

## Redrawing of electoral boundaries

Political parties must appreciate demographic realities

**T**HE move by the Election Commission to redraw the boundaries of 133 electoral constituencies on a district-wise basis has drawn flak from the political parties. Indeed, some politicians smell something of the negative and even the conspiratorial in such a move. While the reaction from the parties was only to be expected, we nevertheless feel that the EC has done nothing beyond its remit. In fact, the constitution obliges the EC to go for a delimitation and readjustment of constituencies. More pertinently, it is the demographic realities (the last census was conducted in 2001) that necessitate a redrawing of constituencies. At this newspaper, we believe that constituencies must be so arranged as to provide for an equitable distribution of population and electoral representation within them. There is surely concern when two constituencies, of 100,000 people and 5,00,000 people respectively, are each represented in Parliament by a lawmaker. The discrepancy in the numbers becomes glaring. Moreover, there is the important question of expenditure ceiling applicable for election campaigns. How could the same limit hold good for constituencies of widely different sizes?

Perhaps the political parties have a point when they say the EC's plans will lead to complexities. They fear that such plans may only delay the holding of the elections on time. It is to be noted that the parties are not per se against such delimitation. That again raises the question of why, if they are not really opposed to such delimitation, they did not undertake the task themselves when they were in office. Unfortunately, in the pre-January 2007 situation, a party-influenced or party-dominated Election Commission ignored the need for delimitation. Be that as it may, the present EC has made it clear that complaints regarding its plans about the 133 constituencies will be heard and disposed of by June 30. That means a full two-month period is there for the matter to be handled, assuming that problems arise. If the EC can convincingly and expeditiously address those problems, there should be little need for worry on the part of the parties. Besides, parties cannot take recourse to legal measures as there are clear provisions disallowing any such move being taken.

The matter of a redrawing of the constituencies should not cast a shadow over the larger national interests. And it will not if the parties adopt a solution-oriented rather than an obstructive attitude to it. They would do well to understand that it is in their own future interests. With the next polls (after 2008) scheduled for 2013, it makes sense for the constituencies to be redefined now. Why must a task of such significance be kept in abeyance for five years more? There is the bigger picture which must not be missed. And it is that demographic discrepancies and inconsistencies do not go well with the collective national goal of a fair, free and credible general election. Which is why we understand the logic in the EC's position.

## A spurt in crime

Police need to be proactive

**A** number of murders of macabre proportion have taken place in the metropolitan city and elsewhere in the country compelling us to wonder about the competence of the law enforcing agencies. In the recent months, a lady was murdered in her own flat in Dhanmondi while two more met the same fate in a Banani flat. We remember, only a couple of days ago, an army personnel was knifed to death by a group of snatchers when he tried to catch one of them. And as recently as on Thursday last, a trader was shot dead by local extortionists when he refused to oblige them. The discovery of the dead bodies of two young schoolboys in an abandoned house in the city added yet another gruesome dimension to crime situation in the country. These are examples of some recent crime committed in the city. In the rural areas, a major crime that was reported from Bagmara upazila on Thursday was the murder of a police constable and infliction of grievous injury on four others by some outlaws. They had raided the police camp and looted their firearms.

What is noticeable as a pattern is that in most cases perpetrators have used some form of lethal weapon, but the most frightening of all is the use of small handguns by young criminals. According to some reports, a new crop of young criminals have replaced older ones to take control of the underworld. The report further revealed that young criminals having easy access to handguns could be hired to kill a person for only a couple of thousand takas. Most of these young thugs are heroin addicts and they waylay or kill people for money.

It has been discussed often in various fora that the police force lacks the required motivation to be proactive in combating crime. Low salary, lack of risk allowance, politicisation of the force in the past and lack of modern equipment remain at the root of slow action by the police. We therefore feel the impediments to modernising the police force and boosting up their morale should be given a priority if the administration wants to fight crime. Unless crime and criminals are sufficiently neutralised through raiding the dens of gun suppliers, our achievements in other sectors will pale into insignificance. We feel, it is the right time for the law enforcing agencies to declare war against the criminals.

## Worries on women's rights



A.N.M. NURUL HAQUE

**T**HE pitched battles that some radical Islamist groups fought recently with the police for two consecutive days around the Baitul Mukarram national mosque to protest against certain provisions of giving women equal rights in the National Women Development Policy (NWDP), have engendered a deep sense of concern among the conscious people.

Hundreds of radical Islamists armed with bamboo sticks clashed with police for hours and beat them up. A huge number of students from madrasas across the city participated in pitched battles with the police. They acted on instructions from their teachers who were staying inside the mosque.

Hundreds of madrasa students also went on the rampage and stormed Hathazari Police Station in Chittagong on April 11 over rumours that an imam was killed earlier in clashes between police and religious activists in Dhaka.

Khelafat Majlish and Islami Shashontantra Andolan recently formed the Anti-Quran Law Resistance Committee to protest against the NWDP 2008, approved

**BY THE NUMBERS**

The recent rampage by the radical Islamists multiplies the need for correcting all the faults so far done by the immediate past government in tackling these elements. The government must not show a subservient attitude in tackling them. These elements have got no appeal to the great mass of people, as they always hide behind religion to achieve their nefarious political agenda. The caretaker government can deal them severely as it has no obligation to any vote bank. Islam offers ample opportunities for deliberation and discussion as for resolving any issue. One really fails to understand as to what sort of Islamic edicts these radical groups want to introduce by resorting to violence.

by the advisers' council on March 8. These radical groups have been claiming that the policy gives equal inheritance rights to men and women despite the government affirmation that there is no such provision in the policy.

In an effort to scotch the discontent, four advisers of the caretaker government met Islamic leaders on March 27 and formed a 20-member review committee headed by the acting Khatib of Baitul Mukarram mosque. The committee placed a 15-point suggestion to scrap major provisions of the policy aimed at women empowerment.

Around two dozens of Islamic groups launched violent street agitation using different names. A prominent political leader even threatened the government saying: "If our demands are not met, the fire ignited today will spread like wildfire across the country."

This is however, not for the first time that the radical Islamist political groups have gone ram-

pant or defied the state of emergency. Many of them brought out a procession in the city, almost without any resistance, to protest against the Sector Commanders Forum's move for trail of war criminals.

The radical Islamist groups have now shifted their wrath to a more sensitive issue, the NWDP, claiming that the policy contains provisions against Islamic principles. It is of course true that there is nothing repugnant to Islamic principles in the NWDP. The policy says in Article 9(13) that women's right to retain their earned properties will be ensured. The policy does not contain the issue of women's inheritance rights.

A section of Islamic scholars said, the review committee could not pinpoint in its recommendations any verse in the Quran that the NWDP contradicts. Considering the policy as a good document for establishing rights of every human being, the scholars said, those who are violating

laws and threatening the government with greater movements, have vested interests and should be brought under trial.

The Quran has made equal social rights of both men and women, the basis for their inheritance rights and it never says that women as human beings cannot have rights as men. The Quranic rule ensuring women's rights to inheritance was revolutionary at the time when women did not have any dignity in the then Arab society and a man's status was determined by the number of their wives and maids, said the eminent Islamic thinkers.

The Constitution of Bangladesh in Article 28(2) has clearly instructed the state to ensure equality of women in all spheres of life. The Chief Justice of the country has univocally said that progress and democracy cannot be ensured by denying half of the population their rights as enshrined in the Constitution. Former chief adviser Justice Muhammad Habibur Rahman

has also said on April 30 to change our traditional attitudes towards women.

The radical Islamist groups also opposed formulation of the Muslim Family Law Ordinance in 1961 restricting child marriage and discouraging polygamy. They tried to instigate people against it. But the then government with dealt them with strong hands.

Most of the Muslim countries have moved away from the traditional provisions of women rights over the ages for women's development. Morocco ensured equal rights to women in every sphere of life, enacting the Family Act in 2004.

The radical Islamist political groups, who are vehemently opposing the constitutionally guaranteed rights of the female citizens of the country, were all along been inimical to women. The issue of NWDP, of course, is not Islamic but political use of religion. In fact, they have been looking for a pretext under the guise of a religious issue to divert public attention from the increasing demands of trial of the war criminals, side by side to instill fear in the society. Now they have got one.

A number of Islamic scholars have made it clear for the nation that the review committee has failed to say exactly how the provisions of the NWDP contradict the Holy Quran. It is indeed a significant development towards implementation of the NWDP. Islam does not discriminate between man and women and throws away the argument of

men's superiority. There are reasons to believe that correct interpretation of the Holy Quran would allow equal rights to women in every sphere of life.

The women in Bangladesh, who are socially weaker, have the serious causes of repudiation of equal rights in terms of earned property by their husbands and parental inheritance by their male siblings. They are also vulnerable to many social oppressions including dowry. Therefore, it is a dire need for the government to implement the NWDP for social security of the women without giving in to any pressure.

The recent rampage by the radical Islamists multiplies the need for correcting all the faults so far done by the immediate past government in tackling these elements. The government must not show a subservient attitude in tackling them. These elements have got no appeal to the great mass of people, as they always hide behind religion to achieve their nefarious political agenda. The caretaker government can deal them severely as it has no obligation to any vote bank.

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## Bangladesh in a non-polar world



KAZI ANWARUL MASUD

**I**N the light of the Anglo-American opposition to military rule in Bangladesh one cannot but be reminded of Ambassador Richard Haas's essay on the Age of Non-Polar World (May/June Foreign Affairs) in which he tries to analyze the pros and cons of the present state of global affairs in the absence of "hegemonic stability."

While the US's hard power has not lessened (indeed it is unlikely to be reduced in the foreseeable future given the \$500 billion dollars earmarked for defense expenditure in this fiscal year), American influence in global affairs certainly has gone down.

Richard Haas recalls columnist Charles Krauthammer's prophetic designation of the "US uni-polar moment" that lasted for about twenty years because gauging by historical standards twenty odd years is nothing but a moment.

But then, the passing away of the US uni-polar moment was inevitable, as Harvard professor Joseph Nye pointed out in his book *The Paradox of American Power*, that history teaches us that hegemony, however consensual it

may be, is always faced with competing entities who despite being in accordance with the values of the hegemon feel threatened by its overwhelming influence, be it hard or soft power or both, that would ultimately dictate the course of its future actions.

Richard Haas points out that in the light of increasing influence of China and India, through the infusion of new members in the European Union and Nato, and the continuing presence of Japan, Russia and the US inevitably gives the world a multi-polar complexion. Apart from nation-states who are losing monopoly of power the roles played by the UN, the Bretton Wood Institutions, Asean, Saarc, African Union, OAS, Opec, WHO, FAO, WTO, etc are increasingly having greater impact in global affairs.

Effectively, the global connectivity in politico-economic relations is increasing every day as multi-national companies with their transnational presence dictate the quantum of the wealth of nations, many of whose net worth is more than the GDP of some developing countries. The "corporate conscience" of these

multi-nationals have to be beefed up and then enforced if the world is to live in peace amidst multi-racial, multi-religious, and multi-ethnic conflicts that are basically reflections of poverty engulfing the Third World countries due to asymmetric distribution of the wealth and power among different poles.

Richard Haas is not off the mark in his assessment that "the principal characteristic of the 21st century international relations is turning out to be non-polarity: a world dominated not by one or two or several states but rather by dozens of actors possessing and exercising various kinds of power."

This account would accord with Immanuel Wallerstein's World System in which the world economy, integrated through the market rather than a political center in which some polities are interdependent due to play of market forces for basic necessities while other polities compete with one another for political dominance without resulting in the emergence of one permanent power center. But then would it be logical to be oblivious to what Wallerstein calls a "multi-cultural territorial

division of labor" between the core and the periphery the core focusing on capital intensive production and the periphery on labor intensive production as a by-product of colonialism that has passed us by?

Belief in post-colonialism and even post-modernism is an accepted discourse for cultivation. But if we give credence to Edward Said's distinction of "imperialism" being the practice, the theory, and the attitude of a dominating metropolitan center ruling a distant territory while "colonialism," a consequence of imperialism, is the implanting of a settlement in a distant land is contestable in the present day context, but can we ignore the thesis that there has been a historical categorisation in which certain societies are being considered "inferior" and others as "superior"?

Why else do we use the terms the North/Developed/First World and the South/Developing/Third World? Despite Edward Said's contention that the West and the Orient had always been intellectual contestants in the innermost recess of our hearts we do believe that technological knowledge has

become the preserve of a particular part of the world from which we have to borrow and trade with to enhance our prosperity.

"Democratic Peace Theory" is therefore a natural development that holds that mature democracies do not go to war with one another and thus give intellectual backing to a division of the world into democratic friends and non-democratic foes. US Under Secretary of State Nicholas Burns candidly remarked: "We treat law abiding democratic countries that are friends of ours differently than law breaking authoritarian governments." Unsurprisingly, therefore, Australian government's interest in developing facilities to enrich uranium for export and/or for domestic use has total American support because "Australia is viewed as a totally reliable and trustworthy country."

Bangladesh has to live in this world that as yet is not quite historical Niall Ferguson's chaotic world where the prosperous countries have to live in seclusion and guard against militants and marauders of different hue. That doomsday scenario was painted as a possible global meltdown that would force the developed country to adopt a fortress mentality.

In South Asia the Nepalese situation appears to be heading towards a solution as the Maoists have won the elections in a democratic way under international supervision. In Bangladesh we are yet to demonstrate our maturity as a nation. Unfortunately due to the misdeeds of some politicians that invited January 11 transition,

albeit supported by the people (the donor funded Election Working Group found in February 2007 that over 90% of Bangladeshis saw the emergency declaration as essential to end the lawlessness let loose by lajuddin government), we are going through a period that is unique in our history.

But the expectation of the people from the interim government still remains to be fulfilled. Brussels based International Crisis Group assesses that the interim government's "achievements have been patchy, and relations with the major political parties are acrimonious. Efforts to sideline the two prime ministers of the post-1990 democratic period have faltered and the government has become bogged down in its attempts to clean up corruption and reshape democratic politics. Even if elections are held on schedule, there is no guarantee that reforms will be sustainable... Its poor handling of the economy and natural disasters has aggravated underlying skepticism over its real intentions."

Despite ICG's critical appreciation of the situation in Bangladesh most of the people still believe that elections will be held as promised, and a representative government, shedding its character of doing business as usual as done in the past, will now concentrate on doing what they are elected to do and not consider themselves to be above the law.

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## Rev. Wright derails Barack Obama's campaign again

### LETTER FROM AMERICA

There is a 90% chance that Barack Obama will be the Democratic nominee. But to win the American presidency in November, Barack Obama must talk the talk and walk the walk like average Americans. A good starting point is to learn to communicate in a simple enough language and syntax all Americans can comprehend.

FAKHRUDDIN AHMED

**A**FTER lying low for six weeks in the aftermath of his controversial snippets airing on Fox News and YouTube, Rev. Jeremiah Wright suddenly resurfaced on April 25 and gave an interview to Bill Moyers, defending his reputation, making Barack Obama cringe. Then on April 28, in front of a national television audience Wright reiterated all the outrageous assertions he had made in those snippets, at the National Press Club in Washington, DC, making Obama

furiously. Nervous uncommitted super-delegates were immediately on the phone with Obama warning him that Rev. Wright was making them uneasy. Comments such as, "America's chickens have come home to roost," "God damn America," and suggestions that the US government invented Aids to decimate its black population and that through its own "terrorism" America brought 9/11 upon itself, make white American question the motive and patriotism of some blacks.

The next day an angry Obama

denounced the comments saying that Rev. Wright had caricatured himself, is not the man he met twenty years ago, that he and all decent Americans repudiate Wright's outrageous comments, adding that Wright does not speak for him or his campaign, that Wright is not the man he thought he was and that Wright obviously does not know him and his values.

Over time the Wright controversy had died down. To reignite it, a Hillary Clinton supporter had invited Rev. Wright to speak at the National Press Club! Asked to comment about Rev. Wright,

Hillary Clinton told Fox News's Bill O'Reilly: "Let the voters decide!" Excuse me, I did not know that Wright was running for office! In her mind Hillary had so morphed Wright into Obama that such a Freudian slip was inevitable!

And it has worked. Barack Obama's once commanding double digit lead has evaporated in North Carolina, where he still leads in the single digits, although one poll shows Hillary ahead. Barack led by 5% points in Indiana ten days ago; now Hillary leads by 8-9%. If Barack were to win in both North Carolina and Indiana primaries on May 6, there would have been an enormous pressure on Hillary to quit the race.

If Obama wins North Carolina and Hillary wins Indiana, a likely scenario, it is like holding serve and the race will continue. If Hillary were to win both, the race would then be thrown wide open.

Hillary and Bill Clinton have pulled no punches. They have done to Obama what the Republicans would have been afraid to do in November. Instead of attacking Obama on issues, such as the Iraq war, his foreign policy and health care program, they have attacked him personally through his association with Rev. Wright, called him an "elitist" because of the "bitter" comment and have declared Obama unfit to be the commander-in-chief and by implication, the president.

The Clintons are attempting to do to Obama what the Republican nominee, George H.W. Bush, did to the Democratic nominee, Michael Dukakis, in 1988. Senior Bush was a child of privilege. His father, Preston Bush, was a Senator from Connecticut. George H.W. Bush went to the best prep schools and Yale University. Michael Dukakis was a working class, second generation Greek

immigrant with a funny (read un-American) name, just as Obama is a second generation Kenyan-American with a funny (un-American) name. Yet, Bush painted Dukakis as an "elite" who is "out of touch" with real America. Sounds familiar? Dukakis was destroyed by a Republican; Hillary Clinton is using the same Republican playbook to try and destroy Obama, who, hard to believe, belongs to the same Democratic party.

Obama should not be let off the hook that easily. He is letting others define him negatively. As a newcomer he should have introduced himself to the American people first. Despite the two-pronged attacks by the Republicans and Hillary, average Americans know that Obama does not share Rev. Wright's views, and as someone brought up by a single mother on food stamps, he is neither an elitist, nor out of touch

with average Americans. It is the intellectual manner in which he explains his association with Rev. Wright and his disdain for elitism that does not resonate with average Americans.

Obama must learn to communicate with the Americans better. The most successful president of the last thirty years, Ronald Reagan, was known as "the great communicator." A second rate Hollywood actor, Reagan used simple language, one-liners and Hollywood clichés ("Make my day!") to humour and communicate with American people. One of the best politicians of the twentieth century, Bill Clinton, made Americans believe "I feel your pain."

Barack Obama took plenty of heat from the Clintons for praising Ronald Reagan. Because Bill Clinton is so partisan for his wife Hillary, and has played the race card against Obama, Obama

refers to the former president as "Hillary's husband," earning the ire of Bill, who thinks that the upstart Barack does not give him enough respect.

Ronald Reagan is dead. But Barack can learn a thing or two about communicating with the American people from Bill Clinton. People have noticed that Bill Clinton (Hillary too) changes his accent depending on whether he is addressing a northern, mid-western or a southern audience.

There is a 90% chance that Barack Obama will be the Democratic nominee. But to win the American presidency in November, Barack Obama must talk the talk and walk the walk like average Americans. A good starting point is to learn to communicate in a simple enough language and syntax all Americans can comprehend.

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