

Eid-ul-Azha

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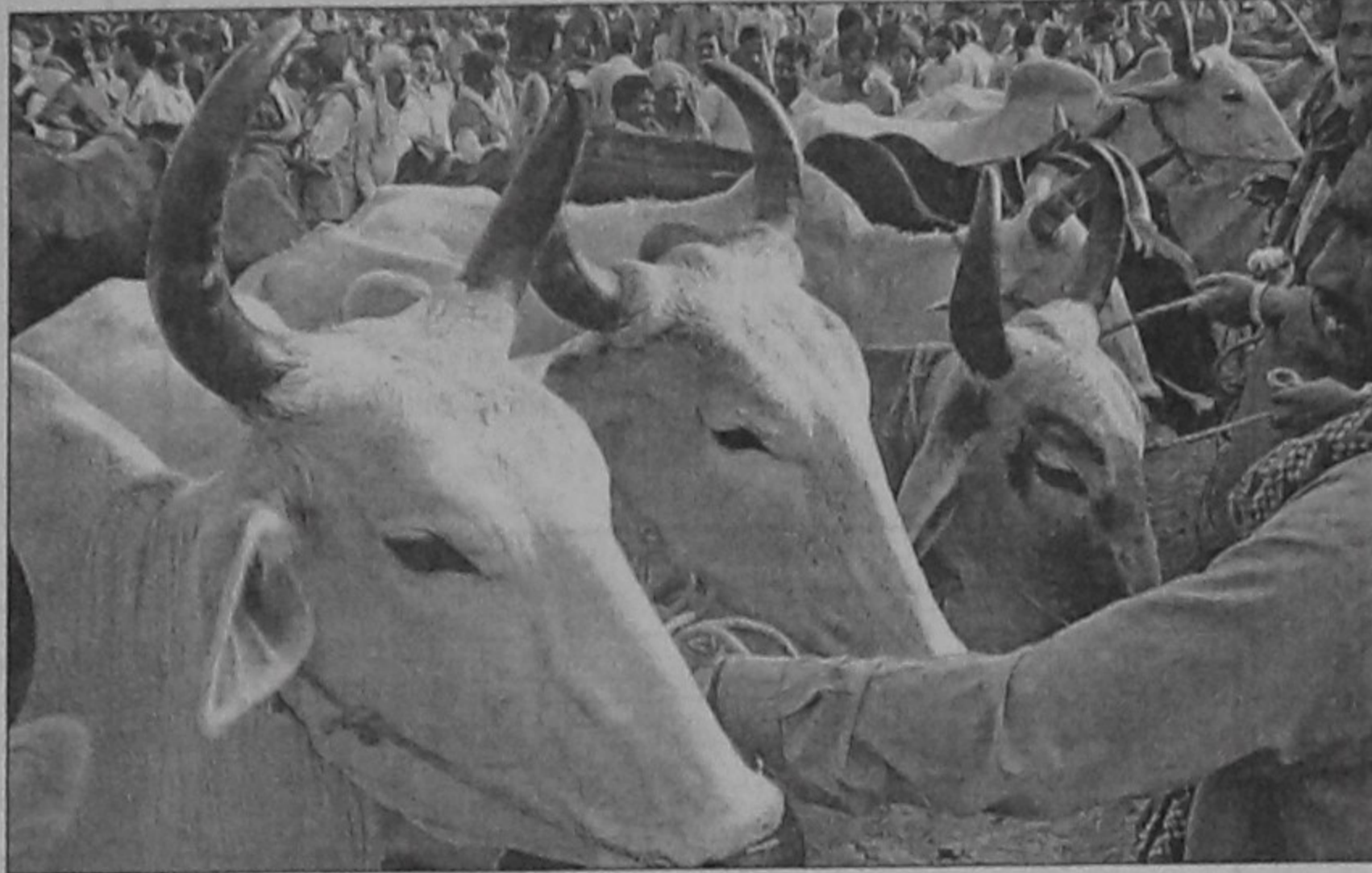
SYED ASHRAF ALI

EID-ul-Azha brings an opportunity to receive Allah's mercy and reward through sacrifice and patience. Popularly known as Bakrid, it is celebrated on the tenth of Dhul-Hijja through sacrifices and prayers in memory of the glorious sacrifice of the Prophets Ibrahim and Ismail (peace be upon them), and shows the way in which both father and son cheerfully offered to suffer any self-sacrifice, however painful or difficult, in order to obey the Allah's command. Although the word "Eid" in Arabic means "joy", Eid-ul-Azha is certainly not an occasion for unbridled fun and frolic, not an opportunity for immoderate gluttony or gourmandism, but is a solemn, sacred festival which enables a person to enjoy through Azha -- sacrifice and surrender, resignation and renunciation, selflessness and total submission to the will of God.

Celebrated concurrently with the slaughtering of the animals in Mina by the Hajis and the days of Tashriq in the auspicious month of Dhul-Hijja, it is also known as al-Eid-al-Kabir or "the Great Festival." Some also call it Eid-ul-Qurban or the "Sacrificial Feast," and Yom-an-Nahr.

Sacrifice has always played a significant role in the history of mankind. Sacrifices have been made to get rid of natural calamities like flood and cyclone and earthquake, to evade famine, to solicit rain, to stop volcanic eruptions, to win wars, to ally tyranny, to appease or eulogise gods and goddesses -- human sacrifices also have indeed been made by various nations in various forms and for various purposes since the dawn of civilization.

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Recalling Hazrat Ibrahim's (PBUH) sacrifice.

annals of history. Never, never indeed, has any other father tried to slaughter his own son with his own hands simply to obey the Master's command.

It was indeed a great and momentous occasion when two men "ranged themselves in the ranks of those to whom self-sacrifice in the service of Allah was the supreme thing in life." The glorious incident, which took place in Mina some 3800 years ago, commenced a new era in religious history. It teaches us the very essence of our religion; that the keys of life and

death, and the mysteries of everything around us, are in Allah's hands, that our honesty, determination and upright conduct are not matters of policy or convenience, that all our life in this world must be lived as in the presence of Benign Providence, and that no task or responsibility, however difficult or heavy a burden it may be, is greater than what we can bear.

It teaches us, in the words of the Holy Quran, that "short is the enjoyment of this world: the Hereafter is the best for those who do right." It teaches us that a Muslim

does not live with his body, but with his spirit. It teaches us not to love life too much, seeing that we must one day part with it. It teaches us to face death with resignation.

Muslims celebrate Eid-ul-Azha on the 10th day of Dhul-Hijja through the sacrifice of an animal in the name of Allah.

Prophet Ibrahim's (peace be upon him) vision that he was sacrificing his son, his preparation to fulfill it literally, and the Divine commandment to sacrifice an animal in his stead, indeed, marked the abolition of the savage custom of human sacrifice. The world today stands indebted to the righteous patriarch and his dedicated son for their noble example in uprooting the age-old savage custom.

It is very clear that what Allah, in His infinite mercy, desires from the band on this sacred occasion is giving of our whole being to Him. Quranic verses assert: "Truly, my prayer and my sacrifice, my life and my death, are all for God, the Cherisher and

Sustainer of the Worlds." Every Muslim should bear in mind that if he can sacrifice an animal, how much more necessary it is that he should lay down his life in the ay of Allah.

No Muslim, nay no human being, has any right to humble the unparalleled sacrifice of the Prophet Ibrahim and his son (peace be upon them) by equating it with the mere slaughtering of an animal, with no taqwa behind it. Allah has very kindly given us power over the animal kingdom and permitted us to eat their meat, but only if we pronounce His Holy Name during the solemn act of taking the animal's life. Through this solemn invocation, without which we are apt to forget the sacredness of life, are we reminded that wanton cruelty is not in our thoughts and is never permitted in Islam.

The most perfect deed of Allah does not permit extravagance or wastage in the name of religion on any occasion, whether through slaughtering of cattle on Eid-ul-Azha or through any other means. Eid-ul-Azha is the system of denying ourselves the greater part of the food derived from the sacrificed cattle for the sake of the poor brethren; our symbolic act finds practical expression in benevolence, and that exactly is the virtue sought.

Syed Ashraf Ali Former Director General Islamic Foundation, Bangladesh.

ANALYSING THE ELECTION

Deprivation or abstention?

Low voter turnout can put the legitimacy of the government in question. And particularly in areas such as the Chittagong Hill Tracts, low participation of voters would once again raise the ongoing concerns over the rights and voices of minority groups.

J. RAHMAN and S. AHAMED

IN our last two pieces (published in these pages on Dec 4 and Dec 7), we focused on centres with incredibly high voter turnout. While the high turnouts point to irregularities, significantly low voter turnouts may also be problematic, particularly in the context of alleged deprivation of minority groups from casting their votes. This is the focus of the current piece.

Before moving on to this issue, we should also flag a concern about the availability and accuracy of public data. Regrettably, the Election Commission does not expose the centre-level data to broader public domain, making the analysis difficult. We believe there can also be some misprints in the available data. For instance, unbelievably high turnout in Sharanpur GPS in the then Jessore-5 constituency may very well be a typo either by the Election Commission or by the NDI who compiled the data and made it available. To avoid using possibly incorrect figures, we will avoid drawing conclusions from single centres.

Voter turnout can be very low in any given polling centre for a number of legitimate reasons such as the geo-

graphic terrain or natural calamities. As such, among the 29,978 polling centres, one can very well expect a good number of polling centres where the voter turnout would be much lower than the average national turnout. But one would expect these centres to be scattered around the country. The reality in 2001 was, however, very different.

In the 2001 election, there were some 850 centres where voter turnout was less than half of the total registered voters. Of these, 49 centres were in Bandarban, 67 centres were in Rangamati, and 36 centres were in Khagrachari. In addition, around 87 centres with less than 50 per cent turnout were in Cox's Bazaar-3. The remaining low turnout centres were almost evenly shared by the other constituencies.

In that election, there are around 35 polling centres where the voter turnout was appallingly low -- between 1 to 10 per cent. Among these, 2 centres were in Bandarban, 18 centres in Rangamati, 8 centres in Khagrachari, and 5 centres were in Cox's Bazaar-3.

Clearly there was something about these four constituencies that made their turnout so low. We know what happened in Cox's Bazaar-3. And we can guess what happened in the three con-

stituencies in the Chittagong Hill Tracts.

In Cox's Bazaar-3, the election was held on November 1, a month after the national election. In that month, there were allegations of intimidation and harassment against the Awami League workers and supporters. As a result, two days before the election, the AL candidate withdrew from the race in a seat where the party won in 1991 and the margin for 1996 election was below 10 percent. The very low voter turnout in this seat is very likely to be a reflection of a one-sided election where abstaining was used as a means of delegitimising the election.

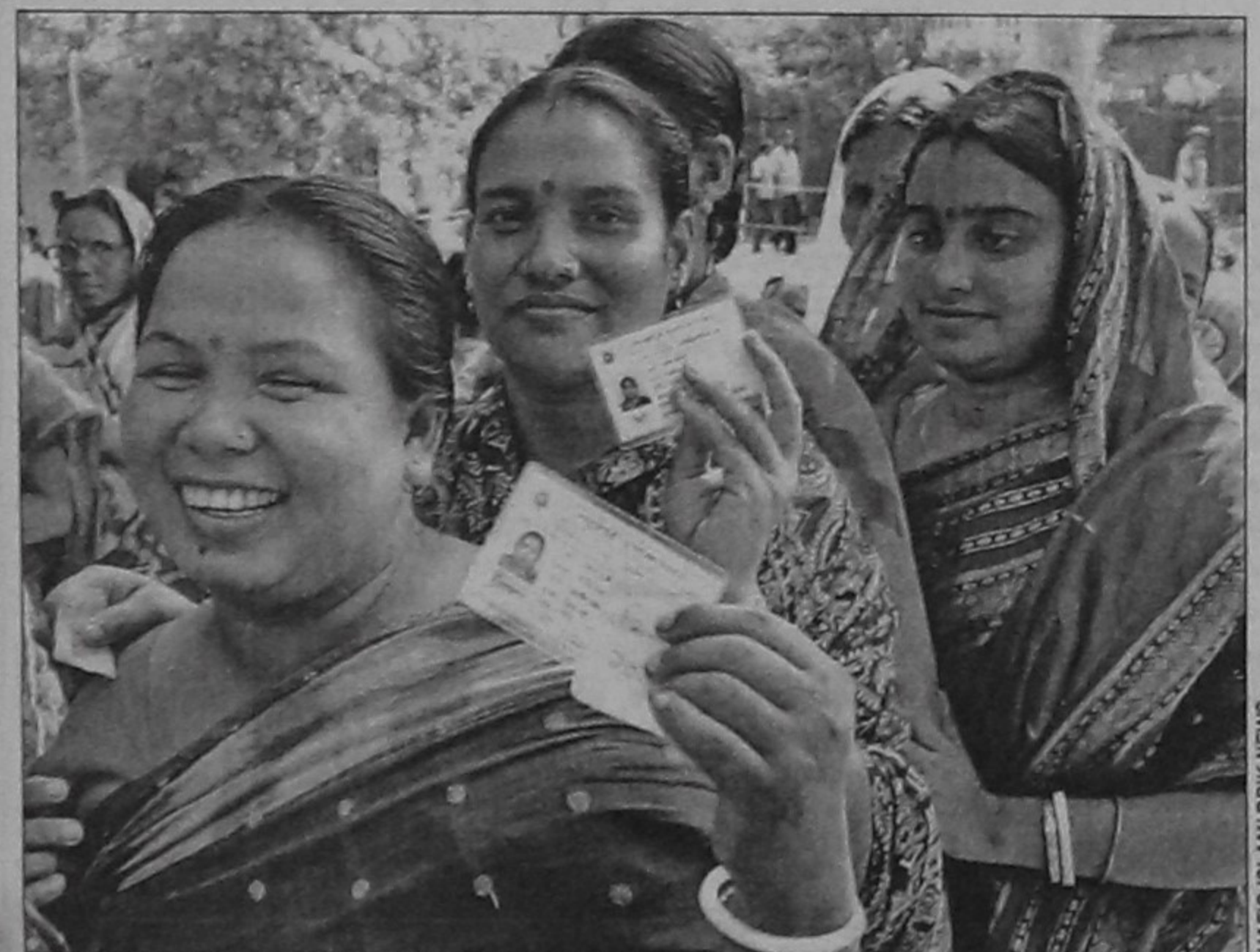
What happened in the three CHT constituencies? Obviously the terrain may have been a factor. However, there are coastal areas in Barisal and Khulna divisions where geography may make it quite difficult to vote. And yet, these areas don't show a concentration of low turnout centres. We suspect that the reasons lay elsewhere.

The data do not tell us the ethnic or religious identities of the voters who are staying home. But given the history of the region, we believe the low turnout reflects a lack of participation in the electoral process by the minority voters. We suspect two things. First, some voters could have been intimidated or otherwise prevented from casting their ballots. Second, it could be that these voters were disenchanted with the political system -- candidates, parties, institutions -- and opted to stay home.

The delicate democracy of Bangladesh cannot afford abstaining as a way of delegitimising a regime. However, this is exactly what happened in 2001 in Cox's Bazaar-3. Low voter turnout can put the legitimacy of the government in question. And particularly in areas such as the Chittagong Hill Tracts, low participation of voters would once again raise the ongoing concerns over the rights and voices of minority groups.

The world has witnessed how a big voter turnout changed the course of history in the American election, which has been for long been criticised for low electoral participation. Ensuring the participation of unheard voices in the upcoming national election will be a major challenge for the government and the political parties given the brief campaign time and the socio-political situation. Swift and vigorous role of the government, political parties, NGOs, and civil society organisations is required in this regard.

S. Ahamed and J. Rahman are members of Dristhapat Writers' Collective. They can be reached at dpwriters@dristhapat.org.



Let's protect their rights this election season.

A dream manifesto

The first and foremost responsibility of the political parties is to present pro-people manifestos, which should not be mere paper documents. For their attention, a dream manifesto of a party X for this election is given below:

MD. ANWARUL KABIR

ELECTION 2008 will be an unprecedented one as it is going to be held in a completely different context, because the failure of the immediate past CG headed by Prof. Iajuddin Ahmed in resolving political crisis brought in the incumbent government on January 11, 2007.

The Election Commission (EC) seems to be confident about staging a fair election as it is now more empowered than ever. Moreover, unlike the immediate past chief adviser, the incumbent chief adviser has no political affiliation.

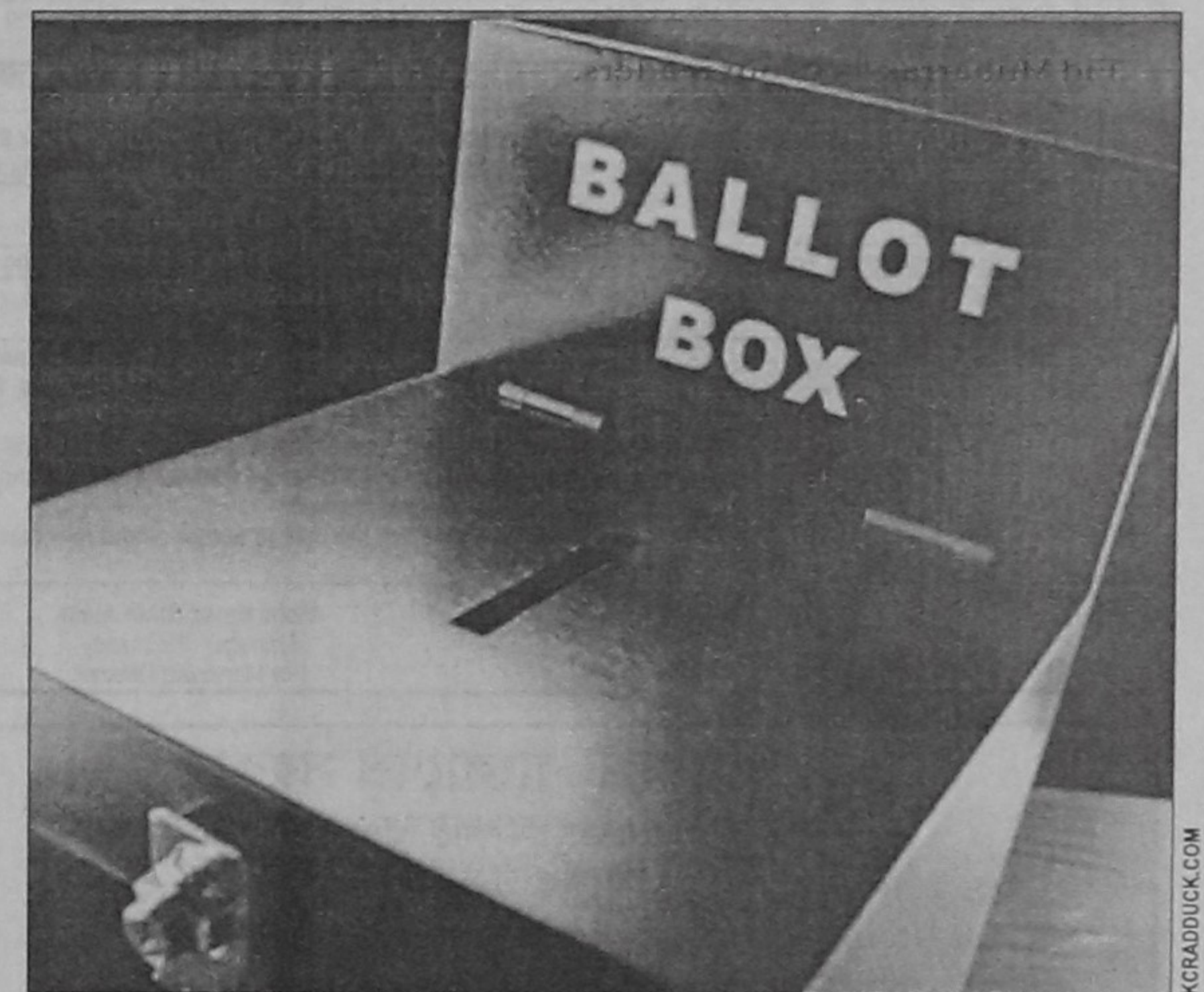
Implementation of voters' list with national ID card, mandatory registration of political parties and amendment of the 1972 electoral laws, are the success stories of the present EC. Thanks to Anti-corruption Commission (ACC) for framing charge sheets against many corrupt politician. The subsequent verdicts on some cases by the lower courts have eliminated some bad elements from the electoral process. Hopefully, voters will reject those who were involved in corruption and vandalism.

So a relatively healthy atmosphere has been created for holding a credible election. Now it is the turn of the political parties. The first and foremost responsibility of the political parties is to present pro-people manifestos, which should not be mere paper documents. For their attention, a dream manifesto of a party X for this election is given below:

- If X wins the electoral race then it will work for making the parliament an effective one. It will select neutral parliamentarians as speaker and deputy speaker, and form committees with members from the opposition parties.
- If X wins then it will work hard to curb the price spiralling of essentials. The party will implement an effective and efficient market management system so that the prices of essentials fall within the reach of the poorer class. X will consider a state controlled welfare free market economy for overall development of the country. Promoting SME is a must, and the government will give special attention to this.
- If X assumes power, it will continue the present drive against corruption, focussing on institutional corruption, which will dramatically reduce overall corruption.
- If X assumes power, it will establish e-Governance with a view to leading the

country towards good governance.

- Though, on paper, the judiciary has been separated from the administration, in practice it is yet to be achieved. The influence of the administration is still prominent, especially in recruiting judges. If X comes to power then it will fully empower the Judicial Service Commission.
- Agriculture, though it is the largest



- producing sector, is unjustifiably neglected. If X wins, it will establish a village-based marketing system where the poor peasants will be able to sell their products to the wholesalers in urban areas directly. Besides, the government will provide sufficient subsidies to the peasants for overall development of agriculture.
- Education is a basic right. If X wins, it will formulate a pro-people education policy. The government will allocate substantial amount of budget for this sector with a view to enhancing overall quality of education.
- Power crisis is an acute problem. If X forms the government then it will set up some power plants so that the consumers can be benefited within the shortest possible time.
- Local governments must be empowered. If X wins, it will ensure full autonomy of local administrative units so that they can take their own decisions for overall development of the regions.

a sovereign foreign policy. X will not tolerate any undue interference from any foreign country in our internal affairs, and will compel the foreign diplomats to strictly follow the Geneva Convention.

- If X forms the government, it will formulate a pro-people mineral resources policy.
 - If X wins it will resolve the problems in Chittagong Hill Tracts considering the right of different ethnic groups there. Besides, it will also stop extra judiciary killings.
- The above manifestos may seem to be overambitious. We know that the culture of a country and its political realm cannot be changed overnight. But we believe that Election 2008 will be a turning point for the country. At least, this election will decriminalise the political domain to a great extent and will lead us to good governance.

MD. Anwarul Kabir is a freelance contributor to The Daily Star. E-mail: kabiranwar@yahoo.com

Tainted products from the West

NURY VITTACHI

BUYER, beware. Tainted products are heading back into the headlines. But this time they're moving from West to East.

Massive numbers of items exported from North America and Europe to Asia contain more than DOUBLE the permitted dosage of Western permissiveness, according to a joint communiqué issued yesterday by the Asian Societies Summit, an organization based in this reporter's imagination.

The erupting scandal appears set to dwarf the Chinese melamine-milk scare of the autumn.

"These Western items corrupt the minds of a whole generation of young people, whereas the tainted milk we produced merely kills them," a spokesman from the Chinese Ministry of Dairy Products and Other Industrial Poisons said.

The problem was identified after a spot test on a shipment of Baywatch DVDs moving through South Asia on its way to Singapore. "Every one of them had excessive amounts of liberal Western ideology," said cargo inspector Anand Chowdhury. "Members of the inspection panel hyperventilated after seeing images of people in bikinis, and several conservative members from Islamic nations fainted

when they were informed that many of these were in fact women."

So far, "unacceptable" rates of permissiveness have been found in Western DVDs, computer games, magazines and tourists from France.

Indian economist Deepak Bakpik said the single worst offender so far was MTV, a channel running videos of young people cavorting in a decadent manner in luxurious surroundings. "Our analysis showed that a single day's viewing contained 89.9 per cent unrealizable expectations, against a United Nations-recommended limit of 2.6 per cent."

American trade officials fought back, arguing that the tariff-free export of

Baywatch videos, MTV broadcasts and magazines such as Maxim was protected under World Trade Organization laws allowing the unrestricted distribution of items of intellectual property.

But a joint Asian trade panel unanimously overruled this claim. "It's plainly ridiculous to use the word 'intellectual' in connection with Baywatch, MTV or Maxim," a spokesman said.

Meanwhile, conservative nations such as Malaysia are experimenting with ways of digitally "adjusting" shows such as Baywatch to make them more suitable for Asian viewers.

"Using digital technology, we have added a full-length burqa to Pam

Anderson," said Ahmad Madman, a Kuala Lumpur professor of digital media. "In scenes where David Hasselhof appears topless, we have superimposed a bikini top."

The Malaysian experiment is proving a surprise success, with pirated copies selling at high prices across the United States.

However, Asian commentators are most intrigued by political elements in the debate.

The communiqué condemning the imports from the West said: "We, the leaders of Asia, deplore the way US movies, TV shows and other items show people taking drugs, shooting weapons, being promiscu-

ous, and openly changing their leaders from time to time."

Privately, delegates spoke in stronger terms. One Myanmar general said: "How on earth are Asian leaders supposed to keep our peoples in a state of subjugation when they are faced with movies which give the impression that Westerners live in rich, free societies?"

A North Korean delegate, who gave his name as Kim, echoed this view: "Our people are told daily that they are living in the richest country in the world. Movies from the West should reflect this. Otherwise we will have no alternative but to lose control of our society, which would be a total pain in the butt."