

A manifesto of mockery

The analysis of a few points of the 36-point election manifesto is a big challenge to the memory of the people, who are the ultimate arbiters in deciding the fate of a political party.

MOZAMMEL H. KHAN

THIS article is an analysis of the 36-point election manifesto that BNP has unveiled for the forthcoming general election, in which a few vital points will receive attention vis-à-vis the performance of the last BNP government in those spheres.

About the price hike, the manifesto declared: "... take measures to ensure food security as well as to contain prices of essentials by increasing food production, provide subsidy for agricultural inputs, quality seed, fertiliser, pesticides, power and diesel to genuine and marginal farmers."

But what did the BNP do when it was running the country? Its immediate predecessor not only attained self-sufficiency in food but also left a hefty stock in the national silos. The BNP government successfully transformed self-sufficiency into food-deficiency.

The hike in the prices of essentials is a legacy of the last BNP government. There were reports about the syndicates that were responsible for it, but the ministers attributed the hike to "the increased buying power of the common people."

Regarding corruption, the manifesto observed that the extent of corruption has been exaggerated at home and abroad. It, however, pledged to take stern measures to prevent corruption. If one takes a look at

the BNP nominees, this pledge could be viewed as mockery.

Not only accused party loyalists but also convicted criminals, including the one who took bribe for saving a murderer, or their wives or children, have been given nominations.

The party chairperson's recent entourage included a convict who reportedly owns many apartments in Dhaka. In fact, the evidence of corruption is so obvious that The Economist (December 14, 2008) wrote: "The most visible evidence of that corrupt era is strewn along the streets and dirt roads: unused electricity poles lying about in their thousands. The government of the former prime minister, Khaleda Zia, had bought the poles from a syndicate controlled by Mrs. Zia's elder son, Tarique Rahman. Yet the electricity generated during her rule from 2001-06 grew by not a single megawatt, even though the economy's size increased by a quarter. Bangladeshis are, like the poles, still waiting for their electricity."

The promise to make the ACC impartial and independent does not bode well either, if one reflects back how this constitutional body, headed by a few extremely partisan individuals, was made absolutely ineffective.

The manifesto vowed to extend all-out cooperation to all international efforts to contain terrorism. However, in the internal front, it vowed to take measures

against malicious attempts to label Bangladesh an intolerant, extremist, radical and corrupt country. This is like the "state of denial" mode which the party maintained during its tenure, that terrorists were the creation of the media and treacherous elements who were out to tarnish the moderate image of the country.

Even after the country-wide bomb attack of August 17, and though reinvestigation of many of the carnages indicated the radical elements' direct responsibility, the BNP is still holding on to its earlier view. In fact, the manifesto did not outline any commitment to tackle it, since, in BNP's views, it does not exist. Instead, it pledges to confront those who say that such radicalism is still a potential threat to the nation.

The manifesto vowed that "the state will ensure safety and security of all people, irrespective of their religious and ethnic identity." What happened to the religious minority in the aftermath of the victory of the BNP-led alliance in October 2001 makes this promise sound hollow.

In its promise to implement the universal declaration of the United Nations on human rights, the manifesto declared: "Human rights were ruthlessly violated during the rule of the present caretaker government." Such a promise and accusation from the BNP assumes that the people have lost their memories.

The party, which has been the champion of hundreds of extrajudicial killings, is now pledging adherence to UNHR conventions and lecturing others on how to uphold human rights and rule of law. The way thousands of innocent citizens were rounded up from the streets, and the merciless beating of the opposition activists, must be still vivid in the minds of the citizens.

The BNP chairperson alleged that the incumbent government ravaged the independence of judiciary by interfering in its activities and pledged to establish a separate secretariat for the Supreme Court. In its last tenure, the BNP appointed around 40 judges to the Supreme Court, many of whom, according to SCBA, are incompetent and were allegedly appointed under political considerations.

The foregoing analysis of a few points of the 36-point election manifesto is a big challenge to the memory of the people, who are the ultimate arbiters in deciding the fate of a political party.

Dr. Mozammel H. Khan is the Convenor of the Canadian Committee for Human Rights and Democracy in Bangladesh.

Shame on them

More often than not, the parent has to leave the house and go begging. Shame on those people who do not behave nicely with their parents and look after them.



SHAMSUDDIN AHMED

MALE children are what parents usually pine for in this part of the world we live in. It is parents' indomitable desire of to live after their death through their progeny that drives them crazy for a male child. This desire is more pronounced in men, which leads to many otherwise happily married couples ending up in divorce because the wife failed to give birth to a child, let alone a male child.

Instances abound where a man married many times because his earlier wives had borne him only daughters. There are also instances when a couple in search of a male child went on to produce several daughters, and gave up after having no luck.

The male child is not only craved for but also adored and doted upon. Both the parents prefer to educate their sons first and then their daughters. It is the son or sons whose needs are usually given preference over those of the girls. Of course, things changing now in educated families, where sons and daughters are treated equally at least as far as their education is concerned.

But what pains me most is the shocking

behaviour of some of these beloved sons who have become capable enough to take care of themselves and their own children but have proved to be utterly incapable of looking after their parents, or even a single parent, who raised them and took good care of them until they grew up to be what they are today.

I was watching a program the other day featuring some old men and women living in an old home run either by the government or by some philanthropic organisation. Not all of them, with age and sadness writ large on their faces, some on wheel chairs and some leaning on crutches, were without near and dear ones.

With tears rolling down their wrinkled cheeks, many of them said that their beloved sons did not care for them. It was a harrowing scene to watch. Can one fathom the grief and the sorrow in their hearts? I wonder if the sons of those unfortunate parents watched this program or had any qualms at all.

That most parents in their old age live a lonely life, abandoned by their near and dear ones, is a common phenomenon in the western world. Marriages do not last as they do in the east. There are far too many broken homes, as a result of which family ties are not so deeply

rooted. No wonder the godforsaken old mothers and fathers find shelter and comfort in homes or centers for the old run by the state.

But ours ought to have been a different story. Our culture and our religion go a long way in forging strong family ties, making it obligatory for the children to look after their parents. It is the mother who cooks, does the laundry, runs the family chores, and also looks after her baby with such care and affection and dutifulness as nobody else does.

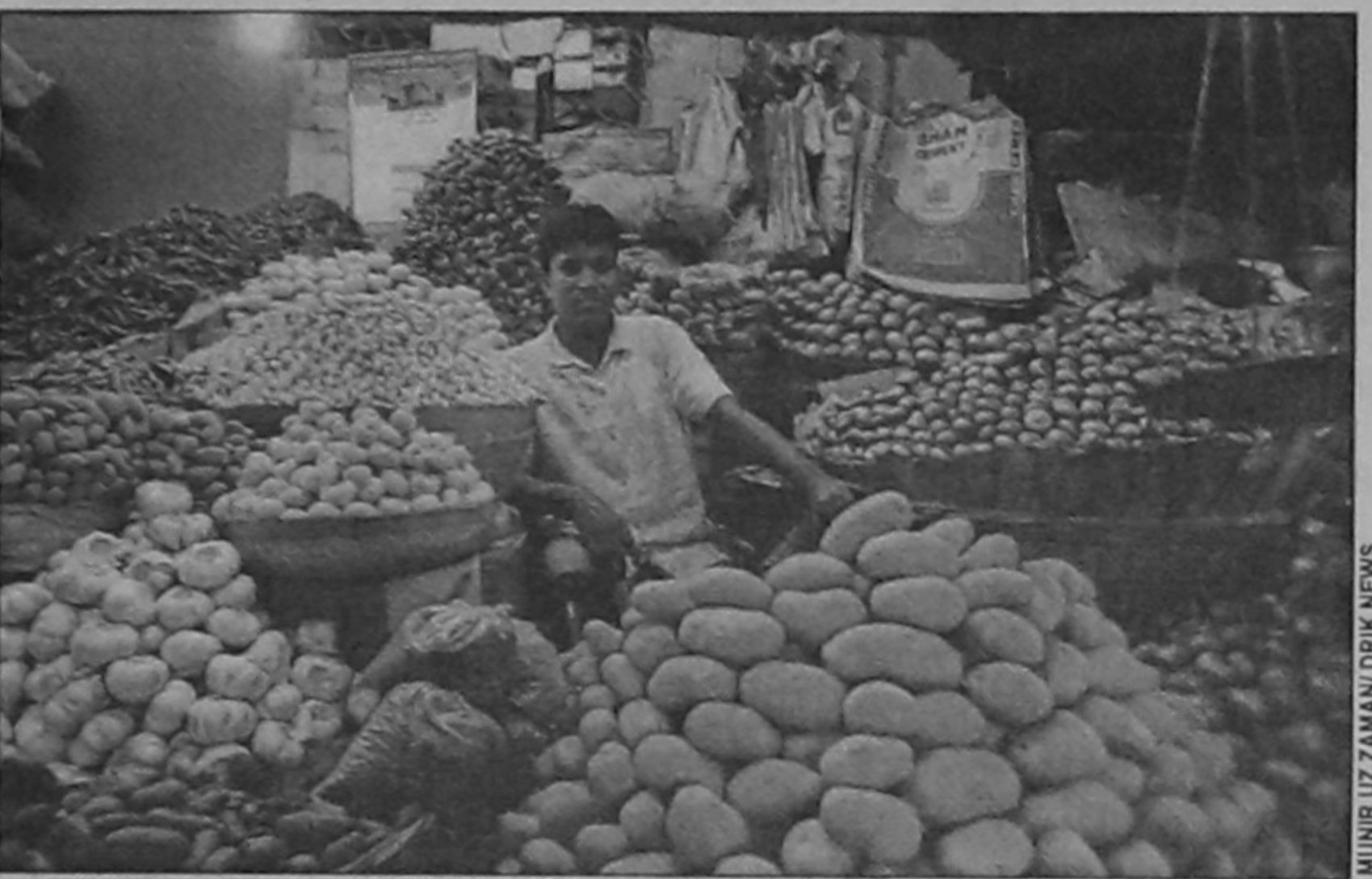
Here the baby learns to take the first step to walk. As the baby stumbles, the father quickly picks it up in his lap and tosses it up in the air playfully while the mother shrieks in panic lest it slip off the father's hands. Such bonds between a baby and its parents only deepen as the baby grows.

Besides, Islam teaches us to be dutiful to our parents. The Quran lays emphasis on the believers being dutiful to their parents, next to worshipping God. It says: "And your Lord has decreed that you worship none but Him. And that you be dutiful to your parents. If one of them or both of them attain old age in your life, say not to them a word of disrespect, nor raise your voice at them but address them always in a manner showing utmost respect, honour and humility. And while praying say: My Lord! Bestow on them Your Mercy as they did bring me up when I was young (Chapter 17: verses: 23-24)."

That children should obey and pay respect to their parents is a part of our culture, not only as Muslims of this country but also as a people of the Indian subcontinent. Bending down and touching the feet of their parents, as a way of showing respect and for seeking blessings on special occasions, is common practice among the Muslims and Hindus.

But in spite of our culture and our religious teachings there are people in our society who behave rudely with their parents. In poor families where an old parent is dependent on his or her grown up sons or son, the ill treatment meted out by the latter is usually very heart rending. More often than not, the parent has to leave the house and go begging. Shame on those people who do not behave nicely with their parents and look after them.

Brig-Gen Shamsuddin Ahmed (Retd) is a former military secretary to the president.



Can a manifesto bring down prices?

MUNIR UZ ZAMAN/DRINK NEWS

The scalding truth

Not only are the physical and emotional burdens on the victims and their families enormous, they also have to bear the economic burden. Treatment of severe burn injury is long, painful and expensive and, on average, approximately four times higher than the cost of treating other injuries.

SAIDUR RAHMAN MASHREKY

THE Dhaka-Chittagong Highway bus accident in Comilla shattered the lives of many passengers when an acid-laden truck rammed into the bus. Five people died on the spot. Several more died in hospital from severe acid burns, one of them a baby boy, Ahnaf, of two months.

Another tragedy occurred just before the Eid holidays when a fire broke out in Lalbagh. Six people died, and among the injured four were admitted to the Burn and Plastic Surgery unit of Dhaka Medical College Hospital in critical condition.

The number of deaths due to burning in the year 2000 totaled approximately 238,000 globally, with 95% occurring in low and middle-income countries. Acid is just

one of the many causes of burns in Bangladesh. There are many more lives lost unnecessarily throughout the country due to burn injury, each with its own story.

Incidents of burning are more than twice that of developed countries, and are the second largest cause of disability in children in Bangladesh. The incidence of childhood burn is four times higher for rural children than for urban children, because the common practice in villages is to have the younger children help with the cooking.

It is understandable that 90% of childhood burns occur in the home. Most common causes of burn injuries in Bangladesh are open flames, hot objects and hot liquids, which, considering our culture and lifestyle and the prevalence of hot tea, rice and meals cooked in hot

liquids, is not surprising.

Not only are the physical and emotional burdens on the victims and their families enormous, they also have to bear the economic burden. Treatment of severe burn injury is long, painful and expensive and, on average, approximately four times higher than the cost of treating other injuries.

The first 24 hours following burn injury are the most crucial. Sadly 60% of burn injury victims in Bangladesh seek health care from unqualified service providers, such as medicine shopkeepers. This leads to further complications as the delay in seeking correct treatment and the type of treatment administered by unqualified practitioners compound the severity of the injury.

Traditional remedies for burns range from using egg or salt on the wound, as they are believed to have a cooling effect, to slathering the burn injury with mud found at the bottom of ponds, again thought to have a cooling effect. These methods greatly increase the risk of infection.

In Bangladesh, as with many developing countries, the health care issues far outweigh the resources available to combat them. On December 3, Bangladeshi health care professionals attended a

world-renowned training course, which will equip them with the necessary skills to handle severe burn within the first 24 hours of the injury.

The course, known as the Emergency Management of Severe Burn (EMSB), is the first step in disseminating this training to medical practitioners throughout the country, so that eventually every village health care provider will be able to administer EMSB.

The course is designed by the Australian and New Zealand Burns Association (ANZBA) and implemented by Interplast Australia & New Zealand together with the Centre for Injury Prevention and Research, Bangladesh (CIPRB).

Because of Interplast's efforts earlier this month a team of Bangladeshi doctors is now qualified to train doctors in EMSB. This team will train more doctors and so on and so on. The key here is that it is a sustainable practice whereby medical practitioners in this country can train their counterparts, rather than having to rely on doctors from the developing world to train every doctor in Bangladesh, which is simply not feasible.

At the opening ceremony of the EMSB course in Dhaka, Professor Peter Maiz,



Victim of inhumanity

Program Director, Interplast, stated that it was because of feedback from Interplast volunteers at the Burns Unit of the Dhaka Medical College Hospital that the course was introduced in Bangladesh. More specifically, the volunteers said there was an insurmountable problem and that the morbidity and deaths resulting from burn were so much higher than they had seen

anywhere else.

Together, we are honoured to be working with Interplast to build a nationwide network of doctors who are qualified to deal with burn and provide a sustainable solution to combat this problem.

Dr. Saidur Rahman Mashreky is an epidemiologist at the Centre for Injury Prevention and Research, Bangladesh.

Zardari: 'I am a victim here'

President Asif Ali Zardari of Pakistan is in the hot seat. Under pressure from the international community, he ordered police last week to crack down on Jamaat-ul-Dawa, a charity thought to be the public front for Lashkar-e-Taiba, the Pakistani terrorist group that India blames for the Thanksgiving attacks in Mumbai. President Zardari spoke with Newsweek's Lally Weymouth just before the Jamaat arrests.

Weymouth: It has been reported that Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) agency had links with Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) and that it shared intelligence with LeT on Kashmir. Do you believe that to be true?

Zardari: Maybe before 9/11, that may have been a position. (But) since then, things have changed to a great extent.

It is said that Lashkar is operating with the help of ISI now. There is no supportive interaction with

our intelligence (agencies) and the LeT. Lashkar-e-Taiba happens to be a banned organisation in Pakistan.

You and Benazir blamed ISI for causing many of your problems.

Yes, we've always maintained that the intelligence agencies (should) have nothing to do with politics. Since I have been in government, we've had a stated position that ISI has no political role anymore.

Lashkar-e-Taiba was used in Kashmir by the Pakistani army to fight India.

Lashkar-e-Taiba has been banned. Of course, these non-state actors keep re-emerging in different forms. Whenever there is actionable intelligence, we move in. Did Secretary Rice ask you to arrest some people?

She is a friend and she knows Pakistan is a responsible state, and the Americans and the British know how much my government has done against the terrorists. What do you think about the Mumbai attack?

I think it is horrific. Reportedly, all of the terrorists were trained in Pakistan.

I don't have any specific information to that effect. I have offered to the Indians that we will do a joint investigation into this Mumbai incident and if it leads anywhere, we will take action.

If they... were trained in Pakistan, don't you have to do something? Definitely. Not for them, it's for myself... The Indians must understand that the government and the people of Pakistan are net losers of the situation. We had put

in a lot of effort... to make good relations with India.

Allegedly, Rice asked you to arrest a former ISI chief, Gen. Hamid Gul. There have been stories that Gul is tied up with the Taliban and Al Qaeda.

Hamid Gul is an actor who is definitely not in our good books. He was never liked by our government. She (Rice) did not go into specifics, if I may share that with you... He has not been accused in the Mumbai incident... I think he is more of a political ideologue of terror rather than a physical supporter.

Do you need real-time intelligence to move faster?

Of course. A lot of people are (saying) that they knew about this attack. I've heard that the Russians told the Indians, but I wish the Russians had also shared it with us.

The Indians are asking you to send them people to bring to justice, right?

(We) don't have that kind of relationship yet. America and Pakistan have hardly gotten to the position where we can interact and exchange information.

So you will not send anyone to India?

No, that is a decision to be made by the Parliament and not by the president.

Do you control Pakistan or does the army?

Democracy controls Pakistan.

So if you say there will be no first strike against India -- as you did -- will the army listen to you?

Of course. It goes without saying.

Were Indian Muslims involved [in the Mumbai attacks]?

I am not pointing fingers as I want to improve my relations with India... I want to be a friend of India and a friend of the world and (a foe of terrorism) because I am a victim myself. I need to become economically better so I can employ these youths that (the terrorists) are employing.

US intelligence reportedly has evidence of ISI's involvement in the [July] bombing of the Indian Embassy in Kabul. Is it true?

No, we have not had that intimation from the Americans. We had nothing to

do with the Kabul bombing. Again, these are non-state actors.

Are you going to take any concrete steps to crack down on the Lashkar-e-Taiba?

Things have been done. One step is we have started combing the whole region for all non-state actors and we have made certain arrests.

Do you think you can shut the LeT down?

We will not allow anybody to have the capability to perform such acts.

Or to train on Pakistani soil?

Nobody will be allowed to use Pakistan soil for any form of aggression toward any friend or foe.

Secretary Rice said that non-state actors on your soil are still your responsibility. Yes, definitely. I do not shrug away from that position. Anybody from my soil is my responsibility.

Over and over before, Pakistani leaders said they would do something about Lashkar and they never did. That is not us.