

# How not to run a re-election campaign



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ABDUL MANNAN

THE battle for Chittagong City Corporation (CCC) is over but the dust is yet to settle. What started about three weeks ago with a whimper ended with a big bang that shook the entire political arena of the country. No other local council election that was called in the past to elect a mayor for the second largest city of the country attracted so much attention of the entire nation. The CCC election did this for a couple of reasons.

Theoretically, local government elections in Bangladesh are not contested under any political party's umbrella. In practice, they take on a political colour in the end. From the very beginning the CCC election was no exception.

This election gained an added importance as the sitting mayor, and the president of the Mohanagar (City) Awami League, A.B.M. Mohiuddin Chowdhury, was contesting for the fourth time and the rival BNP, failing to find its own candidate due to its inner party squabble in this port city, backed one time close associate and friend of Mohiuddin Chowdhury, Manjur Alam, who until recently had a very strong Awami League label tagged to his personal dossier.

Backing Manjur for this coveted post was a master-stroke in BNP's election strategy, which paid off in the end. Manjur won by about ninety-six thousand votes. When the battle for Chittagong began Manjur was an underdog. His only credential was that he was elected ward commissioner for three consecutive terms. He also acted as the mayor in the absence of Mohiuddin at least on nine occasions. When Chowdhury was arrested by the last caretaker government (CTG) Manjur was made the acting mayor, a position he held until

Mohiuddin was released.

Manjur, known for his philanthropic work, is a budding entrepreneur of the port city, and even founded Begum Fazilatun Nessa Mujib Foundation to help the poor and the needy. The ever-smiling Manjur was surprised when BNP declared that it would support him against Mohiuddin Chowdhury in a situation where at least three BNP heavyweights in Chittagong were vying for the coveted nomination.

When his candidature was finally announced, the reaction of Chittagong BNP took an ugly turn. However, due to apt handling of the mini crisis by Begum Zia's advisor Amir Khasru Mahmud Chowdhury, the ever feuding BNP leaders of Chittagong closed ranks and took up the challenge of getting Manjur -- who was turned down by both major political parties during the last parliament election when he sought nomination from them -- elected.

The scene in the Chowdhury camp was quite different and everyone, including this author, thought that getting elected as the mayor for the fourth time would not be a problem for him. However, things started to change fast. Chowdhury started facing tremendous opposition from his own party leaders in Chittagong. At least three local leaders announced their candidatures in addition to Chowdhury. Two filed nominations but later on withdrew at the instruction of party President Sheikh Hasina.

Once the election was over, everyone started to do their post mortem in the media. They labelled Chowdhury as megalomaniac, autocrat, mini-dictator, over-confident, anti-minority, corrupt etc.

Not entering the debate as to how much of all these allegations is true or false, it can be safely said that one of the primary reasons for this unexpected defeat was the absolutely amateur-

ish and naïve management of the election itself. Although it may seem unkind to many, as a student of strategy and management, I can safely conclude by saying that this election has set an example of how not to run an election at this level.

Mohiuddin Chowdhury used the Nagorik Committee platform to run this election, as he did in the past, and was later supported by the fourteen party alliance and JP. The fifty member Nagorik Committee members comprised many odd names, some of whom even did not know their names were ever there. An important personality of a Chittagong City Corporation run institution was included as a member of the Nagorik Committee.

Surprisingly, the Committee did not meet even once. Major (Retd) Emdad was appointed as the secretary though he had no clue of the complex political dynamics of Chittagong Awami League politics and was not known to many people. Emdad tried his best to put together a fighting team but failed miserably. The originally declared nagorik convener was sick, and was replaced by a local AL leader Mr. Ishaq Mia, who had also filed his nomination for the election. A man in his late eighties was pitted against an energetic and more dynamic Amir Khasru of the opposition camp.

Mia, after being instructed by the party chief, did his best in spite of his age and other limitations. The election manifesto lacked focus and included issues that did not concern CCC. During the election campaign many people realised that the people around Chowdhury lacked credibility and acceptance, and wondered where the people who once helped him in his hour of crisis were.

The people who supported Chowdhury were frustrated seeing him surrounded by a bunch of sycophants and cronies. The campaign lacked any strategic plan, and the key campaigners spent more time in trying to prove how bad a person Manjur was instead of defending the sixteen-year deeds of Mohiuddin Chowdhury.

The two talk shows (not the BBC Sanglap) were a semi-disaster. I still wonder why Chowdhury did not to press a week earlier with the details of his past actions and what he

expected to do in the future, and apologise for any deeds in the past that could have hurt any particular person or community. He should have promised that all decisions in the future would be taken through consultation with all stakeholders.

There is no harm in apologising, and even the present prime minister did that in the past and was appreciated by a wide section of people. Leaders must be humble, and humility can be the greatest asset that one can possess.

I believe no one asked Chowdhury to sit with an open mind with all the local dissenting AL leaders and seek their all-out cooperation in the election. The result was just a photo session campaigning by these AL leaders while their loyalists in most places worked for Manjur.

It has been reported that a large section of students -- and their family members -- of an educational institution that Chowdhury founded either did not vote for him or abstained from voting, registering a silent protest for an unwarranted incident that took place in that institution a few months back. That this would happen was reported to him in advance, and he wanted to settle the issue but was prevented by one of the cronies.

A bunch of sycophants and cronies can easily bring the downfall of anyone, not to speak of a politician of Mohiuddin Chowdhury's stature. When election results were being finalised and Amir Khasru took over the control of the electronic media and continuously fed the viewers with confusing information relating to the results, no one from Chowdhury's camp came forward to counter him. This just exposed the absolute mismanagement of the election campaign and inefficiency of the team that was in charge.

Mohiuddin Chowdhury has been crucified by the media and the commentators after the announcement of the results. This is tragic for a person who has invested about fifty years of his life in politics, a man who fought for the cause of the people and democracy, a freedom fighter who served three terms as the mayor of the port city and did so much for the development of education, health and the city's infrastructure.

He perhaps did not deserve such an exit. This would not have happened if only he was more pragmatic and careful, could distinguish between a sycophant and a well wisher, listened to the people's voice more closely, and left the formulation of the strategic plans of his election to those who had the competence and expertise to do so.

The government can thank itself for setting an example by not interfering in the affairs of the EC. This has definitely enhanced its image. The prime minister and the LGRD minister have done an excellent job by congratulating the new mayor and promised all possible help for the development of the economically strategic city of Chittagong.

The Election Commission and its representative Jesmin Tuli, who ran the show with a determined hand, deserve special congratulations. Maybe in the not too distant future we might start thinking of holding an election under an elected government and do away with the concept of caretaker government. In the end, democracy has emerged victorious.

As for Mohiuddin Chowdhury, this should not be seen as the end of the road. He still has the potential to begin afresh, learning from the costly mistakes he made. In the past, Winston Churchill and Indira Gandhi lost elections but made comebacks. One just needs to understand why people vote for you and why they do not.

Abdul Mannan is a former Vice-Chancellor, Chittagong University.

## Let their lives be our passion

All out efforts must continue with political will, integrity on the part of the general public, the civil society, family, government, religious institutions, etc. Above all, nothing works if there is no love for people, a deep sense of justice, peace and integrity at every level.

MARTIN ADHIKARY

AROUND 40 thousand children in the world die of hunger, malnutrition and diseases caused thereby every twenty-four hours. On average, about 40% children in the world live in absolute poverty now. Lives of millions of children are at risk. These children are one-third of the total population of the world.

These statistics are staggering even in the developing nations, where almost half of the population are children. Another one billion children may be born in the next decade, many into extreme poverty situation. The sage in the Bible says: "Children are the greatest gifts and rewards to parents," with corresponding sacred trust and responsibility to bring them up as complete persons. But many of us prove to be pathetic failures in this vitally important area in our individual and corporate lives.

The primary need of children is security, a safe place for overall growth -- physical, mental and cultural -- through relationship and exploration of the world around him or her. Nothing will work if the child does not feel that his or her life is secure. The other need is for them to feel significant in our eyes, in our thoughts. They need to be assured that they are someone precious because of who they are. A child needs to be assured that there are some people around him/her whom he/she can trust.

Children's problems include insecurity, hunger, illness, lack of clothes and shelter, abuse, exploitation, lack of education and exasperation or irritation. Children cry for dignity. God creates children with dignity. They need to grow to full manhood in wisdom and stature, and with God. Children are our greatest resource, for both the present and the future.

We need to concentrate on our work for them as they are crucial for national development. According to Unicef, child health and education are the most significant interventions that can be made to develop nation. Many people are not worthy parents, as they do not provide just the basic minimum care for their children. It is a too easy to beget children, but it is not easy to parent them.

While children suffer from lack of wealth and care it has now become an established fact that children in affluent societies suffer from the bad impacts of too much wealth. It is not said that children in the West have "everything to live with but nothing to live for" without meaning.

Children in many affluent societies show signs of not having the right direction in life and, as such, become cynical about life and the world. Millions are suffering from lack of proper parental care. Many feel confused and bewildered with what they see and experience in the post-modern way of life.

Child labour is a curse that we, as a nation, are putting up with. The following categories of child labour can be identified for possible abolition: Firstly, labour that is hazardous for holistic development, i.e. physical, mental, spiritual and moral well-being of the child.

Secondly, labour that is performed by a child who is under the minimum age specified for that kind of work impedes the child's education, skill and growth.

Lastly, the most heinous kind of labour -- child-trafficking, slavery (including camel jockeying), forced labour of various kinds, fighting in battle fields, sex trade, pornography, etc. There are also others who must not be forgotten -- the huge number of young boys and girls that are used (mostly abused!) as domestic servants.

Bangladesh has ratified UN and ILO Conventions/Charters -- the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, ILO Convention on the Worst Forms of Child Labour (No. 182), ILO Minimum Age Convention (No. 15), ILO Minimum Age Convention, Revised (No. 59), ILO Labour Convention (No. 29), ILO Night Work of Young Persons Convention (No. 90), ILO Abolition of Forced Labour Convention No. 105). However, our country has always been good at signing international protocols and charters.

How much is done at home to get those lofty ideals and documents implemented? The child labour problem is a hydra-headed problem. In a poor and developing country like ours we cannot solve it easily. It is linked up with our overall socio-economic conditions.

All out efforts must continue with political will, integrity on the part of the general public, the civil society, family, government, religious institutions, etc. Above all, nothing works if there is no love for people, a deep sense of justice, peace and integrity at every level.

Reverend Martin Adhikary is a social worker and a free-lance contributor to The Daily Star.



## Getting out of Palestine?



If Israel persists in its present policies of imposing apartheid in the West Bank, of strangulating Gaza, of carrying out carpet bombing of undefended Arab populations, it will continue to lose the liberal segments of its population to emigration.

M. SHAHID ALAM

WHEN veteran journalist Helen Thomas was asked recently if she had any comments on Israel, she shot back: "Tell them to get the hell out of

Palestine." She apologised for the remark, but, as the campaign against her escalated, she chose to retire from her position as White House correspondent.

Putting aside the edginess in her words, does Helen Thomas's remark deserve serious

consideration?

Over the years, it has been receiving just that from many tens of thousands of Israelis, who have been emigrating from Israel, applying for emigration, or staying in Israel but holding or applying for dual citizenship. According to Arnaud de Borchgrave, half a million Israelis hold dual citizenship.

Although the Israel lobby expressed particular outrage at Helen Thomas' suggestion that Israelis go back to Germany and Poland, many Israelis have done precisely that. In his book, *The Seventh Million*, Tom Segev writes that many thousands of Israelis have "requested and received German passports." According to the *Jewish Virtual Library*, there were 118,000 Jews living in Germany in 2006. Another 49,700 lived in Hungary and 3,200 in Poland.

Disconcerting as some Zionists may find this, Jews have not stayed away from countries where they faced near extermination under the Nazis. Does this mean that these countries are now safer for Jews than Israel?

At least, that is what the record indicates. According to the *Jewish Virtual Library*, 22,682 Israelis died in Israeli wars or as a result of terrorist attacks.

Over the same period -- that is, since 1948 -- how many Jews in Europe have died as a result of anti-Semitic violence?

I am not suggesting Jewish emigration from Israel as my preferred solution to the Israeli-Palestinian question. Yet, now that Israel has tapped into nearly every Jewish population in the diaspora with an economic interest in emigrating to Israel, that is what we are likely to observe in the future. Is that how the Zionist project might end?

M. Shahid Alam is Professor of Economics at Northeastern University, Boston. He is author of *Israeli Exceptionalism* (Palgrave, 2009) and *Challenging the New Orientalism* (IPI, 2006). Visit his website at <http://lqreason.com>; and write to him at [alqalam02760@yahoo.com](mailto:alqalam02760@yahoo.com).