

STRATEGICALLY SPEAKING

UP polls conducted well

EC should build up on the trend

EVEN though the Union Parishad (UP) elections have been held after two years' delay, the Election Commission (EC) deserves thanks for its success in conducting those more or less peacefully. The local administration, too, have a share in the credit for ensuring successful conduct of this first phase of the six days long polls for the UPs.

There is no denying the fact that the UPs' are the most intensely contested polls. Small wonder in the past, both before and after the UP polls, one would hear of instances of severe violence. Murder or hijacking of candidates by rivals, snatching of ballot boxes, occasional brawls between supporters of contending parties and suchlike occurrences often marred the polls. That is not to say that the ongoing UP polls have been totally free from any kind of untoward happenings. Reports have it that among the 190 UPs spread over 24 upazilas under Khulna Barisal and Chittagong divisions where the elections were conducted Tuesday, sporadic cases of violence did take place only at a few centres. But considering their number compared to those in the past years, they were few and far between. If the same trend continues through to the end over the next five days, that would be something to rejoice at. One has to wait until the first phase of the UP polls in progress is concluded before giving the final judgement about it.

While the peaceful conduct of the UP polls is an occasion to be acclaimed, one cannot say that just holding of an election is an end in itself. Once all the hullabaloo is over will come the real test of the administration in ensuring that this basic tier of the local government is able to play its desired role and deliver the goods. To that end, the government will have to be sincere about effecting devolution of powers on to the local government bodies.

In view of the manner in which the UP polls are being conducted, it would be a real achievement on the part of the EC, if it is able to retain this trend even in the next general election. Every well-conducted series of elections strengthens our belief in the electoral process.

Doctors' truancy

We share PM's indignation

PRIME Minister's warnings to the doctors who are negligent of their duties in rural areas have been well taken by all. This is not, however, the first time that she spoke her mind on the issue.

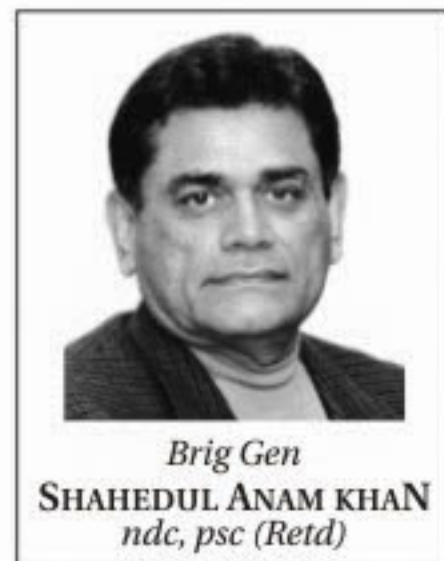
The PM, while handing over vehicles and ambulances to the authorities of the upazila and district level hospitals in Dhaka, has said that the doctors will have to comply with rural postings lest the government enforce replacement. She pointed out that such absenteeism deprives the mass people of better health facilities. We welcome the PM's tough words and want these implemented in kind when necessary.

While agreeing with the PM we would like to point out that proper living and working facilities for the doctors, especially lady doctors, have to be ensured in the rural areas. According to a BMA version, lady doctors posted to remote UP health centres find it difficult to do their job without proper accommodation facilities. Transport, accommodation and other related necessities should be provided to meet minimum requirement of the doctors. But where adequate facilities are available no excuse should be tolerated.

The practice of not attending place of postings in the countryside is nothing new. It has been happening for a long time. Doctors tend to skip their duties and attend to private practice in cities. However they draw salaries basing on their appointment at rural places. The dismal picture of neglected hospitals, clinics or community health centers and reports of absence of doctors are all too glaring.

The government should take measures to improve facilities for the doctors in rural areas and also sack the habitual absentee doctors who resort to wicked practices while

Taher verdict: Many unanswered questions



Brig Gen
SHAHEDUL ANAM KHAN
ndc, psc (Retd)

THE High Court has given its verdict in the case of Taher's trial saying that his trial by the military tribunal in 1976, and

his sentence of death, was illegal. It has also ordered that Taher and the co-accused be treated as patriots, not traitors, to consider providing compensation to victims, and to prosecute military tribunal judge Abdul Ali for Taher's execution. It has also asked for probe into Zia's "involvement" in killing Bangabandhu, freedom fighters

Let me make a clean breast of the fact that I have a poor understanding of the intricacies of law, but the verdict, nonetheless, has raised a few questions even in my mind that need answers.

The issue before the court, as I understand it, was the process of the trial of Taher and not the merit. It is a pity that the court had no document of the case to fall back on to examine the matter. And the only way that it could inform itself was from the statements of those associated with the trial or had followed the course of the trial. Besides the amicus curie and a few others, the court also called upon a foreign journalist who happened to be in Dhaka during those days but was not physically present during the course of the trial, having been expelled by the government. And no one can contend the verdict

on the process of the trial.

Now that the court has passed a judgment on the process of the trial should it also not have the issue of the merit of the case gone into, although in a way too the court has passed a verdict on the merit of trial of Taher? Unless that is done one cannot be blamed for thinking that the judgment and the rulings of the court imply that that the charges brought

against Taher were false? Was it so?

There are certain facts related to the events of the period between August 15 and November 7, 1975, that no one can controvert. That there was infiltration in the Bangladesh military by subterranean groups linked to a recognised leftist political party during that

period taking the opportunity of the existing uncertain situation. That Col. Taher belonged to that party, and believed and indeed propagated for a classless military that would have a completely different orientation.

And while there is nothing wrong with anyone having his or her idea about what the political structure of the state and the character of the government should be, there is every-

thing wrong when one goes about implementing that through violence, which his party did by trying to start an insurrection in the military, a fact that has been acknowledged by a member of the party who happens to be a partner of the current alliance government. And when the armed forces become the target and instrument of change through an insurrection one cannot lose sight of the seriousness of the offense.

The government has not expressed its intention to challenge the verdict, not that we know of, and we can presume that it is in full agreement with the verdict, and sees no merit in challenging it. And that is what begs the question.

If that be so, how do we account for the

mutinous soldiers, led by the so called Biplobi Sainik Sangstha, gunning for the blood of the officers? How do we account for the death of the many officers during the turmoil initiated by the leftist party between November 3 and 7, 1975? The turmoil had affected all the garrisons in Bangladesh except for one. And thank God, the extent of infiltration was limited and the affected soldiers saw

through the ploy of the infiltrators eventually and sanity prevailed.

Col. Taher was a very brave son of the soil, and he risked his life and limb for the country in the Liberation War. And I have a deep respect for what he did then. It is regrettable but true that Taher was a victim of both his own aspirations that made him boldly overambitious and the internal dynamics of the Bangladesh army that had been suffering a flux which started during the War of Liberation and continued well after its conclusion. His actions must be judged in the context of the time.

The issue further gives rise to certain fundamental questions.

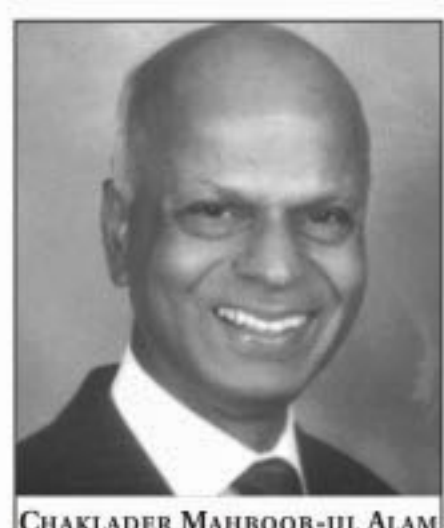
If the merit of the case against Taher is contested, will it not validate his philosophy regarding the military, and indeed the method he applied to implement the changes? Will it not in a sense provide incentives to those that want revolutionary changes in the armed forces? And will that not raise question on the government's position regarding November 7, which the BNP had been celebrating as National Revolution and Solidarity Day, and which the AL government has discarded.

It is time to revisit the events of November 1975 dispassionately and truthfully. One can write off a trial as not having taken place, and rightly so, but can one write off the deaths caused by the mutineers in the same manner, as not having taken place?

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LETTER FROM EUROPE

Huntington was wrong



CHAKLADER MAHBOOB-UL-ALAM

BY now almost everybody knows who Mohamed Bouazizi (Tarek) was. He was the 26 year old fruit vendor from an impoverished

town called Sidi Bouzid in Tunisia, a predominantly Muslim country, who on December 17, 2010 set himself on fire in front of the local governor's office as a sign of protest against police harassment, corruption and systematic assault on human dignity. By the time he died on January 4, he had become a martyred hero.

Protests, organised mostly by internet-savvy youngsters spread all over Tunisia. Al Jazeera picked up the news from a Facebook posting and its television channel spread it across the world. Thus, an incident which started as a routine altercation between a helpless young man and the corrupt and impenetrable security apparatus of an authoritarian government in an Arab country turned into a revolution that brought down a 23-year old corrupt dictatorship.

This secular movement, which demands democratic government and is led mostly by young people, has also toppled the 30 year-old dictatorship of Mubarak in Egypt and is spreading like wildfire to other countries in North Africa and the Middle East.

Through his act of defiance on December 17, 2010, Mohamed not only set off a common man's revolution in the Arab-Muslim world but also shattered the clash of civilisations theory of Prof. Samuel Huntington of Harvard University, which has much influenced American foreign policy toward the Muslim world in recent years.

After the end of the Cold War, Francis Fukuyama, an American

intellectual of Japanese origin wrote: "What we may be witnessing is not the end of the Cold War or the passing of a particular period of post-war history, but the end of history as such. That is the end point of mankind's ideological evolution and universalisation of Western liberal democracy as the final form of government."

In direct response to Fukuyama's end of history theory, Samuel Huntington, a professor at Harvard wrote a sensational essay in 1993 in which he argued "temporary conflict between ideologies is being replaced by the ancient conflict between civilisations" based on ethnic and/or religious lines.

In his opinion, there was no universal civilisation with a common set

would irredeemably remain "the other."

It is not my intention here to enter into a futile controversy over which religion or which ethnic group has been more violent than the others in the past, and I certainly do not like making radical generalisations about any thing so sensitive as the identity and political inclinations of so many millions of people. On the contrary, as a writer I have always tried to seek harmony and better understanding among people, no matter whether they are Hindus, Muslims or Christians.

It is gratifying to note that the most severe critiques of Huntington's imagined universe of faith-based civilisations came not from Muslim intellec-

global confrontation is frequently seen as corollary of religious or cultural divisions in the world. Indeed, the world is increasingly seen, if only implicitly, as a federation of religions or of civilisations, thereby ignoring all the other ways in which people see themselves. Underlying this line of thinking is the odd presumption that the people of the world can be uniquely categorised according to some singular and overarching system of partitioning. Civilizational or religious partitioning of the world population yields a 'solitarist' approach to human identity, which sees human beings as members of exactly one group (in this case defined by civilisation or religion, in contrast with earlier reliance on nationalities or classes)."

Edward Said was a cultural critic and is best known for his brilliant treatise on *Orientalism*, in which he denounced "subtle and persistent Eurocentric propaganda against Arab-Islamic people and their cultures."

In his response to Huntington's theory, he was sarcastic. Without openly calling Huntington a self-complacent bigot or a pitifully ignorant person, he wrote an essay entitled *The Clash of Ignorance*, in which he argued that Huntington's categorisation of the world's fixed "civilisations" omitted the dynamic interdependence and interaction of cultures over the centuries.

In conclusion, I would like to quote the great Amartya Sen again. He wrote: "The hope of harmony in the contemporary world lies to a great extent in a clearer understanding of the pluralities of human identity, and in the appreciation that they cut across each other and work against a sharp separation along one single hardened line of impenetrable division."

The writer is a columnist for The Daily Star.

THIS DAY IN HISTORY

March 31

1146

Bernard of Clairvaux preaches his famous sermon in a field at Vézelay, urging the necessity of a Second Crusade. Louis VII is present, and joins the Crusade.

1822

The massacre of the population of the Greek island of Chios by soldiers of the Ottoman Empire following a rebellion attempt, depicted by the French artist Eugène Delacroix.

1889

The Eiffel Tower is inaugurated.

1909

Serbia accepts Austrian control over Bosnia and Herzegovina.

1918

Massacre of ethnic Azerbaijanis was committed by allied armed groups of Armenian Revolutionary Federation and Bolsheviks. Nearly 12,000 Azerbaijani Muslims were killed. The day is observed in Azerbaijan as Day of Azerbaijan Genocide.

1959

The 14th Dalai Lama, Tenzin Gyatso, crosses the border into India and is granted political asylum.

1970

Nine terrorists from the Japanese Red Army hijack Japan Airlines Flight 351 at Tokyo International Airport, wielding samurai swords and carrying a bomb.

1991

Georgian independence referendum, 1991: nearly 99 percent of the voters support the country's independence from the Soviet Union.