

## GROUND REALITIES

## The Narayanganj polls

Create a peaceful atmosphere from now

THE tension in the run-up to the mayoral elections in Narayanganj is palpable. With two of the three candidates for the office asking for a deployment of the army before the polls scheduled for October, it is clear that the administration has a tough job on its hands. There is too the rather negative legacy associated with politics in the port city. Over the last few years, with local politicians vying for supremacy in the city, often driven by a propensity to violence, conditions have clearly worsened. Obviously, there must be measures in place in order to reassure people that the elections will be conducted in a free, impartial and uninterrupted manner and that the results will be honoured by all candidates.

In view of the many turf wars fought in Narayanganj over these many years, all precautions must be taken to ensure a peaceful election. Again, the political parties must keep their candidates and their followers on a leash. It is a situation where godfathers have long played a pivotal role in the politics of the city. That has naturally meant the rise of gangs and goon squads whose job has been to try to intimidate their rivals, sometimes to devastating effect. Besides, factionalism within the political parties has always been a matter of concern for citizens. This can be observed from the way two of the candidates are vying for the support of the ruling Awami League. As for the BNP, despite the candidate being its Narayanganj district president, there are many who have not taken kindly to his candidacy. The risks, therefore, are huge. But if the elections are to be credible, these risks need to be minimized and even neutralized.

This is where the administration, including the Election Commission, comes in. Strict measures to prevent any breakdown in law and order must be in place between now and election day. It must be ensured that the political parties desist from interfering in the polls and turn them into a microcosm of the current debilitating national politics. Most importantly, the law enforcers must come down hard on any individual or group found muddying the waters. It is a job which must be undertaken now, in the interest of Narayanganj and its people.

## Saudi women's new rights

A big leap forward

KING Abdullah decided on September 25, 2011 to grant women the right to vote and run in municipal elections from 2015 and to be a member of the Consultative Assembly, known also as the Shura Council. This Council advises the king and debates on current affairs but cannot pass or enforce laws.

This unprecedented and welcome change has also been approved by the religious scholars with whom the king had consulted, stating that women have played vital roles since the Prophet's time.

This opens up the door for women's participation in political life and decisions in unprecedented ways. Since May of 2011, women have been asking for the right to drive and posting such needs for change on social media sites such as Facebook. Their voices are finally being heard on a larger scale. On a practical level, the right to drive will only be inevitable.

Whereas countries such as Tunisia, Egypt and Libya have seen widespread bloodshed during the Arab Spring to ask for democracy and equal rights, Saudi Arabia welcomes changes in a peaceful manner.

This comes at a time when Saudis recognize the need for accelerated change and reforms in a shrinking world, thanks to King Abdullah's views that women should no longer be marginalized.

King Abdullah has taken giant steps to grant women equality and this is just the beginning of those steps that



SYED BADRUL AHSAN

IN a long ago era, much of Field Marshal Mohammad Ayub Khan's reputation as Pakistan's president was tarnished by the doings of his sons. A fairly good number of questions were raised about some industrial undertaking in Gandhara and how his children were increasingly bringing their influence to bear on the government.

It was a time when censorship was absolute, despite Ayub Khan's endless assertions that his Basic Democracy-based politics provided room for a free expression of opinion. It was no such thing; and newspapers spent the four seasons singing paeans to Pakistan's first military ruler. Obviously, when you are so beholden to the man at the top, propriety demands that you do not touch, or even think of touching, his offspring. And so the Ayub children went on doing what they thought they should be doing. No one stopped them. Everything stopped the day their father stopped being president on a cold evening in March 1969.

It is not always a good idea for the mighty and the seemingly indisputable to bring their spouses and children into the public domain, either through politics or lucrative business deals. For all the critical appraisals we make of the regime of General Ziaur Rahman, indeed about the man himself, we do remember with a good degree of appreciation the meticulous way in which he kept his family at bay. He did not permit his wife, his siblings or any other members of his clan to derive advantage from association with him. There are a thousand and one reasons why we take issue with Ziaur Rahman and his brand of politics, but that he was incorruptible in the matter of his family in relation to politics remains an

instance of what powerful men and women must do to keep themselves on a high, clean pedestal.

Contrast Ziaur Rahman's frugality, if you can call it that, with the way Bangladesh's second military ruler approached politics. In General Hussein Muhammad

another appendage of the family to be in politics. It was not a good time for Bangladesh's people. It is never a good time when politics becomes captive to family preponderance... because that happens to be a sign of politics being in retreat and of feudalism, in its patently modern

Before the Rajapakas there were the Bandaranaiques. Democracy could in Sri Lanka have been a healthier process without these two clans taking centre stage. Which takes you to India, where the Congress, for all its claim to democratic credentials, has remained in the shadow of the Nehru-Gandhis. With nearly everyone waiting for Rahul Gandhi to take charge as prime minister someday, you wonder if that is the best way to build a pluralistic society in our times.

That brings you back to Bangladesh. The obsession of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party with the elder son of its party chairperson is worrying, because of the bad record that has already been set, because of what it portends for the future. On a more reflective level, you are quite inclined to think -- and believe -- that with every infusion of clan politics in the country, there is a corresponding decline in intellectual brilliance across the spectrum. Good people lose hope. Those who can, leave the country.

In New York this week, Sheikh Hasina's son did not lose the opportunity of letting us know how happy we are as citizens with his mother in charge. That, again, was an instance of how political clans, happily caught as they are in the maddening rush of sycophancy, quite misread the reality. You can bet that there are people in the Awami League already looking to the times of the prime ministerial child being foisted on us as our leader.

And then there is that other child, Begum Zia's, ready to be showered with similar honours by his mother's acolytes. You ought not to feel cheerful about these prospects. Our dark tunnel, constantly promising us light at the end, keeps getting longer and increasingly frightening.

Politics withers in the shadow of clan politics. And democracy comes to acquire something of the bonsai about it.

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JONATHAN EVANS

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Ershad's nine-year hold on power, his wife Roushan exercised a considerable degree of clout in politics as first lady, which term was again a misnomer in this country. The idea was plainly borrowed from the convention in vogue in the United States, where the presidential wife is referred to as first lady.

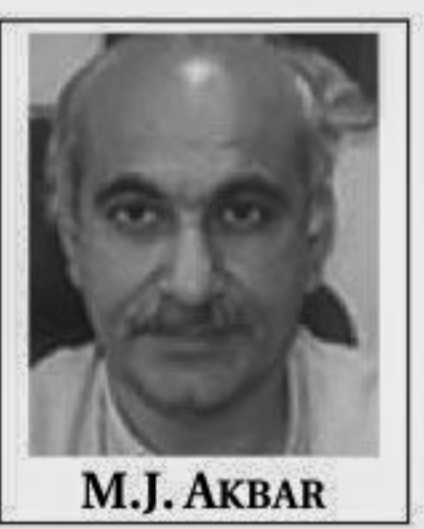
The irony for us was that we did not elect Ershad to be our president; he simply seized the office and then informed us that his wife was first lady. And that was not all. His sister-in-law became yet

way, taking over.

Think here of the Rajapaksa clan in Sri Lanka. It is not merely the president who rides the waves these days, in rather terrific form since his army inflicted that dramatic defeat on the Tamil Tigers two years ago. One of his brothers handles the nation's defence. Another is speaker of parliament. What more could a family ask for? Perhaps nothing, perhaps much more. But the damage caused by such family intrusions into politics is incalculable.

## BYLINE

# Tiger, Tiger burning bright



M.J. AKBAR

IN the loneliness of the small town where I was born, and the shuttered years of boarding school, dream was a

five-letter word called Tiger. Mansur Ali Khan's magic transcended the supreme piffle that passed for cricket commentary when radio, with a glowing green eye in the right hand corner, was our primary passport to Test cricket. Secondary knowledge came from the grey photographs in black-and-white newspapers; but the red cherry seemed to blossom when it was smacked imperiously in an arc that began with the single eye of the master and traversed along the hooded nose that had been designed by God for aristocracy. The radio went into memory. The photograph was lovingly preserved in a scrapbook along with peers like Neil Harvey, Richie Benaud, Wes Hall, Garfield Sobers and Frank Worrell. I kept the unassuming Worrell in that illustrious company not because he could bat, but because he could lead.

Pataudi's inherited title was a bit of a two-way sniff. We certainly sensed if not heard his occasional sniff at the plebs; but the fun was that he heard our periodic snort at yesterday's elite as well. By the 1960s a Nawab had already become an effete caricature, a piteous descent from the glory days of the 18th century, first reduced to a whin-

ing fawn of the British and then to a vainglorious hanger-on of post-Independence politicians. Even Hindi cinema had begun to laugh at the "Chhote Nawab," unless it tipped towards lachrymose self-pity as Nawab Sahab auctioned off his precious heirlooms in Mere Mehboob to protect some immensely idle honour.

Then came Indira Gandhi. In 1969 she made Nawabs and Rajahs illegal. Their fury was as silly as

moors. If he did not belong to any Drones club from the fiction of P.G. Wodehouse, it was only because he carried a bit of Drones along with him. The strategy for his impish pranks was often perfected across a convivial bar, and secrets were carefully protected till long after the victims had been duped -- harmlessly of course. It was tragic that the last incident in his life was a snub from the MCC, which refused to hand out the traditional Pataudi

trophy but demanded too much discipline for too little reward. Politics was an option, but required rubbing shoulders with the serf.

Tiger had an equitable relationship with glamour. He was not a hypocrite, so he never disdained glamour. But he never fell in love with his mirror, either. Many reasons have been cited to explain the comparative paucity of runs: he scored just six centuries. The popular theory is the tragic loss of an eye in a car accident when still at Oxford. I tend to believe that he just could not be bothered. Cricket was a game, not a religion. He did not sacrifice joy at the altar of statistics.

Pataudi became an acknowledged Tiger because of his sleek style, his calm demeanour at the crease until the moment came for the instinctive pounce. He also wore the smile of the Tiger, a quiver that only once in a while bubbled across his face. This Tiger had class: Royal Bengal, an epithet that Calcutta happily adopted when he married a brilliant daughter of the great Tagore family, Sharmila.

I wonder how Tiger would have reacted to the cant that has surfaced after his death. A shrug, a nod, a half-weary smile. He hated clichés, so could we please abandon rubbish like "Cricket has become poorer" etc. Cricket has become infinitely richer in both cash and technique since Tiger last held a bat. But the world has certainly become poorer since his death.

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their impotence. They learnt how distant they had become from changing India when they tried to challenge Mrs. Gandhi in the general elections of 1971. That election anointed a new order when it lifted Mrs. Gandhi to power. The new Rani of India was Indira Gandhi, the Begum of Democracy.

Tiger was as upset as any of his brotherhood, but he disguised any personal trauma behind a finely chiselled sense of humour that combined the riot of practical jokes with the deadpan of a British mask. He was the perfect Indo-Anglian, as comfortable in stately sherwani as in a hunting jacket on Scottish

trophy at the end of an India-England series this summer.

The Indian prince was bound to English cricket by a silken bond. At one level it kept him on friendship terms with the new ruling class, just as hunting had done in the Mughal days. It also became an appropriate theatre for the display of regal talent. It did not threaten the British, and it did not involve too subservient Indians. It would have been demeaning for a Nawab to become, for instance, a rampantly successful business executive: even a blue-chip private company was not blue enough for India's blue-blooded. The army was an honourable sanc-

## THIS DAY IN HISTORY

September 28

**1238** Muslim Valencia surrenders to the besieging King James I of Aragon the Conqueror.

**1907** Indian revolutionary Bhagat Singh was born in Khatkar Kalan, Lyallpur, Punjab, British India.

**1928** Sir Alexander Fleming notices a bacteria-killing mold growing in his laboratory, discovering what later became known as penicillin.

**1950** Indonesia joins the United Nations.

**1960** Mali and Senegal join the United Nations.

**1961** A military coup in Damascus effectively ends the United Arab Republic, the union between Egypt and Syria.

**1987** The beginning of the Palestinian civil disobedience uprising, "The First Intifada" against the Israeli occupation.

**1996** Former president of Afghanistan Mohammad Najibullah is tortured and brutally murdered by the Taliban.

**2000** Al-Aqsa Intifada: Ariel Sharon visits Al Aqsa Mosque known to Jews as the Temple Mount in Jerusalem.