

## CROSS TALK

### Three years of Sk. Hasina's rule *Massive mandate, mostly wasted*

WHEN Sheikh Hasina promised a "politics of change" in 2008 people just loved it and massively voted for it, simply because they so desperately wanted it. At the end of the third year of a five year mandate, there is no sign of any change, especially in politics, governance and corruption, the three areas where change was needed and people expected most. Regrettably all the indications are of a return to politics of violence, police oppression, use of mastans, black money, etc in politics and related areas. The above facts along with price hike of essentials, widespread corruption, extrajudicial killings, recent disappearance and partisanship in most of the activities of the government have overshadowed its considerable achievements in education, rice production, fertilizer distribution and power generation.

Both in terms of reach and quality, education can be termed as this government's most successful effort. Power generation, though highly laudable, came at a price which the country is finding almost impossible to bear. Distribution of fertilizer, another great success is marred by its high price, which is caused by international market and the government cannot be blamed for. Food production is another sphere where Sheikh Hasina's government rightly deserves a lot of credit.

War criminals trial, arresting rise of fundamentalism with an iron hand, and hunting down and destroying extremists' hideouts have been some remarkable achievements of this government.

Extending a hand of friendship to India was one of Sheikh Hasina's boldest move in foreign policy that called the bluff of the anti-Indian lobby as to their popular base. Given that we have extended the full gamut of our co-operation India's slow and so far unsubstantial response makes our PM appear anxious and out-manoeuvred.

Our opinion poll, fifth in a row, which we publish today as a special tabloid, reveals a massive drop in government's popularity but still holding to its core voting block. This indicates a window of opportunity to recover in the last two years if some effective steps are taken to stem corruption, partisanship, mal-governance and repression of the opposition.

The opposition, on its part, has done nothing to deserve the rise of its popularity indicated in our survey, evidence of the 'negative' nature of our politics in which a party never wins, the other party loses.

Our survey, along with most others that have been published, show a significant shift of "swing voters" whose massive support gave the 'Moha Jote' its four-fifth parliamentary strength in 2008. This should serve as a "wake-up" call for Awami League and Sheikh Hasina's government. Will she and her government heed this message?

### Govt move on school admission fees *Couldn't have come a day sooner*

THE government has warned of stern action against non-government schools in the capital charging admission fees higher than what has been fixed by the government.

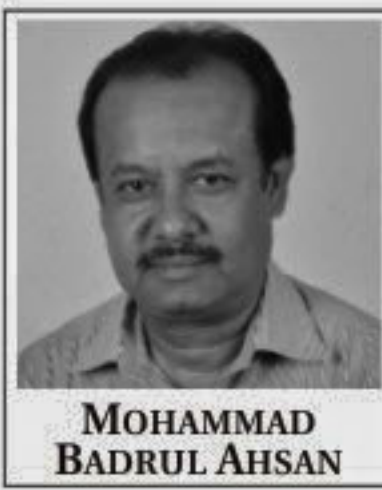
Schools found defaulting on the government fixed fee may be punished by stopping monthly pay order (MPO), cancelling their registration and debarring them from public examinations like JSC, SSC and HSC.

We welcome the government decision, particularly, against the backdrop of reports of allegations that some reputed schools of the city have been overcharging parents and guardians anxious to get their children and wards admitted to those schools. As told by a desperate parent, so far they were virtually held hostage by the management of those schools demanding fees under different heads.

With the number of children increasing every year, these schools tend to take advantage of the parents' mad rush for good schools are even demanding donations. Granted, expenses of quality education have increased, but that does not justify asking fat fees including something of a development surcharge.

The government is reportedly making a list of schools charging exorbitant fees in order to process action against them. While doing this, it should blend sternness with

# Maximisation of minimisation



MOHAMMAD  
BADRUL AHSAN

THERE is a tribe in India whose people believe that their short stature goes back to a time when the sky and the earth came too close and their ancestors were squeezed. How do we explain the diminishing height of our

people? I am not talking about physical height, but height in every other sense. It looks like everybody is incredibly shrinking in the relentless squeeze. There is no height that doesn't diminish these days. Funnily, the sky is the limit.

In the 1957 Hollywood movie *The Incredible Shrinking Man*, Scott Carey is a character who continued to shrink and lose weight after he was contaminated by a radioactive cloud. Scott described that his body was dwindling, melting and becoming nothing, before he explained how he managed to cope with his minimisation. "My fears melted away. And in their place came acceptance," he said.

If people are shrinking today it is not only because they are no longer afraid of it, but also because they have learned to accept it. In fact, we are living in a time when life has become an inexorable shrinking contest and everybody wants to maximise his minimisation. A man accused of molesting a woman when he was a parliament member gets re-elected to the same office. This time he is accused of yet another horrible crime. He has been allegedly stealing money from the school fund which is chaired by him.

This is not to say that the world has not been vulgar before. The intimation of degeneracy and decline from any of the previous centuries will resonate with those of our own. The conviction that flows through the writings of 14th-century Japanese poet and courtier Kenko is that the world is steadily growing worse. Every moment of life readjusts the coordinates of hopes and despairs, which leads to conflicts. These conflicts lead to further readjustments leading to further conflicts.

Almost five centuries ago French philosopher Montaigne broke out of this vicious circle by seeking early retirement. He had an estimable career as a courtier under Charles IX, as member of the

Bordeaux parliament, and he was close to both Henry III and Henry of Navarre. But at the age of thirty-eight in 1571, he withdrew himself to the round tower on his family estate. In his own words, he was "long weary of the servitude of the court and of public employments."

Perhaps it was giants like Montaigne who often refused to accept their shrinking. They stood taller



CARGO

*The fact is that all of us are shrinking. Children know their parents are shrinking. The dimwits know the intellectuals are shrinking.*

than their fellow men to resist the sky and the earth from squeezing. The dizzying stature of these towering men increased the average height of their countrymen.

Who is there to do it for us? Our lone Nobel Laureate has fallen prey to our own smallness, a Gulliver dwarfed by the midgets of Lilliput. We invite another laureate from another country to our state functions as if neglecting our own tower-

ing figures has its absurd dynamics. We expect to grow by diminishing, hoisted by lowering.

When Awami League leader Abdur Razzaque died last month, many of his admirers were resentful. They were mourning his loss, but they were also mourning the loss of his political height and weight. At once a freedom fighter, an organiser of the liberation war and a trusted hand of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, he was relegated to an unceremonious post, fairly comparable to leave prior to retirement for a career politician. Many of those who loved the man are convinced that he was deliberately shunted from mainstream politics and marginalised to melt away.

It's an irony that we talk about greatness, when we are categorically destroying it. Kenko talked about it in allegorical terms when he said that a man's character, as a rule, could be known from the place where he lived. Then he added that a house polished with every care, where strange and rare Chinese and Japanese furnishings were displayed, and even grasses and trees of the garden had been trained unnaturally, was ugly to look at and most depressing. "A house should look lived in, unassuming," he said.

If we compare every individual in this country to a house, the question is whether that house looks lived in or it's merely well-furnished with luxurious fittings reeking of dead souls. The talk shows, writings, speeches, fashions, parties, workshops, seminars and rallies are conspicuous manifestations of an emptiness that speaks of hubris hiding hollowness.

Everyday newspapers write about crime and corruption. Every day we get foamy at the mouth talking about these things. The fact is that all of us are shrinking. Children know their parents are shrinking. The dimwits know the intellectuals are shrinking. The followers know their leaders are shrinking.

Future generations will seldom know that their ancestor had invited the sky and the earth dangerously too close.

The writer is Editor, First News and an opinion writer for *The Daily Star*.  
E-mail: badrul151@yahoo.com

## The New York Times EXCLUSIVE

# Egypt's real revolution

JON B. ALTERMAN

THE Egyptian revolution did not happen last winter. It is happening now. It is not taking place in Tahrir Square. It is taking place in towns and villages throughout the country.

Although violent protests and even more violent military responses in downtown Cairo have seized international attention in recent weeks, they involve a small fraction of Egyptians. Much more important, tens of millions have voted this month in a rolling election process for the lower house of Parliament that will stretch into January, setting the stage for a negotiation in the spring between the political victors and Egypt's current rulers, the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces, over the rules for governing the country and allotting power.

That negotiation will mark the true Egyptian revolution; we need to focus our attention on it, on its outcome and, perhaps counter-intuitively, try to preserve an untidy result.

Last February, the picture looked very different. Huge crowds of beaming Egyptians celebrated Hosni Mubarak's departure from power, and the world cheered. The youth and energy of Egypt's revolutionaries captivated audiences around the globe and consolidated the view that an "Arab Spring" was upon us. If Hosni Mubarak could fall in only 18 days, could other dictators be far behind? Boosted by American-created applications like Facebook and Twitter, people like us -- moderate, educated and tolerant -- seemed poised to seize power from brutal and graying dictators.

As the spring wore on, it became

increasingly clear that less had changed in Egypt than many had thought. Army officers in suits had ruled Egypt since the 1950s. Generals were still in command, albeit now in uniform. Many Egyptians bristled and tens of thousands came out in sporadic protests to criticise the enduring role of the army and the slow pace of reform.

A core of activists still comes to Tahrir Square and the surrounding streets, but the real game is farther afield. In the elections, the Islamist parties have mobilised tens of thousands of volunteers across the country to assist voters, to get out the vote, and to monitor polling stations.

Sitting in the United States, it is hard to imagine that religious parties could win almost 70% of the Egyptian vote. But I served as an official election observer earlier this month, and it is hard for me to imagine how they could not. Islamists have grasped that the game has moved beyond protests to the mechanics of elections, and their supporters are motivated, organised and energetic. By contrast, the secular liberal parties are virtually absent from the countryside, seeming to concede seats in district after district. Judging from posters to billboards, bumper stickers to banners, the two major Islamist parties have the field to themselves.

Although Egypt's rising political forces are seeking to take power from the military, the military is supporting the political process. At every polling station, the military guards the perimeter and maintains order. In general, and in contrast with past Egyptian elections, it has done so with professionalism and fairness. As a consequence, the balance of power is shifting. The electoral turnout, probably over 60%, gives legitimacy to Egypt's rising politicians. At the same time, the military's own legitimacy is withering as political missteps and the brutal treatment of protestors in downtown Cairo sullies their reputation as the defenders of the citizenry.

All of this, however, is merely a prelude to the real battle for the future of Egypt, which can be expected in the spring. The new parliament will be elected, constitutional revision will be in full swing, and a presidential election will be in the offing. At the same time, Egypt is likely to be running low on its foreign exchange reserves, tempting the government to devalue the pound sharply and spur inflation. In such an environment, the elected politicians and the army will both be working to set the rules by which Egypt will be governed for the next half-century or more. It will be no time for temerity. Each side is likely to take things to the brink, reminding the other of its

strengths and ensuring that it gets the best deal.

Some openly root for a train wreck that averts such a negotiation. Many in Israel and the United States, and even some in Egypt, fear that the elections will produce an Islamist-led government that will tear up the Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty, turn hostile to the United States, openly support Hamas and transform Egypt into a theocracy that oppresses women and Christians, not to mention secular Muslims. They see little prospect for more liberal voices to prevail, even if the liberals hone their political skills in the longer term. In the critics' view, a military dictatorship is a preferable outcome.

American interests, however, call for a different outcome, one that finds a balance -- however uneasy -- between the military authorities and Egypt's new politicians. We do not want any one side to vanquish or silence the other. And with lopsided early election results, it is especially important that the outcome not purge Egypt's educated liberal elite, whose economic connections and know-how will be vital to the goals of attracting investment and creating desperately needed jobs. Their flight from Egypt would be a catastrophe.

None of this will be easy. Our instinct as Americans is to search for the clarity we saw in the televised celebrations when Mubarak stepped down. Revolutions, we seem to feel, should make great television. What Egyptians need, and what we need, is something murkier -- not a victory, but an accommodation.

The writer is Director and Senior Fellow of the Middle East Program at the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington.

© The New York Times. Distributed by the New York Times Syndicate.

## THIS DAY IN HISTORY

January 6

**1929**  
Mother Teresa arrives in Calcutta, India to begin her work among India's poorest and sick people.

**1950**  
The United Kingdom recognizes the People's Republic of China. The Republic of China severs diplomatic relations with the UK in response.

**1967**  
Vietnam War: United States Marine Corps and ARVN troops launch "Operation Deckhouse Five" in the Mekong River delta.

**1993**  
Indian Border Security Force units kill 55 Kashmiri civilians in Sopore, Jammu and Kashmir, in revenge after militants ambushed a BSF patrol.

**2009**  
Gaza War: Israeli Defense Forces retaliated against mortar attacks in the Gaza Strip by firing on or near a school.