

STRAIGHT LINE

Message from Comilla election

Maturity from all sides is welcome

LET'S begin by congratulating Monirul Haque Saku on his resounding success in the mayoral poll to Comilla City Corporation. Significantly, both the process of election and its outcome have vindicated maturity and reliability in the conduct of such polls falling in a heartening pattern.

Speaking of the trend we recall that in by-elections to Brahmanbaria and Hobiganj seats vacated by deceased Awami League MPs, the former was retained by Awami League but the latter, a long time stronghold of the AL, was lost to a BNP winner. Coming to mayoral election in Chittagong similarly popular verdict replaced an AL incumbent by a BNP-backed candidate.

Equally free and fair has been the election to Narayanganj City Corporation set in the backdrop of a stormy situation which returned Selina Hayat Ivy in preference to Shamim Osman, who was openly backed by the AL.

Now, we have had the mayoral election to Comilla City Corporation in a transparent manner with Nagorik Committee-backed candidate Monirul Haque Saku defeating the AL contender by a huge margin.

Both the ruling party supporters and those of Nagorik Committee behaved responsibly and well to let the people exercise their choice freely. The turn-out was record high and the EVM procedure applied at all polling booths with considerable success. The tight security arrangements, a vigilant district administration and efficient synchronisation in the conduct of the polls by the Election Commission ensured success of Comilla mayoral election. Our felicitations to all of them.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's government can take credit for a hands-off approach to polls allowing free and unfettered expression of popular verdict. At the same time, she cannot have missed the message of a declining popularity mirrored by the recent poll verdicts. A similar reflection comes through the latest Daily Star opinion survey on the government's performance at the end of its third year. So the message for the AL is that the party pull up its socks in the remainder two years of its tenure to turn a corner, especially in terms of governance including protecting human rights, curbing corruption and injudicious expenditure and cushioning high prices.

Importance of classroom stressed

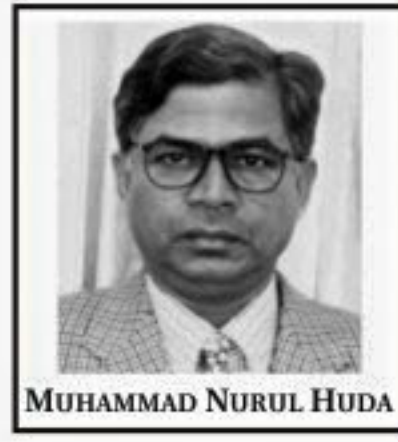
Need for a balanced policy approach

THE government move to put a lid on teachers' involvement in 'coaching business' has got underway with the formation of a committee mandated to prepare a list of such teachers in seven days. The Education Minister Nurul Islam Nahid has taken the initiative aiming to restore effective classroom teaching. We consider it a necessary step on the minister's part to get the teachers to prioritise classroom instructions over that of private tuition. We are for a balanced approach even though we are entirely against commercialisation of teaching which is a noble profession.

What worries us most is the fact that coaching centres have become an integral part of the education system whereas it should have been at best a supplementary feature. In classrooms, education is a matter of learning lessons and ideals but in coaching centres it is commodification of education. What is worse, the teachers themselves goad the students into attending the coaching centres run by them in order to make grades.

This trend, however, is but an effect of certain underlying causes without addressing which the real problems cannot be solved. Growing imbalance between teachers and students ratio is a major obstacle to effective classroom teaching. Compounded with it are teachers' inefficiency and their lower pay scale. Consequently, thousands of coaching centres have mushroomed catering to the students' needs in exchange of hefty sums of money.

We are firmly opposed to business of coaching as distinguished from service of coaching at reasonable fees. We would expect that the ministry will first enunciate a well devised policy to address the aforementioned concerns, which will eventually ensure effective classroom teaching and some coaching on the sides for weaker students. Let the government move result in a judicious out-



MUHAMMAD NURUL HUDA

GENERALLY speaking, in the sub-continent, when public functionaries talk shop they are usually in a self-

congratulatory mood, and if the event is an annual one requiring some stock-taking and well-deserved relaxation, no one really is in a mood to dwell into the downsides. It was, therefore, no wonder that the difference of opinion among senior police officials on police performance, which surfaced during the course of a formal meeting, made headlines in national newspaper.

The Daily Star editorial of January 5 says that "High ranking police officials subjected their force's conduct to a measure of self-examination and introspection at a closed-door discussion on law and order on the occasion of Police Week-2012 on Tuesday" last. It termed the deliberation as "a welcome development from what used to be generally a mode of self-denial" and comments that officials can change "when they look at their performance self-critically" and acknowledges the allegations of misfeasance made against them.

The above editorial also tells us about the lack of progress in effecting substantive police reforms and urges the government to bring "to bear the full weight of its political will on the long pending police reform agenda." In fact there could be no two opinions on the propriety of the thoughts expressed in the said editorial.

Beyond the salutary introspection

While arguing over self-criticism one needs to be careful in choosing expressions and should refrain from speaking in absolute terms. Unfortunately, voicing reactions in superlatives is not uncommon in our parlance. It is not known what critical words provoked the Dhaka Metropolitan Police Commissioner to reportedly and angrily react to his superior's comments. This scribe would like to believe that the Police Commissioner's conduct, though unexpected, may have been an act of healthy indiscretion.

The apparently unlimited powers of the police to arrest and to enter any place without search warrants may reasonably be curtailed. The police should be accountable for its acts of omission and commission and no black sheep should go unpunished.

The Police Commissioner has some reasons to feel exasperated upon hearing the serious complaints against his outfit because whether or not he relishes the nearly unlimited police powers of arbitrary arrests he is visibly encumbered by the lack of tools to adequately grasp the complexities of urban crime and investigation. The fact of the matter is that powers to arrest arbitrarily and enter any premises without a warrant have actually hampered the growth of police skills in scientific detection and investigation of crimes.

The question is: Are we really refus-

ing to seriously address the police reform agenda while exhorting the police to improve their attitude, performance and service? Do we want to prolong the old practice of using the police as a convenient instrument of coercion and fulfilling partisan political agenda, as alleged?

It appears that status quo is the best policy because some would say that reform implementation would be a costly exercise while another view would be that change in police laws

would destabilise the whole system. Reasons for inaction are many, though not very convincing. In all these exercises of advocating reforms and implementing recommendations thereof, the basic point is lost sight of. It is perhaps no more a question of adopting this model or that. Unless the police are allowed to perform their duties in a truly professional manner, without extraneous interference, nothing will change. We need updating of old laws and their implementation in a fair and free manner. If this principle is accepted, half of the problem will be automatically

solved.

Since the prime minister has desired and directed for real professional growth, one would expect that honest, hardworking and committed officers would not be sidelined.

Simultaneously, ill-reputed and pliable officers must not succeed to manage postings of their choice. Ignoring the upright and rewarding the incompetent would amount to putting the last straw on the camel's back.

For a long time we have failed to treat the policemen as a human being. There is a need to accord dignity to this class of public servants and allow them to act without hindrance.

The apparently unlimited powers of the police to arrest and to enter any place without search warrants may reasonably be curtailed. The police should be accountable for its acts of omission and commission and no black sheep should go unpunished. There should be strict controls on its activities but all these need to be institutionalised.

One may have to admit that we, as a nation especially the ruling elite, are largely responsible for the deficits of the police organisation. The police are expected to perform better in a culture of emphasis on obedience of laws than on the disproportionate reliance on enforcement. Agreement among the important segments of the society for attitudinal change is crucial.

The writer is a columnist for The Daily Star.

Outlook for global economy in 2012

A. R. CHOWDHURY

WE expect 2012 to be a year of slowing global growth, with wide divergences between regions and countries. Overall global growth will slow from about 3% in 2011 to 2.5% in 2012. For 2013, a modest recovery in global growth is likely.

The Euro-zone sovereign debt crisis will escalate, provoking a sufficiently strong policy response from the European Central Bank (ECB) and creditor governments to prevent Euro-zone disintegration and a string of disorderly sovereign debt defaults. Even so, sovereign spreads will remain unusually wide even at end-2012. The euro area already probably is falling back into recession, with negative quarter-over-quarter growth in fourth quarter of 2011 likely to carry over into 2012. Real GDP in the euro area will drop by at least 1% in 2012.

The United Kingdom is likely to be near recession, and we also look for a marked slowdown in Eastern Europe in 2012. By contrast, modest but sustained growth will occur in the United States in 2012 and beyond, and still relatively strong but slowing growth will take place in 2012 in emerging Asia, Latin America, Africa and the Middle East. In all, there will be sluggish growth in the advanced economies (around 1% year-over-year in 2012), with emerging market growth of about 5% for 2012.

As a result, the extent to which global growth is China-dependent will increase. The lagged effect of past domestic tightening and slowing export growth are likely to cool China's growth below 9% in 2012. Nevertheless, China will continue to account for a huge share of global growth.

The specific predictions for 2012 could be summarised as follows. **The US will avoid a recession:** The US domestic risks have diminished somewhat and growth momentum has

picked up modestly. After a fairly miserable first half of the year, the economy grew by 2% in the third quarter and is likely to accelerate to more than 3% growth in the final quarter of 2011. There are a number of signs that recent momentum could carry into next year - job openings are on the rise, the unemployment rate is trending down and corporate profits relative to GDP are at their highest level in over six decades.

Recession in the Euro-zone: The Euro-zone sovereign debt and banking crisis will intensify further in 2012, with sovereign yield spreads vs German Bunds remaining high in many Euro-

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zone countries, and many countries in the euro-zone in recession. We do not, however, expect the euro area to break up in 2012 or the following years, nor do we expect the disorderly default of an euro-zone country. The risk that either or both of these disaster scenarios materialise is, however, non-negligible at around 25%.

Asian growth will continue: While Asia will not remain immune to a recession in the Euro-zone, growth in the region will continue to be the strongest in the world for a number of reasons. First, Japan's post-earthquake rebound will help to underpin the region's exports, offsetting some of the weakness in sales to Europe. Second, Chinese economic growth will be around 8% and further bolster Asian growth prospects. Third, easing inflation will give all Asian governments much leeway to stimulate, if necessary.

Growth in emerging markets will continue: The Euro-zone crisis will have an adverse impact on emerging European countries as Western Europe is its most important export destination and also because the region is dominated by subsidiaries of Western European banks -- all of which are tightening credit. Latin America and Africa are relatively more vulnerable to the United States and China so, barring a plunge in commodity prices, the growth in these regions should be reasonable.

Inflation will drop worldwide: With soft world growth and drop in commodity prices, inflation is likely to

decline worldwide in 2012. The decline will be more pronounced in the developed countries due to the excess capacity in the labour and product markets. The drop in food prices in recent months will also keep inflation under control in the emerging markets. **Monetary policy will be accommodative:** Easing inflationary pressures and increasing concerns about the growth outlook will force most central banks to follow an expansionary monetary policy. Some central banks, such as, Reserve Bank of India and Bank of China, that had been following a restrictive policy would soon ease their policy tools.

Of course, there are major risks in the outlook. First, the possibility that the Euro crisis escalates and then is contained and mitigated somewhat by policy responses is subject to considerable risks -- most of them on the down-

side. On the upside, it is possible that the ECB and creditor nations may be willing to commit themselves publicly to provide extraordinarily large assistance early enough to prevent sovereign spreads widening further, although this is rather unlikely.

On the downside, it is possible that there may not be a viable overlap between what the ECB and creditor nations are prepared to offer and what Greece and other periphery countries need to avoid early defaults. The chance of one or more countries leaving the European Monetary Union (EMU) in 2012-13 is about 25%. If this happens it would probably be a Greek exit, but there is also a small chance that Germany balks at the costs of sustaining EMU and walks out, probably together with other core countries.

Second, the experience of 2008-09 highlights that bank deleveraging during economic weakness (which is likely in Europe) can cause a large drop in economic activity. Third, emerging Asia may hit a slowdown in exports to Europe compounded by the drag from previous domestic policy tightening. In particular, restrictions on home purchases in China are producing a sharp slowdown in housing activity. If there is a deeper downturn in emerging Asia, this would probably produce sharper loosening in monetary, credit and fiscal policies.

Fourth, there will be a limited decline in imbalances between current account surplus and deficit countries, both globally and in the euro zone. The continuation of such imbalances creates additional downside risks to the outlook. For example, the necessary recycling of excess savings from current account surplus countries may not occur smoothly, and deficit countries may turn to protectionism or disruptive foreign exchange policies to try and regain the growth lost to imports.

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THIS DAY IN HISTORY

January 7

1610

Galileo Galilei makes his first observation of the four Galilean moons: Ganymede, Callisto, Io and Europa, although he is not able to distinguish the last two until the following day.

1927

The first transatlantic telephone service is established from New York, New York to London, England, United Kingdom.

1952

President Harry S. Truman announces that the United States has developed the hydrogen bomb.

1993

The Fourth Republic of Ghana is inaugurated with Jerry Rawlings as President.

1999

The Senate trial in the impeachment of U.S. President Bill Clinton begins.