

Revitalising the Election Commission

PRANAB KUMAR PANDAY

THE headline in the online version of the *Ananda Bazar Patrika* on February 11 caught my attention. The news was about a letter of the Election Commission (EC) of India that was sent to the president against the Indian law minister who was alleged to have breached the code of conduct of the EC in the Uttar Pradesh Bidhan Shava election. Describing the law minister as "disobedient," the EC requested the president to take necessary action against him.

This is really a praiseworthy initiative of the Indian EC that indicates the level of its independence. There is no denying that the Indian EC is independent and functions without the control of the executive. That is why, despite the presence of the sitting government, election is held in free, fair and credible manner. In fact, real democracy demands existence of such practice.

However, in the context of Bangladesh, we do not usually find the EC conducting its responsibilities in this way. Of course, the outgoing EC was successful on many occasions. First, it held a good number of elections, including the 9th Parliamentary election, which has been appreciated by all concerned. It was even critical about some ministers and MPs of the government during different elections. Despite some praiseworthy initiatives for institutionalisation of democracy, our politics is centered on debates of one group supporting something and the other opposing it.

Bangladesh got its independence 40 years ago. 40 years is quite enough for institutionalising democratic institutions. However, it is our great regret that we have failed to do so. This is mainly because of existence of undemocratic government for a long time and lack of tolerance and consensus building among political parties. None of the political parties wants to sacrifice for the sake of democracy and the country.

It is natural that political parties will vie for power. But, that does not mean that they will strive for power at the cost of violence, loss of lives, *harts*, and sufferings of the general public. After the restoration of democracy for the second time in 1991, none of the political parties took any praiseworthy initiatives for the welfare of the country. Of course, the introduction of caretaker government (CTG) was a notable achievement in the political history of the country since all the authoritarian governments prior to 1990s exercised state power for manipulating election results. But, introduction of CTG offered us relief since free, fair and credible election was made possible in the country. However, the system did not last long due to irresponsible behaviour of both the major political parties.

A pertinent question is: Did politicians learn something from their mistakes? The common man

reason for AL's decision to abolish the CTG system since the political culture of Bangladesh does not support such assumption.

On the other hand, about the BNP's negative politics, it could be said that they are really crazy about regaining power. One possible cause is that they are afraid that if the AL retains power the existence of BNP as a political party would come under a question mark. Another reason is that they are trying to create a chaotic situation so that another 1/11 takes place in the country, which will at least prevent the AL from coming to power again.

In the above circumstances, one may wonder where the problem in strengthening the EC lies. If political parties really want to establish a strong EC capable of conducting free, fair and credible election, they can do it easily if they have a positive mentality. If we could establish a strong EC, we would not need a CTG in future.

The president deserves appreciation for his initiative to assist the formation of the new EC. Of course, the dialogue was not fruitful since some political parties, including the main opposition, remained engaged within the discussion of restoration of CTG system. Even then, the process has started at least. The people selected to form the EC do not seem to be controversial since we did not find any reports in the media alleging their alignment with any political party. We should at least offer them some space to prove their efficiency and impartiality through some elections. Of course, the BNP has declined to accept the EC, but they are doing it only for the sake of criticism.

If I refer back to the main subject matter of the discussion, which is the independence of the Indian EC, we can learn a lot from their practices. Finally I would urge the members of the EC to accept the positives of the Indian EC and prove their own efficiency. Only then, will we be able to consolidate democratic practices in the country.

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thinks that the answer is "no." The attitude of the leaders of different political parties suggests that they want to commit the same mistakes again in the near future. Otherwise, the AL would not have abolished the system of CTG from the Constitution and the BNP would not have tried to create unrest in the country.

Now another question is, why are both the political parties are behaving this way? From the perspective of the ruling AL, it can be said that either they are trying to manipulate the election result or they are really serious about strengthening the EC. However, it is very difficult to believe the latter

SHIFTING IMAGES

The curse of genius!



MILIA ALI

THE sudden passing of Whitney Houston, the phenomenal singer and performer, has spurred a whole range of reactions from the world. Of course, the overriding sentiment has been utter shock and grief at the premature loss of one of the greatest voices of this century: a voice that sold 170 million albums, singles and videos worldwide.

There has also been much speculation about the cause of death, which is still unknown. What is known is that her body was discovered in a bathtub in her suite at the Beverly Hills Hilton Hotel, from where the police also retrieved various prescription drugs.

The news of Houston's untimely death, at age 48, although tragic, was not entirely unexpected. Her rocky marriage to R&B singer Bobby Brown ending in divorce and her long drawn struggle with drug and alcohol addiction have been public knowledge for quite some time.

At a personal level, Whitney Houston's demise sparked an internal dialogue in my mind about the likely link between creativity and anxiety and depression. We all know that many highly creative individuals both past and present have had to struggle with some form of neurosis. Numerous successful artists, writers and even scientists have articulated their mood fluctuations in explicit terms, thus giving us compelling reasons to believe that there may be a connection between bipolar illness and creative temperament. On the other hand, many of these creative people have successfully turned their negativity into positive achievements. Could this mean that mental disorders act as triggers for creativity or is it the other way around?

While there is no conclusive answer to the question, the fact remains that many people with mental health challenges accomplish creative excellence. Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart is said to have suffered from a personality disorder and experienced episodes of hypomania when he typically got up at 6am and often worked until 2am the next morning. Ludwig Van Beethoven was bipolar and his manic phases are said to have inspired his creativity. According to some sources, Abraham Lincoln suffered from depression but had the amazing will power to lead his nation through a historic civil war aimed at freeing slaves from bondage. Painter Van Gogh's manic stages were accompanied by tremendous productivity. John Nash, the Nobel Laureate in Mathematics,

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was schizophrenic but is recognised as one of the greatest mathematical brains of this century.

Famous writers like Ernest Hemingway, Sylvia Plath, Virginia Wolf, Leo Tolstoy, Charles Dickens also battled with some form of mental illness. Yet they produced literary works which have given us intellectual inspiration as well as a profound understanding of life and human relationships. Add to the list icons like Elvis Presley, Marilyn Monroe and Michael Jackson, who resorted to prescription and/or non-prescription drugs to fight their mental demons. And, this may only be the tip of the iceberg!

Since I am not knowledgeable enough to present an informed analysis on the topic, let me lean on Freud. He claimed that the creative process is a defense mechanism for protection against neurosis. According to him, artists are capable of turning their fantasies into artistic creations instead of neurotic symptoms. Hence, art may provide a release from psychic pressures. If this is true, we may ask, why is it that the life stories of so many talented artists are replete with suicides, drug-related accidents and reckless behaviour? Is it because they have trouble balancing the worlds of fantasy and reality and are unable to make the switch from a manic state of creativity to a depressive state of unproductiveness? Or, are they lost in the nowhere land between the two worlds?

The debate on the correlation between creativity and mental disorder is still inconclusive since it is practically impossible to draw inferences on the intricacies and complexities of the human mind and its responses to various triggers and stimuli. But there is one factor that seems to bear heavily on the lives of geniuses...it is their sudden brush with fame and wealth and the inability to cope with the "big life" in the daily glare of the media. And, once the fame begins to wane celebrities develop an acute sense of insecurity. Unable to cope with the fear of failure they are often driven to drug dependency and substance abuse. This brings us back to the basic question: are artists pre-disposed to self-destructive behaviour because of their mental make-up or are they victims of the roller coaster effects of public adulation and rejection? It is perhaps the interplay of both leading to a cyclic pattern of cause and effect.

And, let us also not forget that the borders between sanity and psychosis are blurred. For, "Who in the rainbow can draw the line where the violet tint ends and the orange tint begins?"

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Shipbuilding: A beacon of hope

MD. ALAMGIR

BANGLADESH'S July-October trade deficit balloons to over \$3 billion" reported Xinhua news agency on December 14, 2011. The overall trade deficit in the same period of the 2010-2011 fiscal year was nearly \$1.825 billion. Growth of remittance from hard working Bangladeshis living abroad seems to be only hope to minimise the gap between import and export. In such a situation the nation must search for some new potential area of business for earning foreign currency.

Shipbuilding industry has brought in new opportunities to earn foreign currency. In recent years a good number of contracts for building ships for foreign buyers have already placed our name in the list of international shipbuilders. Our shipyards only construct the hull (body) of the ships, while almost all the machineries and equipment required on a ship are bought from abroad. As a result, a major part of the income goes back to foreign countries.

To what extent we are able to utilise the opportunity of shipbuilding as a foreign exchange earning source depends on our ability to manufacture the machineries, equipments and other accessories used on a ship. Although it is not possible to set up heavy industries overnight to make marine diesel engines, pumps, compressors, etc., there are many items like steel plates, pipes, valves, furniture, electrical cables, switchboards, transformers, motors, etc. that can be made right now in our country.

When the cost of building a medium sized ship is about \$20 million, apart from the cost of labour and the shipyard's profit, all money goes abroad for buying steel plates, machineries and equipments. The only government steel mill in Chittagong had been closed some years ago. Otherwise, it would have been a source of earning foreign currency now. Presently, there are about 20 to 30 ships in the order book, which require an average of 2,000 ton of steel plates each. Steel is being brought from abroad at a price of about \$1000 per ton. That is, steel plates worth \$2 million are being imported for each ship.

ation. We can see a ray of hope that shipbuilding may one day brighten the nation with the status of industrialised country. It may seem that the dream is too big and too far-fetched. However, we can take heart from South Korea, which was a very poor nation just a few decades ago, but is one of the rich nations in Asia today. Therefore, we as a nation should consider that the dream is achievable.

Although shipbuilding industry is mainly export-oriented, the domestic market is no less important. 12 tanker vessels of 2,000 ton dead weight each are now being built. They have been designed by naval architects of Bangladesh under supervision of Germanischer Lloyd.

One shipyard delivered 8 new ships to European companies in just 1 year. Dead weight of each ship is 5,200 ton, that is, each vessel has a cargo carrying

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capacity of 5,200 ton. This has been made possible by the hard working labours and engineers of Bangladeshi soil.

Imported materials and accessories such as steel piping, sanitary equipment, furniture, doors, windows, engines, electrical generators, switchboards, transformers, upholstery and many more things can be easily made in manufacturing facilities available in this country. However, to guarantee the quality of product an "approval of manufacturing" from an International Ship's Classification Society is required. Approval of welding shop and design approval of some equipment can be done by consultation with local representatives of International Classification Societies.

If someone wants to fabricate a particular steel

equipment, for example doors and windows, he has to invite a classification society to assess the competence of the workshop in terms of facilities such as availability of required equipments and workmanship of the welders, workers and engineers. If the conditions are fulfilled as per the requirement of the classification society, the factory can produce approved items, and the shipyard will buy the goods from this approved manufacturer and save the money needed for shipping the same equipment from abroad.

We expect interested entrepreneurs to find out what equipments, materials and accessories they can produce in their existing facilities, and accordingly they should approach the classification societies for getting approval for manufacturing. It is sure that many entrepreneurs will find they can produce the items in their factories and workshops.

For example, the pipes for ventilation of fuel and water tanks are designed such that they allow only air to pass in and out. They do not permit water from the sea to enter. These pipes can easily be designed and made in the manufacturing facilities available in Dhaka and Chittagong. As electrical switchboards, transformers, batteries, cables are already being produced in our country, proactive marketing with the class approved products may help the industry to fetch some foreign currency.

There are 4 Ship's Classification Societies: Germanischer Lloyd, Bureau Veritas, American Bureau of Shipping and RINA now operating in Bangladesh. We wish that accessories of ships and steel plates will also be made in this country with necessary approval from these Classification Societies.

At the end I would like to say that we must salute the shipbuilding industries that made such tremendous progress--from small boat to medium size ships--without virtually any government support. The talented marine professionals in Bangladesh must wake up the nation, telling its people: "If heavy industry is possible, any state of art technology is possible with the ability of Bangladeshi professionals."

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