

A massive public indictment

A rejection well deserved

THE voters in four important city corporations have given a resounding verdict in favour of opposition BNP-backed candidates. The mayoral AL incumbents in Rajshahi, Barisal, Khulna and Sylhet have been defeated hands down. The margin of wins has been between 17,000 and 60,000 votes. This is as much a rejection of the poorly performing outgoing mayors as it is a massive indictment against the ruling party.

The sweeping victories cannot be entirely explained away in local or any self-righteous terms. How the AL-led Mohajote government ran during the last four and a half years has had its tainted reflection on the clear-cut verdict returned by the city electorates. Its corruption, abuse of power, misgovernance and arrogant partisanship have been experienced on a scale that an anti-incumbency sentiment poured out at the first opportunity. It is a justified and timely warning to the AL-led government. One only hopes that it will have a sobering effect on the ruling party by way of reassessing their alienation from the people through the mistakes they have committed which obscured some of its achievements. Mind you, this is a ringing wake-up call at the

fag end of the government's tenure. In the end, we share a sense of relief and satisfaction with the entire nation at the way the four city corporation elections were held upholding a democratic process. The Election Commission has come out successful from its first test of fire and let's hope the trend will be sustained.

Repatriation after stability?

Means little in immediate term

MYANMAR would start repatriation of Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh but only after the situation in that country became stable. The conditional assurance came at the latest round of foreign office consultations held in Myanmar, between June 14 and 15.

There are presently 25,045 registered Rohingya refugees residing in two camps at Kutupalong and Noyapara waiting to be repatriated to Myanmar. Of them, around 9,000 were cleared by the Myanmar government in 2005. Although Bangladesh had never been for forced repatriation of refugees, we fail to see the reason of the foot dragging by the government of Myanmar even after lapse of eight years after according clearance. And the issue of 'stability' is a new caveat after the assurance given to the Bangladesh PM during her visit to Myanmar in December 2011 to take back the Rohingyas.

For Bangladesh, the latest statement means little since the repatriation is predicated on the situation being stable in Myanmar. We feel that keeping stability in Myanmar is the sole responsibility of the government of Myanmar. And no international commitment should be made conditional to a situation whose description is highly subjective.

For a long time the issue of Rohingya repatriation to their country has been stalled on some excuse or the other by Myanmar, and the latest condition is apparently yet another ploy to dither on the issue. Not only should Myanmar start the process of repatriation immediately, it must also address the underlying causes for the problem, starting with the restoration of Rohingya citizenship.



FARIZA RAHMAN

MUSIC itself is a language. A language which explains human emotions and ups and downs of life. Music works as stress reliever, mood changer and also as weapon to change society. And the musicians work heart and soul to produce some good music. But the way piracy has taken over the audio market very few musicians get what they actually deserve. Just after releasing an album the songs become available online.

People prefer downloading the songs rather than buying the original CDs. Our industry is being hard hit by this sort of uploading and downloading. Because when musicians do not get proper remuneration or simply the original CDs are not sold they face an economic blow which undoubtedly discourages them to work further. This is badly hampering the expansion of our local music.

Keeping pace with the technologically advanced world we all have laptop, ipad, iphone, music players or just cell phones through which we can easily transfer songs. Even after having these we can check out the CD store sometimes and it is also a fun thing to buy albums of favorite musicians.

It is like supporting them. Most of the artists these days have to be involved with other works apart from music. It inhibits their pace of work. Our music scenario is an emerging one with a blend of young talented musicians experimenting, trying out different genres and also classical, traditional, folk, fusion and what not!

We should support this wonderful atmosphere instead of ruining it through piracy. So, say "NO" to piracy and buy the original CDs to support and salute the creations of our artists.

The writer is a Class XI student, Viqarunnisa Noon College.

REZAUL KARIM TALUKDER

THE new budget is 17.5% higher than the revised budget of the outgoing year and the size of the proposed ADP is also 25% higher than the preceding year's revised ADP. The incremental component of the budget has been allocated to different sectors, presumably according to priority in which agriculture does not seem to have found a place.

The finance minister has a lot of sweet words for agriculture in his budget speech, but in the allocation to the sector he has earmarked Tk.13.3 thousand crore in the proposed budget, compared to Tk. 15.8 thousand crore in the revised budget of the outgoing year. This represents a decline of 15.5%, compared to the enhancement of the national budget by 17.5%.

This means that agriculture has a negative share in the incremental component of the proposed national budget.

Agriculture has historically been contributing enormously to the national economic growth. The sector still contributes 18% to the national GDP. Over the recent past years, agriculture sector grew at a rate of 3.97%, 5.22% and 5.24% in the FYs 2008-09, 2009-10 and 2010-11 respectively and thereby made valuable contribution to the national GDP growth.

But for how long can a poor duck lay golden eggs without being properly fed and nourished? As has been evident from the GDP figures published recently by the Bureau of Statistics, there has been a major deceleration in agricultural GDP growth, registering only 2.99% in the FY 2011-12.

The provisional estimate for 2012-13 is even lower. Much of the lower growth is attributable to slower growth of the crop sector.

Although we have achieved remarkable progress in rice production over the recent past years, the medium-term outlook suggests that food grain production may reach a state of plateau. While total foodgrain production increased by 4.0% between 2009-10 and 2010-11, the increase was only 1.0% between 2010-11 and 2011-12. The most stimulating rice varieties BRRI Dhan 28 and 29 were released during early 90s and contributed enormously to rice production in the country over the last two decades.

Although quite a good number of new rice varieties have been developed (some with special traits) by the Bangladesh Rice Research Institute (BRRI) and Bangladesh Institute of Nuclear Agriculture (BINA) over the past years, none have so far demonstrated to be promising enough to replace BRRI Dhan 28 and 29.

With gradual degeneration of these two rice varieties and no equal or better yield augmenting new varieties being in place, the future of rice production may not be that promising. The irony is that a large number of agricultural scientists including good breeders left the coun-

KAMAL GABALLA

CONCERNS and fears are high in Egypt ahead of June 30 where masses are expected to march to the presidential palace, demanding the withdrawal of confidence from President Mohamed Mursi, as well as early presidential elections. These fears are particularly high among Islamist movements and pro-regime militias as well as revolutionary groups and major opposition forces who have announced their support for the "Tamarod" (Rebel) campaign which has collected millions of anti-Mursi petitions to date.

This atmosphere of fear, anxiety and anticipation is a result of many questions: Will the expected mass demonstrations be entirely peaceful like they were during the 2011 uprising? Or will they be another useless wave of protests that only delays everyday life for a few days not more? Or will the country drown in seas of blood as a result of street brawls between supporters and opponents of the regime?

Other legitimate questions are also now surfacing without answers: How did a large sector of Egyptians grow to hate the Muslim Brotherhood in such a short period of time? Why hate the Brotherhood only and not the Salafi (ultraconservative) movements whom they also ideologically disagree with? Why not hate the "Strong Egypt" Party that is led by an ex-member of the Muslim Brotherhood? Why not hate many other Islamist movements?

Another important question is: Will Mursi's administration fall on June 30 or will the Muslim Brotherhood make compromises to calm civil opposition forces (such as sacking Prime Minister Hisham Kandil's government, freezing the activity of the Shura Council (upper house of parliament), changing the general prosecutor, amending the election law to make it more transparent and representatives of the voters, etc.)?

Meanwhile, very frightening rumours are circulating, including that unprecedented violence will erupt in light of the absence of police and army forces—leading to a bloody scenario similar to that of Lebanon or Algeria—or that Churches and Mosques have been collecting arms to engage in a full-on fight for and against the regime—God forbids.

Egypt's modern history witnessed several successful movements to overthrow oppressive regimes. The first example is the 1919 revolution where a campaign to collect authorisations granted Saad Zaghloul popular legitimacy to assume executive power and negotiate with the British occupation, leading eventually to the ratification of the 1923 constitution.

The second example was another petition campaign that granted Mohamed ElBaradei some popular legitimacy to consider nominating himself as president against toppled President Hosni Mubarak—which gave people hope for change that sparked the January 25 revolution.

What's interesting about Tamarod is that the number of petitions (for a no-confidence vote against Mursi) that it has so far collected highly exceeds any number of petitions collected against Mubarak—which can only mean that popular rejection for the Brotherhood regime is a lot more powerful than the people's rejection for Hosni Mubarak's administration.

Former presidential candidate and leading member of the National Salvation Front (Egypt's main opposition alliance) Hamden Sabahi has stressed on the importance of the June 30 demonstrations for completing the goals of

Is agriculture a cinderella sector?

try, having been deprived of their professional incentives. Although the issue has been discussed at various levels for long, little visible remedial measures seem to have been taken to improve the situation.

The future of agricultural development, including development livestock and fishery sectors, seems to be very much contingent upon development and diffusion of new promising technologies, particularly the seeds of crops and breeds of livestock and fish species. To achieve positive results in this direction, extraordinary incentives will have to be given to selected extraordinarily promising agricultural scientists, to be identified through national search committee(s).

A number of measures announced in the budget would surely lend support to agriculture. Distribution of agricultural credit has successively been increased to

reach the highest ever allocation of Tk.14,595 crore in the proposed budget for 2013-14. Allocation of Tk.43 crore for supporting Aus rice production through free distribution of inputs to small and marginal farmers is a welcome move.

Continuation of exemption of income tax for poultry farmers and duty free import of poultry and fish feed ingredients will surely encourage fish and livestock production.

A drastic reduction of customs duty on import of milk tanker will improve milk marketing facilities and thereby benefit the stakeholders of the dairy sector.

The flexible food grain procurement and distribution policies pursued by the government are believed to have contributed to some extent to stabilisation of food grain prices and thereby protection of producer and consumer interests. The highest ever distribution of grains, of 1.2 million tons, through Open Market Sales (OMS) channel in 2010-11 in the face of price spiraling, is believed to have contained the price hike of coarse rice during the period. The flexible procurement policies of procuring less during the high price regime of 2010-11 and procuring as much as 1.43 million tons during the price plunge in 2011-12 could be seen as another dimension of price stabilization effort to protect farmers' interest.

If we want to see a sustainable growth of agriculture, we must invest in the sector accordingly. Private investment has demonstrated to be shy across all sectors of the economy. We see a sliver of public investment proposal for agriculture (2.8%) in the total development budget for FY 2013-14. As has been mentioned, contribution of agriculture to national GDP is still 18%. Would it be unjust to expect a bit bigger slice for agriculture in the even bigger budget proposed for the country?

The writer is Dhaka-based National Advisor, Food Policy, Capacity Strengthening Programme, Fao. Email: rk_talukder@yahoo.com

End of a religious state?

the revolution which was abandoned by the Brotherhood regime. He expressed his confidence that millions of Egyptians will participate in the protests to take back their revolution from those who have hijacked it and reproduced the old regime.

A large portion of Egyptians hold the Brotherhood responsible for failing to manage the country after the ouster of Hosni Mubarak and consider it the obstacle that has delayed Egypt's transition to democracy and failed to deliver the revolutionary demands: bread, freedom and social justice.

Of course these failures include their constant breaking of their promises, the economic crises that all Egyptians pay for, the tension they have created with Ethiopia as well as the lawlessness in Sinai. However, perhaps all these examples do not even compare to how the Muslim Brotherhood regime has divided Egyptians into two fighting camps while they continued to rule despite all the damage they have caused.

Political and legal expert Noor Farahat said, "The legitimacy that President Mohamed Mursi's supporters refer to in arguing that he must continue to rule is not granted by imposing power through deception, but through meeting the demands of the people and ensuring them that he truly represents them."

He added that while the road to legitimacy is elections, votes do not give the ruler the ultimate authorisation to disregard the people's will, which, he argues, has already happened through:

- Ratifying a disfigured constitution -- voted on by only 20% of eligible voters -- which divided the people into two camps;
- Squandering the lives of police and army forces on Egypt's borders;
- Leaving Sinai under the mercy of terrorists and outlaws;
- Adopting economic projects that harm national interest like the Sukuk (bonds) draft law.
- The Brotherhoodisation of state institutions;
- Sabotaging culture veins; and
- Undermining the constitutional legitimacy by attacking the judiciary and imposing a prosecutor general despite a court order to remove him.

Egypt's economic status, according to many experts, has almost hit the point of no return, where it's expected that soon an entire economic collapse will occur due to the debts and budget deficit.

A former leading member of the Brotherhood, Tharwat al-Kharbawy, said, "The Muslim Brotherhood regime in Egypt will fall three days into the protests which are scheduled to begin on June 30. The regime will not be able to resist and removing it will not take the revolutionaries so much time."

Kharbawy added to the Watan newspaper that the Brotherhood is a very weak institution unlike what its campaigners propagate, and will not be able to resist because their being is more important to them than ruling the country. He predicts them to step back and withdraw all their forces when or if they are faced by mass protests and return to their hiding places -- like they did under the Mubarak regime.

The writer is Managing Editor, An-Naham Newspaper. E-mail: kgaballa@ahram.org.eg

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

letters@thedailystar.net

An outstanding achievement!

Eight highly challenging goals were set by the UN for the developing nations to achieve by 2015. Among them the number one goal was to halve the number of people suffering from extreme hunger. Bangladesh has already achieved this goal by reducing the percentage of population living below poverty line from 58.8% in 1990 to 29% in 2013. This is an outstanding achievement. When Bangladesh is faced with numerous political and economic problems, this success will inspire us to work for further development of the country.

Avik Chowdhury
Bangladesh Agricultural University

Attention, food minister

A news published in The Daily Star on 12th June left me shell-shocked. It says that a study conducted in 26 areas' shops of Dhaka city revealed that around 94 percent of the mangoes and 100 percent blackberries and litchis are formalin-tainted! So, all the seasonal fruits the city dwellers are buying with their hard-earned money for their children are poisonous. These killer fruit traders are slow poisoning the whole nation to death for their own benefit. Government's efforts to curb this practice have been in vain. So, how to save our children from these killers? The only way to stop this, I think, is to award them exemplary punishment and have that news spread throughout the country so that the crooked traders restrain from poisoning fruits. Honourable food minister, will you give this idea a thought please?

Khandaker Zia Hasan
Special Correspondent
Weekly Jogajog, Canada

Owners pushed

As celebrities including Tom Cruise and Hugh Jackman celebrated Wal-Mart at its annual meeting last week, workers and activists converged to demand sweeping changes at the company's U.S. stores and global factories. Around 100 striking workers with the group OUR Wal-Mart arrived in a caravan from across the country to protest what they allege to be retaliation against those seeking to change company practices on wages, safety and unions.

Wal-Mart is one of only a few major retailers that have refused to sign on to the new safety standards after the Dhaka tragedy. Tazreen Fashions fire killed 112 workers and left hundreds injured. And in Rana Plaza, it killed 1,127 and left more than 600 or 700 injured for lifetime. And in that shareholder meeting, they haven't even given any condolence for those families. They haven't felt sad. No word for those.

Ted Rudow III, MA
Encina Ave
Palo Alto, CA

People must resist

We are horrified by the news that in spite of knowing about all the hazards that a nuclear power plant may pose, the government is going ahead with its plan to set up a 1000 MW nuclear power plant in Rooppur. Bangladesh should not go for nuclear power because: it is in high risk of earthquakes; it is not as technically developed as Japan; in case of radiation people will not be able to move to a safer place; our maintenance capability is very poor, etc.

The article by Quamrul Haider, "How safe are the Russian civilian nuclear reactors?" published in The Daily Star on June 12, 2013, covered all the negative aspects. In the last paragraph he wrote: "There can be no greater or more frightening burden for the people to bear than a sword of Damocles hanging over their head. Not only must they live in continual fear that nuclear reactors may get out of control in their lifetime, but also with the shadow of radiation poisoning looming over their long-term future."

Nur Jahan
Chittagong

Comments on news report "Anti-terror law draws flak," published on June 15, 2013

Monju Huq

In case of abuse, which can happen in the case of any law, there are provisions of remedy through the judiciary. The very presence of the law in question will act as a deterrent against crimes which are quite common nowadays due to the absence of proper laws. However, for check and balance, clearance from the judiciary must be obtained prior to applying the recently enacted anti-terror law.

Iftekhar Hassan

Strong anti-terror law is an absolute must in Bangladesh. I would congratulate the Awami League government for taking such bold step as long as they don't use this law against their political opponents, as personal grudge and jealousy are very common in Bangladesh.

Corrigendum

In the letter, titled "UN recognises Dr. Yunus," published on Saturday, it should read 'Forbes' in place of 'UN' in the heading. We regret the error.