

The AL's time for introspection

Poll results convey a serious message

AFTER the June 15 city corporation poll results, the prime minister is putting on a brave face. However, she should not be deluded into thinking that it is a passing show.

Of course, the government can take credit for ensuring conditions of a free and fair city corporation polls that saw a high voter turnout. There was no administrative interference in the working of the EC. But then this is not to be expected of a democratically elected government.

That said, she cannot make a short shrift of the comprehensive defeat s in not only the mayoral contests, but also in those of councillors.

Ruling party should go for soul-searching as to why its candidates failed despite the fact that during their mayoral tenure they had carried out impressive development work in their constituencies and they were also personally popular. In other words, it is the party's image that seems to have brought them down.

As for the prime minister's contention in parliament on Sunday that the just concluded city polls have 'proved there is no need for any unconstitutional regime to hold free and fair elections,' it is an irony that she was not being seized of the expectations on the ground. She should be able to face facts that by voting against her party candidates the electorate in a way has only expressed its no confidence in a government on however limited scale it may be.

The AL can ill-afford to ignore facts with only a few months left for the next general election.

Postponement of JRC meeting

We are disappointed

POSTPONEMENT of the JRC meeting between Bangladesh and India at the last minute is a blow to the prospect of immediate resolution of Teesta water sharing issue. Bangladesh was hoping to finalise the deal in this meeting, which had been on hold since the Indian prime minister's visit to Dhaka in September 2011. Assurance from the Indian side to hold the meeting at a time convenient for both sides has left the prospect of the meeting, and consequently resolution of the issue, rather open ended.

The ostensible reason for the deferment of the talks is the Indian water resource minister's inability to attend, due, reportedly, to some 'internal issues'. It comes as a little solace to us, given that it has been more than three years since the last JRC meeting between the two countries were held. And the meeting was supposed to address a few other important issues, which include the controversial Tipaimukh dam project.

The impression we get from the eleventh-hour cancellation of the meeting is that India is not according due importance to the issue, and perhaps there may be a policy to soft-pedal on the matter. We wonder whether the 'inability' on the minister's part to attend has been caused by any other compulsion on India since no country would allow unexplained internal reasons to impinge on bilateral interests.

The postponement is frustrating and disappointing for us given the fact that for Bangladesh Teesta water sharing is a burning issue whose resolution cannot brook further delay.

Jinxed Rana Plaza!

S.A MANSOOR

THE whole background of Rana Plaza, seems murky, as given in a front page report published in an English daily on June 10. It is clear that Rana Plaza's owners are fully responsible for second degree murder, and possibly Savar municipality officials who permitted the building to be built, without proper verification. Hence to that extent, they are also a party to the crime; whether we like it or not! Incidentally, in the same daily, the next column on the front page; mentioned about another garment owner who is roaming free, although their garment factory fire on November 24, 2012, killed 112 poor garment workers! This is a very 'dirty puddle' for the party in power, to wipe clean.

The structural designs of Rana Plaza, was done by a fictitious and non existent designer; giving an absurd and imaginary membership number of the Institute of Engineers; that the approving municipality found now, while verifying to their dismay! This important check and verification should have been done prior to giving approval for construction! Did 'Speed Money' help to short circuit this basic need for verification step by the approving municipality officials? If so, then they too are accessory to 'second degree' murder of the victims killed in the horrifying Rana Plaza disaster!

Further strangely, two different configuration of structures were applied for approval to the same Savar municipal authorities; for the same building; initially in 2005 for a six storied building and in 2008 for additional four floors, making the building ten stories! Strangely no in-depth scrutiny or detailed study was undertaken by the approving municipal authorities!

To prevent this once for all I propose that approval of all more than three storied building; be it residential, commercial or industrial; a set of detailed drawings and material specifications for the structure; must be physically signed in the presence of the concerned approving authority. Full particulars of the owner and the designer with their photographs, including the applicant and the owners identity cards or passports; as well as official T&T and mobile numbers will be verified by calling the phone numbers; by the approving official and duly stated in all the drawings and documents enclosed for the building's approval!

The writer is an Engineer.

Read the writing on the wall



Ruling AL, along with its alliance partners, must see into its failures in the recent and past local government polls. Clearly, it was the anti-incumbency factor. And it is not rocket science to understand why anti-incumbency factored into the voters' mind.

WHAT should we make of the results of the just completed elections under the four city corporations? Can we look at the result as the outcome of the anti-incumbency factor, since all the winners are opposition BNP supported mayoral candidates?

Given the history of the major city corporation elections in the last three years, the AL should not have been surprised, far less shocked, at the latest results of the recent city corporation polls.

Only one year and a half after the general election of December 2008, the ruling AL tasted their first defeat in June 2010's Chittagong city corporation polls when opposition BNP-supported mayoral hopeful M Manzur Alam trounced the port city's seemingly invincible mayor ABM Mohiuddin Chowdhury by a large margin of votes. Perhaps, the AL then solaced itself with the thought that the polls result was more a fallout of the crack in AL's camp in Chittagong than any success of the opposition BNP. That is because, earlier, Manzur had parted company with his former ally Mohiuddin. And still intoxicated with the last general election's historic victory, AL might have dismissed the outcome of Chittagong mayoral polls as an inconsequential event of local nature with little impact on national politics.



STAR

It remained nonchalant even after the October 2011's victory of Dr. Salina Hayat Ivy, who defeated AL-backed candidate Shamim Osman in the Narayanganj City Corporation polls. Again, the ruling AL might have deluded itself into thinking that though a rebel, Ivy was, after all, a bona fide Awami Leaguer by birth. But it failed to accept the fact that the voters had actually voiced their 'no confidence' in the ruling party by rejecting its chosen mayoral candidate.

The ruling AL seemed still unperturbed after the victory of BNP-backed Monirul Haque Sakku by defeating Afzal Khan in the Comilla City Corporation elections as late as January 2012.

Now the upsetting results with the 10th Jatiya Sangsad elections only five to six months away. Has Awami League taken this result with the same old insouciance?

Or that it has finally been able to come to terms with the reality!

Hopefully, this last electoral event will have left the AL leaders rethinking their long pursued political strategy and effect changes in it to accommodate the ground realities.

Even though these polls are essentially party-less, of local nature and do not change a government, yet the way the major political parties field their candidates to contest these elections belie their non-political nature. And the latest city corporation polls unmistakably show that national politics, rather than local issues, dictated the voters' choice of the candidates.

The government must not have failed to note that all the four sitting pro-AL mayors of Barisal, Khulna, Rajshahi and Sylhet have been defeated by the self-same pro-BNP candidates (except in Sylhet where BNP changed the previous candidate by a new one), who had lost to these same pro-AL mayoral rivals in 2008's city corporation polls. It looks like a poetic justice. But has AL taken any lesson from this result?

They should know what message this result will convey to the voters across the country. They should now take stock of the damage already done.

Had its candidates been able to retain at least two of the mayoral seats, the AL could save its face. However much the AL leaders may now try to put on a brave face, it cannot hide their frustrations. And it will not be the same AL now as it used to be before the devastating results in the four city corporation elections.

On the other hand, despite its recent debacles in

its movement strategies against the government, the opposition BNP along with its alliance partners will begin to feel more assured and confident about themselves.

The windfall success will act as a huge morale booster for the BNP leaders and activists. They will now become more ambitious and find a stronger ground for launching a tougher movement with its demand for a non-partisan, neutral caretaker government.

How will the ruling party face this emboldened opposition? By repeating the same old cliché that since the city corporation polls have been conducted in a free and fair manner, the national election conducted by it would also be equally free, fair and credible?

Ruling AL, along with its alliance partners, must see into its failures in the recent and past local government polls. Clearly, it was the anti-incumbency factor. And it is not rocket science to understand why anti-incumbency factored into the voters' mind. It cannot anymore afford to be lost in its unlimited hubris, but begin to read the writing on the wall.

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Woman and Hefazat-e-Islam

REBECCA HAQUE

WHEN I left the country on May 18, 2013, for a two-week vacation with my daughter, two catastrophic events had occurred and passed, leaving the nation to recover from the trauma of the Rana Plaza disaster and the horror of the night of the Hefazatis.

Cocooned in the restorative cool clean air of Melbourne, soothed by the abundant green foliage in and around the city, savouring the order and serenity of the music of harmonious ethnic diversity and unity, my faith in humanity was restored.

The best of our young generation are thriving in this region of Australasia in the Pacific zone. More numbers of our young people are flocking to the shores of this continent. Why? The answer is obvious. Like birds flying away in panic from nesting tree-tops in the path of the eye of the storm, our young are fleeing the homeland to find new peaceful nesting grounds. It is a tragedy for us, the parents, who are painfully embracing this separation in their declining years to give their progeny the opportunity to settle in cities where the daughters and sons can grow confident and strong in honest toil and just reward.

In my cocoon, the image of the lone female survivor of seventeen days of being buried alive under the concrete rubble of Rana Plaza metamorphosed into a symbol, an icon, of the essence of every Bangladeshi woman. Like the two pioneering Mt. Everest climbers, women charged with the spirit of endeavour, this survivor represents the best qualities present in every Bangali girl and woman: courage, resilience, intelligence, adaptability, and the strength of will to live despite adversity and abuse and poverty.

However, certain malevolent, ignorant, intolerant patriarchs, mired in self-distorted rigid interpretation of Islam, are hell-bent on destroying the body and spirit of the woman of this land, thus destroying any hope of progress or positive growth of the nation as a whole. The economics of feudal landholdings and inheritance has for centuries kept the majority of women of this region paupers and drones. Women were deprived of physical liberty, of the light of education in the dark days of despair so that such patriarchs could control, manipulate, and barter their

bodies as currency for feudal profit.

We must not ever forget, however, that our Prophet (pbuh) himself had the utmost respect for women, and sought the wisdom of the experience of worldly commerce in his bond with his first wife. His daughter, the inestimable Fatima, mother of Hassan and Hussein, was the jewel of his days of preaching the faith, a worthy daughter raised in adoration to become the wife of Hazrat Ali. The sand dunes of the Arabian Peninsula were filled with the decaying bodies of female infants until our Prophet (pbuh) and his army of good followers battled long and hard to change the fate of woman.

The body of every woman needs to be protected, her womb cherished, not violated. The mind of every woman must be allowed the light of knowledge to flower, to fulfill mankind's true destiny in peace and prosperity. The leading headline in *The Daily Star*, on Friday June 14, 2013 --



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once again, to be beaten and led to slaughter as in the days before faith and knowledge and equality? Ignorance cannot be allowed to rear its ugly head in this land where the girl-child now is an asset for progress.

Woman in Bangladesh is the true Third Force of the nation. Woman belongs to no sole creed, colour, or community. Woman is not man's property. Woman is earth, earth-mother, seed-bearer, life-giver, nurse, nurturer.

Hefazat her! Respect her. Learn from her; look at her shining eyes without lust in your heart, look upon her without shame, man born of woman. Listen to her songs; look into her agile mind, look at her nimble fingers. Look at her lovely smile.

Look into the depths of the goodness of her sacrificing soul. And learn to better thyself.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Internet users' plight

Recently BTRC took a decision that the minimum speed of the broadband internet connection should be starting from 1Mb/s. But it is a matter of sorrow that the broadband internet service providers do not comply with the order. They are harassing the subscribers with different technical problems and low internet speed. Moreover, they are charging exorbitant fees. We, the broadband internet users, ask the government to look into the matter and implement the aforementioned internet speed as soon as possible.

Samiul Raijul
Bangladesh University of Textiles
Dhaka

'Neo-Ottoman Sultan'

Ever since the beginning of the Arab spring, many Arab commentators have been quick to highlight Turkey as the exemplary state and Erdogan as the ideal statesman to be imitated. Turkey has taken advantage of this opportunity to further its interest and influence in the region. But now it seems that Erdogan is not happy just by violating the spirit and letter of the constitution of Turkey by contributing to erode its secular principles. He is not satisfied with just ordering citizens how to lead their lives, calling his citizens by childish names, and sending scores of military officers and journalists to prison on the flimsiest of charges. No, to this neo-Ottoman Sultan, these are not enough. He used disproportionate force against the innocent protesters of Taksim square who were only defending their civil rights to lead their lives as they see fit without the gaze and supervision of the government of this religiously fanatic prime minister.

Nabil A. Siddiqui
AIUB

Bribing slum dwellers!

I would like to applaud The Daily Star's excellent coverage of the recent city corporation elections. Events like those in Khulna where the various candidates addressed voters from a shared stage gave me hope that city politics might be different. Today I am disappointed that rampant breach of electoral rules is taking place and that the candidates are not ashamed that it happened. Particularly dismaying were election "expenses" that include bribing slum dwellers and telling them what symbol to vote for. The candidates are admitting failure to earn these voters' support based on merit which insults the slum dwellers by turning them into votes to buy, instead of people with real concerns. If winning candidates would implement policies to better these voters' lives when they are in office then perhaps the people would choose to support them rather than need to be "bought and taught".

Neil Taylor
On e-mail

Comments on news report, "Four-Zero," published on June 16, 2013

Saleh Tanveer

Looks like each time a party is put in power with an overwhelming majority, its leaders keep misreading the public mind. People then take electoral revenge on the ruling party after being fed up by their excesses and misrule.

Quawsar Moinuddin

This is a wake-up call for all politicians. Popularity is not reserved permanently for any quarter. Let a healthy atmosphere prevail and let our country prosper.

M.Ashraf

The government should not give the opposition a free ride. We need some sort of accountability from BNP as well.

Sara

Wow, opposition sweep in absence of caretaker... maybe elections can be held fairly in January after all.

Iftekhar Hassan

This is the verdict of people against Awami League.

truthprevails53

I know this may sound condescending in many levels but this is the beginning of a sinister change in our society. The illiterate majority swayed by religion. BNP, if this trend continues, will win and with it will come a very dangerous and strong Jamaat.

Syed

Get rid of 'HEK' virus. 30 years of politics is good enough. It's time for them to go. Bangladesh must find new leaders and get rid of HEK.

Shahidul K Khan

These city elections also indicate that BNP will win in the national election.

Shahin Huq

Bullet cannot earn public support. Ballot is the best weapon that the unarmed people can use to retaliate.