

# Impending election

## Missing manifesto is tell-tale

THE fact that none of 11 parties participating in the January 5 election has published its election manifesto speaks volumes about the real effectiveness of this election. They will no doubt make one available soon enough, but not having done so yet is a clear acknowledgement that the polls will be meaningless and a non-event, and thus preparing a manifesto and making that public in time will be an exercise in futility.

It is worthwhile to note, however, that the party which has bulldozed an election oblivious to its participatory nature just to what it enthusiastically says conform to the constitution has itself failed to provide a manifesto. A party manifesto is formulated and made public by way of seeking a popular mandate on its contents. A manifesto provides a vehicle for evaluating a party's performance in power vis-à-vis its pledges and commitments contained therein.

The missing manifesto reflects, let's reiterate, a ritualistic approach to election as distinguished from a substantive one. Even so, it devolved on the Awami League as the principal participant in the election to come out with a manifesto to elucidate what the party aims for by way of giving a positive directional thrust to governance, both economic and political.

Having regard to the way things were messed up on the political front, on the caretaker government issue as such, a new direction in matters of enhancing quality of politics to avert violence should be part and parcel of the manifesto of such a major party as the AL.

## Sextuple murder

### Deterrence needed against such criminality

THE recent gruesome murder of six men in an apartment has a spooky dimension to it. Predictably, the sensational murder incidence and the manner it was carried out leave all sorts of questions about the motive behind it. An alleged spiritual rivalry or turf warfare may have been the reason behind the incident. Such a grisly killing orgy requires a scooping investigation to ferret out the culprits.

Although some arrests have been made, a focused investigation is yet to get underway. Our law enforcers may have arrested suspects but often not the killers in a number of cases. Of late, police patrolling has also decreased in terms of area surveillance.

Given the limited number of police being devoted to crime control and vigil, criminal elements have some kind of a field day. One has to only see the bulk of the police force being assigned to traffic control, VIP duties and tailing the political processions. This imbalance in the police force in regard to tackling crimes will have to be corrected.

The deterrent effect is missing as far as conviction rate goes which basically encourages impunity among potential criminals. The sextuple murder case should be investigated with due diligence. Simultaneously, our law enforcers should be extra vigilant in times of political unrest as well.

## Nuclear war to trigger global famine

ABDUL MATIN

TWO nuclear bombs dropped at Nagasaki and Hiroshima in 1945 killed over 200,000 people and caused huge devastations accompanied by nuclear radiation fallout. A recent study added a new dimension to the aftermath of a nuclear war. It is a global famine. According to a study (second edition) by the International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War and Physicians for Social Responsibility, "a nuclear war between India and Pakistan would set off a global famine that could kill two billion people and effectively end human civilisation."

The study concludes that black carbon aerosol particles released into the atmosphere by a South Asian nuclear war would reduce US corn and soybean production by around 10 percent over a decade. Similarly, China's rice production will be reduced by an average of 21 percent over four years and by another 10 percent over the following six years. In addition, China's wheat production would plunge by 50 percent during the first year after the nuclear war and would still be 31 percent below baseline a decade later. This will virtually trigger a global famine.

India and Pakistan together possess only about 200 nuclear weapons compared with the combined total of 9,130 weapons stockpiled by USA and Russia. These weapons are several hundred times more powerful than the ones dropped in 1945. Obviously, a war between USA and Russia will annihilate the entire human race from the planet.

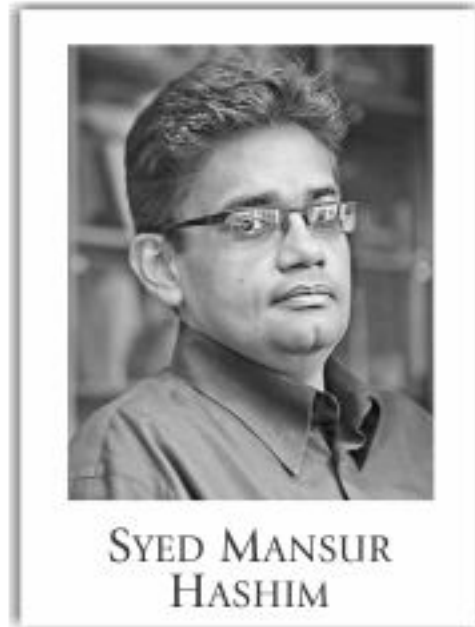
Ira Helfand, the author of the report, called for further research to ascertain the size of a probable nuclear famine. According to him, the disaster will be so massive in scale that no precautionary measures will be able to protect us. The only way to survive is through total abolition of nuclear weapons. A number of Strategic Arms Limitation Treaties (SALT) and a Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) have been signed but yet we are not closer to even a partial abolition of nuclear weapons. What is worse, three nuclear weapon states did not sign CTBT.

According to the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists, there are now 10,200 stockpiled nuclear weapons by nine countries. President Barack Obama pledged in 2009 to work towards abolition but said that the United States would keep nuclear weapons as long as others did. In that case, which country will be the first to abolish nuclear weapons if every country intends to be the last one?

Several international organisations have been campaigning in support of nuclear disarmament. They need to be more active. To abolish nuclear weapons, we need more public support -- particularly in the nuclear weapon states. Only they can convince their leaders that abolition of nuclear weapons is essential for the survival of the human race.

The writer is a former chief engineer of Bangladesh Atomic Energy Commission

# Addressing problems in supply chain



SYED MANSUR HASHIM

EVERY year, newspaper headlines blare out the same old story. Farmers are not getting a fair price for their produce. We, the consumers in cities get a raw deal, since we end up buying produce grown by the agricultural sector at several times the price paid out to farmers. Everyone knows what the problem is -- too many middlemen. Yet, one would have thought that with the advances in technology and all the hype around 'Digital Bangladesh', someone, somewhere at policy level would have come up with some idea about putting into place tried-and-tested formulas that are big on delivery, yet small on cost. Yes, we are talking about innovative solutions that are essentially technology-driven.

Most people in our country regardless of the rich-poor divide have access to technology. The mobile phone revolution and the arrival of the internet on the phone mean that access to information to millions is a reality. As stated by a young entrepreneur "while agriculture has been the most thriving sector in Bangladesh, recent globalisation trends have led to a shift in demand in how we approach farming in emerging markets as such. An 'information spill over' means producers no longer want to rely on middle men to cut their deal; they want to secure the best bargains on their own and lose nothing in between." Indeed solutions using mobile phones whereby a "virtual marketplace" is created bridging producers and consumers already exist in the country. And it is not only about creating a market where there are no middlemen. It has to do with interventions that can cut out the "system loss", e.g. 10 kilos of mangoes shipped from another district destined for say, Dhaka, reaches the retailer or consumer for that matter where there are only 8 kilos of mangoes. We are talking about pilferage along the route. We are talking about innovations in "monitoring of the supply chain through GPS tracking and counting applications."

The list of inadequacies in the supply chain is too long to address in a single article. Yet certain basic conclusions can be done from studies done in neighbouring India. According to a study conducted by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) in 2012, "To help address price volatility and middlemen collusion during a harvest time a similar, *mobile based, tool would feed farmers daily price information* for several of the closest markets. Farmers would then be able to decide where and when to sell their crops. The service could also incorporate an educational component to help farmers gain higher yields from their crops. A similar service, called e-coupal, has already been rolled out by Indian conglomerate ITC which has several thousand kiosks outfitted with internet-enabled computers which display daily price information and educational

*An 'information spill over' means producers no longer want to rely on middlemen to cut their deal; they want to secure the best bargains on their own and lose nothing in between.*

materials. A text-based mobile service with forecasting mechanisms, however, would allow a service to scale much faster and help reduce price volatility."

A few things become apparent from the above statement. That mobile technology has provided many farmers in India with access to *real-time* information about daily prices of their produce to make informed decisions. Secondly, the involvement of large private sector players in the information technology arena is helping to come up with required investment in both software and hardware to get the message across. Innovative tech-companies across the globe are coming up with solutions that work in the field. For instance, *BumperCrop* is a gateway for some 4crore home food growers who want to buy, trade, and sell their produce in their community.

The business volume annually for home growers hover around US\$18billion -- now that's big business. Looking at the Asian scene, we come across companies like *Agrisaurus*, which helps user "design and maintain a perfectly executed edible garden. Their *gardent* management tools include garden-map AI assistance, HTML5 canvases, cloud databasing, Gantt chart timelines, automated reminders, real-time weather data, and pests and disease diagnosis."

Why can't such approaches be adopted in Bangladesh? We have a vibrant telecom sector and an emerging IT sector. In Bangladesh, where more and more young people are turning to self-employment and where 5 out of 10 new companies being formed are IT-based, it is natural for many of them to be developing applications to be used on mobile phones. Recent data shows a boom in low-cost segment of mobile phones, with more and more users moving to the smart phone category, especially since the conclusion of the 3-G licensing procedure. With the various Telecom companies in various stages of implementing a nationwide coverage of the 3-G services, where it is envisaged that the bulk of revenue will come from data, rather than voice-enabled services, the market is poised to take off. The bottom line is that the loopholes in agriculture and its supply chain create massive opportunities -- opportunities that can be explored by a largely underutilised IT and private sector.

What is there to stop government from introducing required legislature and access to finance through, if necessary, nationalised commercial banks to enable both established and new start-up technology companies to explore uncharted markets. What is required are policy level guidelines to create access to low cost finance for new tech-based companies into the market. Equally important is to engage the private sector that will work in close cooperation with government ministries, particularly agriculture, to bridge the gap that exists today between farmers and consumers -- so that both groups may benefit in the long run.

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The writer is Assistant Editor, *The Daily Star*.

## India's Martian chronicles

opportunity to participate in space exploration. Its moon mission in 2008, which carried a payload for some 20 countries, won the International Lunar Exploration Working Group's International Cooperation Award.

Yet, unavoidably, some triumphalism has crept into the narrative. One of India's more astute young commentators, Sreeram Chaulia, captures this heady exuberance well: "Every milestone in advanced rocket science," he writes, "is a shot in the arm for national self-confidence, showing that India is headed for global leadership. When the chips are down, or if there is a national calamity, memories of the Mars orbiter blazing a trail in the sky will sustain the faith that the future belongs to India."

This is precisely the attitude that raises the hackles of domestic critics, especially on the left, who argue that a country facing India's crippling social and economic problems cannot afford the luxury of indulging in space exploration. Critics have portrayed the Mars mission as an irresponsible ego trip by pampered scientists disconnected from the harsh realities of Indian poverty and suffering.

This may not be entirely fair, however. India embarked on its quest for rocket and satellite technol-



ogy and space exploration when it was far poorer, impelled by its own ancient scientific tradition and the conviction of its first prime minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, that such aspirations could co-exist with a determined effort to end poverty.

Indeed, India's space scientists have produced tangible benefits for ordinary citizens, launching meteorological satellites that have predicted cyclones and helped save thousands of lives, as well as telecommunications satellites that have knit a vast country together through shared networks. Mitigating natural disasters and enabling nationwide broadcasting can hardly be considered to be disconnected from India's real priorities.

With a general election looming in the months ahead, the air is already thick with political recrimination. The Mars mission -- if it succeeds -- is one thing that can literally rise above it all.

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The writer is India's Minister of State for Human Resource Development. His most recent book is *Pax Indica: India and the World of the 21st Century*.

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(Exclusive to *The Daily Star*)

# LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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## Can't media boycott politicians for a day?

I was browsing through your 'Stop this Politics' page and a thought crossed my mind.

I was wondering what if all the media outlets boycotted the politicians for a day. No media person will attend politicians' or political parties' press conference, and no news of what they say will be printed that day.

The front and back page of all the dailies will only have pictures and write-ups of the ills that this kind of politics has brought to the country.

Maybe this is a very utopian thought of mine, especially considering that most media outlets are politically inclined. I urge TDS to give this idea a serious thought and see if it's worth trying. Maybe you can also influence other dailies, TV channels, magazines, etc., etc., to do the same thing and if all of you can do it the same day, it would be a really great protest.

Looking forward to more good reporting.

Mushtahsan Iqbal  
On e-mail

## Repairing Kanchpur bridge

As a regular commuter between Dhaka and Chittagong, I cross the Kanchpur bridge twice per week. As I recall, the bridge was constructed in the late 70s, and no major repairs have been done in the recent years. On the same highway, the Meghna-Gumti bridge was repaired recently, under the supervision of Bangladesh Army, which is expected to be good for vehicular movement for another 10 years. However, I think the Kanchpur bridge also require same attention. We are seeing reports on deteriorating condition of the bridge in the media, but still don't see any response from the authority. Similar to the Meghna-Gumti bridge, a rehabilitation project can be taken under the supervision of the Bangladesh Army, and the Kanchpur bridge can be restored to a better condition, safe for operation for a few more years. Any delay in the authority's part will endanger the lives of passengers and also obstruct the economic activities that are carried through this highway. I request the Bridge authority to initiate a project immediately just like the Meghna-Gumti bridge project, and ensure safety of the commuters.

Brig. Gen. Tanvir Hasan Majumder (Retired)  
On e-mail

## Passing without test

I draw your attention to a question raised by a student who happens to be my grandchild on the unique system of our national election. He asks, "If people's representatives are elected in more than 50% of seats without contest, then why are we not promoted to our next classes without exams?" Can we give any reply?

Engr. Shaheedul Islam  
On e-mail

## Comments on news analysis, "Army to guard one-sided polls," published on December 21, 2013

## Dying regime

We don't want BJP to get elected in the national elections of India. They have blood in their hands and are not a friend of Bangladesh.

## Aasfisarwar

The job is getting a bit easier for them; they won't have to worry about half of the constituencies and the rest will remain empty.

## SM

"Be all you can be" ...for a farce!

## Ibrahim Zaman

What a shame for us that we need the army to resolve our political issues. Then what are our politicians good at? Killing innocent people on the streets?

## Deep purple blue

The army should bear in mind that they are for defending the country and its people from external enemies. Our army personnel are great peacekeepers globally. Army is certainly not for shooting its own people while facilitating the sham elections.

## Kalu\_Mia

Bangladesh army will lose all its credibility and popularity, if it is going to support this one-sided election, whose results have been sold out already.

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## "Upset by vicious politics" (December 21, 2013)

## Kalu\_Mia

Upset by vicious politics of Hasina.

## Hiron

None of the politicians care. They would probably suggest that students should leave education and join their party. Especially after losing so many activists, they are in need of more new recruits. Educated children are not good for them.

## SM

Ask these kids what they want -- they will tell you MINUSTWO!