

Hold long-pending DCC polls

Civic services suffering badly

IT is a shame when twelve years go by with a significant elected body getting to be stymied through an absence of fresh elections. The last time elections were held to the Dhaka City Corporation was in 2002. Mayor Sadek Hossain Khoka, elected that year, stayed in office four years beyond the expiry of his term. He went only when the Awami League-led government removed him and split the DCC into two.

The bifurcation of the municipal body, though controversial, should have led to swift measures toward ensuring two elected, transparent organisations for city dwellers. That has not happened. Despite all other elections poised to take place in the country, the mystifying silence of the government regarding new polls to the two DCCs does not go down well with the denizens. Add to that the bureaucracy which has come into the whole process. What is surely mortifying is the delay in demarcating the new boundaries of the corporations, a situation that has put even the High Court and the Election Commission in a quandary. Must the LGRD ministry carry on with the kind of indifference it has demonstrated on the issue so far?

We urge the government and the EC to expedite the process of holding the DCC polls. With Dhaka having become the worst city to live in across the globe, it becomes an imperative for the DCC polls to be held. Besides, let no one forget that all elections matter in a democracy. Pushing an important election aside drills holes in the structure of accountable governance.

Why school children on reception line?

Public representatives must shun the practice

IT is simply unacceptable on the part of the state minister of foreign affairs to have seen children of ten schools in Bagha upazila in Rajshahi standing for hours on the roadside to welcome him to the locality. We are dismayed to see the over-enthusiasm of party men who have no qualms about getting school children out of classes to become part of a welcoming committee and gates are erected on busy road intersections so that the local party apparatus may show their unequivocal support to the leader.

Last week we reacted to a similar display of utter lack of understanding on the part of local officials who arranged human chain comprising students of various institutions to welcome the land minister visiting his locality in Sirajganj. Needless to say, such detestable behaviour cannot be condoned and does little to uplift the image of the lawmaker or the party he or she represents. It is appalling to see young children being dragged to stand for hours on end braving the elements to wave their hands when they obviously have better things to do, i.e. study. The current practice is a throwback to the time when the country was under a dictatorship and it appears that such an abhorrent practice is back in vogue. We strongly urge the ministry of education to have this practice stopped so as not to satisfy the hubris of

CORRIGENDUM

In our editorial titled "Gene secrets now unlocked," published yesterday, the figures for buffalo population and milk yield related to India and Pakistan and not to Bangladesh. The error is regretted.

Rooppur on fast track!

ABDUL MATIN

THE government recently decided to fast-track six projects, including the 1,000 MW Rooppur Nuclear Power Project (RNPP). There is nothing wrong in implementing important projects on a fast-track provided the projects are technically and economically feasible and, more importantly, the implementation process is transparent.

We have been told repeatedly that we have been following the guidelines of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) for building the Rooppur nuclear plant. The IAEA's approach for building the first nuclear power plant includes, among others, key infrastructures like nuclear safety, management, legislative framework, human resource development, environmental protection, emergency protection etc. It specifically states: "A competent and skilled workforce is a critical element in building the infrastructure for a new nuclear power programme." It further states: "Owing to the long training and development times needed for some of the more specialist roles, it is necessary to recruit and train them well in advance.... Even if much of the initial knowledge and skills are to be provided by foreign sources, long term expertise to manage and oversee the project should be developed, refined and retained within the country."

Have we complied with this guideline and developed necessary manpower "to manage and oversee the project" or "building the infrastructures" like nuclear safety, legislative framework, environmental protection, emergency protection etc? Unfortunately the answer is "NO."

The IAEA also identifies the top issues for newcomers and asks a set of questions to test their readiness for the first nuclear power plant. The first three questions to test the readiness are: (i) Do I have the people? (ii) Can I find the money? (iii) Will I have public/government support for a nuclear power programme? It is to be noted that if the answer is negative to single question, there is no scope to proceed further with a nuclear power project. Obviously, the answer to the first question on manpower is negative in Bangladesh. Why are we then proceeding with the Rooppur project on a fast-track?

Are we not aware of the inherent danger involving the safety of a nuclear power plant if we try to build one without having a reasonable critical mass of properly trained manpower? Should we ignore the IAEA's guidelines and the repeated warnings of the senior and experienced nuclear experts of the country?

We should remember that a nuclear power reactor is not a toy to play with. To fast-track the Rooppur project without having properly trained manpower is a very risky proposition. Bangladesh is simply incapable of dealing with the consequences of any such risky adventure. It is, therefore, advisable to build our manpower first before fast-tracking the nuclear project.

The first 100 days!

SUNDAY
POUCH



ASHFAQUR
RAHMAN

A government under Sheikh Hasina has been formed by the president. The prime minister has selected her 'dream cabinet.' It consists of very senior parliamentarians who are veterans of our War of Liberation. They are combined with young leaders who are wielding the levers of power for the first time. With such an admixture of experience and youth this combination could be excellent for governance. However, several factors could still short-circuit its effectiveness.

One challenge facing it is its moral bearing. The members of the cabinet do not have a role model to follow. The prime minister herself, however hard she may try to be that, does not always have the opportunity to show the way. She is always under immense pressure from all sides and many things slip through her without her knowledge. There is no inner cabinet mechanism that can check such slips. She needs the support of her senior cabinet and political colleagues to check corruption and non-diligence.

Second, this time the PM has a vision about the future development of our country. Not only the Millennium Development Goals -- the 2021 targets -- but also the grand vision of seeing the country graduate into a developed country by 2041. These are indeed praiseworthy policy parameters. But how much they are practically attainable depends on several factors. The country's executive authority, which is vested in the PM, can work in tandem with the parliament. But a creaking judiciary, which unfortunately remains stuck in time, needs to be rescued. All the three organs of state must share the same vision of the future. They should be able to craft their own programmes to be a part of this great architecture. To have any one work out of sync with the other two would mean a slowing down and a breakdown of the process.

Third, if the people in general do not share the PM's vision then, however sincere the government is, the end result would be much less than perfect. It means that the government needs to change, adjust and recalibrate its policy goals to meet the people's aspirations. The government at all times needs to enjoy the confidence of the people in order to meet the genuine requirements of the governed.

All this needs to start from today. The government should understand, and be under no illusion, that there is a 'honeymoon period' it can enjoy. It cannot enjoy a free lunch as they say. It is this urgency with which it requires to enter a dialogue with the leaders of the unofficial opposition, who did not participate in

ND EED, today is the first day when the 9th Parliament is no more. A new journey begins for the nation. If there was no election, of whatever hue, the country would face a difficult constitutional crisis. There would not be an easy transition to the 10th Parliament. By all counts the election, however non-participatory, still met this vital constitutional requirement. The basic question that remains is its legitimacy.

The first 100 days of this government should be the harbinger of what is in store for them. Shiekh Hasina, by adept holding of the hands of the young, will have to prove that she is capable of being a leader who can craft our future.

electing this government. It was a serious misjudgment on the part of (until recently the official opposition) BNP not to go into battle with AL. The people and the nation must not suffer because of a major political error on the part of this party. AL should step in and show the way.

The first 100 days of this government will be a defining time for what is to come. So far, AL has been fairly busy in celebrating its victory in a modest way. However, the PM is travelling throughout the country-side and looking at the woes of the minority community and the marginalised. In some areas AL workers arranged for children to enjoy a day's vacation out in the blazing sun to welcome the arrival of a minister who was 'elected' uncontested. How disgraceful and condemnable! The PM's office should not only stop this but also penalise those who enjoy this sort of adulation.

It is heartening to know that the government at the highest level has already identified six projects which are mega in nature and demand priority attention. This prioritisation would help develop infrastructure in a smart and fast-track manner. This would give impetus to the future growth of industries and services. The PM also needs to think deeply about what she needs to do about the strong opposition elements in the country. She must contemplate incorporating them in some way in the development process. A viable opposition inside parliament is another challenge before this government. An opposition that speaks with an open mind and construc-

tively criticises government policies is what this government needs now. A society that seems to be politically split down the middle needs to be healed and strengthened.

Bangladesh seems to have quietly and imperceptibly slipped back to business. Life has quickly returned to normal. Traffic jams are

there and supply lines to industries and retail restored. The Stock Market is doing reasonably well, so also the remittance flows. In fact, all these will restore confidence in the new government very fast.

Western countries that have criticised the 'unelected election' are also quiet now. They know that the government needs to carry on with its constitutional task and then at some time bring back things to order. They have given some space to the government to start its new term with a degree of confidence. The government has to engage its foreign friends in a more convincing way in the coming days. It has to change its foreign policy orientation and place more emphasis on human rights and political freedom. The world must know that Bangladesh places equal if not more importance to these issues than in the past.

What is new in Bangladesh's agenda is its future. The young and the adolescents are crowding out the old. They are rearing to go, to learn, to build, to create and join the greater world. Old ideologies and old thoughts have pushed out this new generation. They want better. The first 100 days of this government should be the harbinger of what is in store for them. Shiekh Hasina, by adept holding of the hands of the young, will have to prove that she is capable of being a leader who can craft our future.

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Can EC decide the fate of the two MPs-elect?

SHAKHAWAT LITON

TWO lawmakers elected in the January 5 polls on Awami League nomination were found guilty of breaking electoral laws. On directives of the Election Commission (EC), an electoral inquiry committee led by a joint district judge conducted the probe and submitted its report to the EC. On the basis of the report, the EC served notices to Sheikh Afil Uddin and Monirul Islam, who were declared elected MPs from Jessore-1 and Jessore- 2 constituencies respectively, asking them to explain why their candidacies would not be cancelled on grounds of committing electoral offences.

What are the offences? Afil, who is also the vice-president of Jessore district unit of AL and was elected as MP in 2008, allegedly instructed party men to ensure win of his relative Monirul by occupying poll centres and casting false votes. "One hundred boys will always be in the queue. One will enter the booth and then stand at the end of the line again," he instructed. He also assured the supporters of Monirul of protecting them if the administration tried to take any action against them. A video clip of his speech reached journalists.

In response to the EC's show cause notices, both Afil, who was elected unopposed, and Monirul who won January 5 polling, followed the traditional path of denial. They claimed that the news was not correct, and it was given with a view to create controversy. They did not even bother to challenge the EC's authority regarding scrapping of their candidatures. In their view, the EC can now no more cancel their candidacies as the election was over. They claimed that the returning officer, if he wanted, could cancel their candidature before the polls. Is it true?

Section 91E of the Representation of the People Order gives the EC authority to punish Afil and Monirul by scrapping their candidacies in the January 5 polls. This provision is very clear. It empowers the EC to pass an order for investigation into an alleged engagement or attempt to engage in any serious illegal activity, or violation or attempt to violate any provision of RPO or electoral rules or the electoral code of conduct for which someone may be disqualified from being elected as a member of parliament. A contesting candidate does not need to commit the offence himself for the EC to use this authority. The EC may take action against his agent or any other person who, by his order or with his direct or indirect consent, commits an offence. The EC may initiate proceedings against such offence on receiving information about it from any source or any verbal or written report. Before taking final action under this provision, the EC will hear the candidate accused of this

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offence.

The EC has initiated the appropriate procedure. After the investigation, the EC will hear Afil and Monirul on January 27 before deciding whether it will cancel their candidacies and order fresh elections in the two constituencies; or it will publish election results of Afil and Monirul in the official gazette, which has been kept suspended because of the ongoing procedure.

Section 91E shows that Afil and Monirul are unaware of the sweeping authority of the EC as they refused to accept its power to cancel candidacies. It seems they are also unaware of the EC's immense inherent power which empowers it to even cancel election results on grounds of irregularities in the polls. Regarding cancellation of election results in Noor Hossain vs Nazrul Islam case in 2000, the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court explained the inherent powers of the EC. "We cannot but reiterate that if there was contemporaneous report of allegations about disturbance, rigging of ballot papers or election not being held justly, honestly and fairly, then after being satisfied about the correctness of the report or allegations, Election Commission would be justified to cancel the results of the election and direct re-poll....," observed the Appellate Division.

By exercising its inherent powers, the EC cancelled the election results of Daulatkhan Paurasava in 2004 on grounds of gross irregularities in the polls although the returning officer sent the results to the Commission. At that

time, this specific provision was not introduced in the electoral laws empowering the EC to scrap candidacies in the polls to the parliament and local government bodies. It was introduced in RPO before the December 2008 parliamentary polls. Later, a similar provision was introduced in other laws concerning elections to the different local government bodies.

Now, the onus lies on Kazi Rakibuddin Ahmad and his team to uphold the dignity and authority of the EC by making a judicious decision in the Afil and Monirul case. This is a very sensitive case for the EC, which could not demonstrate its ability and efficiency to hold free and fair elections. Rather, it had been mired in controversy when, last September, it decided to abolish the EC's sweeping authority to cancel anyone's candidacy in the parliamentary polls for serious electoral offences. In defence, Rakibuddin and his team described the authority "meaningless" and "inapplicable" as in their view it was never used. Their justification was ridiculous, and triggered huge uproar. In the face of a tidal wave of criticism, they scrapped their decision. Now, Rakibuddin and his team have got the occasion to exercise the authority. Whatever decision they take, it will have a huge impact on the EC.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Animal Farm in real world!

According to our constitution, every citizen is equal before law and deserves equal rights. But in reality, only a few privileged people enjoy unparallel power and the rest are suffering from the ominous fear of being arrested or burnt alive. The situation reminds me of what George Orwell said in his book, Animal Farm: "All animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others." The AL government arranged an utterly disappointing one-sided poll without the consent of common people. They lost their trust in people and deprived them (people) of their voting rights. Isn't it a clear violation of our constitutional right to vote? What a mockery! Does constitution only serve the ruling party's interest?

Ashu
Motijheel, Dhaka

New definition of democracy

Democracy is the most popular system of government in the present world as it represents people. In parliamentary democratic system, the opposition party will do constructive criticism of government's activities, but it will not be a part of government. If you are a part of government, how will you criticise the government activities? In fact, there will be no opposition party in the present parliament. Maybe Bangladesh is going to create a new definition of democracy.

Abdulla Al Imran
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He was one of our guardians

With the passing of Justice Habibur Rahman I feel that a conscience of our nation is gone. I have read so many demeaning speeches, writings and notes from certain notable persons about his role in awarding Golam Azam Bangladeshi nationality and so on. Only learning the true history and law of that time may enlighten us why he had to be involved in making such a decision. But we should not forget his role as chief adviser of caretaker government in 1996, under whose supervision the election was held and the Awami League came to power. Perhaps he is not cent percent flawless like any good human being but we should express our reverence for the person he was. The nation has lost a guardian. I pray for his soul's eternal peace.

Rubab Abdullah Shukla
USA

Comments on post editorial, "Ferret them out, no matter who they are," published on January 20, 2014

T. Husain

Communal riot is a disgrace and a heinous crime against our minority population. Is it impossible to find out the criminals and give them exemplary punishment so that such crime never happens? I say it clearly and loudly that the government is fully responsible for these crimes because they tolerated these crimes and did not provide any security to the minority communities.

Tearful Bengali

I have nothing new to say other than to feel the shame and pain in my heart for such barbarism against the minorities here.

"6 projects put on fast track" (January 23, 2014)

Ikuhel

Wow, such an ambitious plan! During the last tenure of this government, we were just been fooled with the digital version of the Padma bridge and nurtured false hopes of completing the project on time. What can we expect when many other important projects are also added to the list?

Sara

Well-chosen projects. Except maybe the location of the coal power plant, the projects appear to be well-planned and are likely to have favourable impact. Another project that might have helped is the large international airport, which seems to have been mothballed after the fierce violence that occurred over the choice of its location.

Khaled Mahmud

Bravo. Go ahead. Nobody can resist our growth in this century.

Mizan

This government didn't even get 20% of people's vote, so naturally they have to go on fast track, before things get muddy.

"Wealth of 7 politicians under ACC scanner" (January 23, 2014)

Sirajul Haq

Good initiative by the ACC. We are waiting to see how far ACC can proceed.

Mortuza Huq

Is this real or just an eyewash?