

# All eyes on UZ polls

## An opportunity for major parties to test popularity

IT'S a good augury that the first phase of the local government elections to 97 upazilas has begun amid much excitement and festivity. It promises to give the people, who could not exercise their franchise in the recently-held national election, the opportunity to vote for the candidates of their choice in the upazila parishes.

While we appreciate the fact that majority of the candidates in the race are well-educated, reasons for anxiety remains as several candidates have cases against them, a few of them even facing murder charges. Hopefully, the Election Commission has apprised the voters of the vital facts relevant to the candidates' antecedents through affidavits submitted to it. This will help the electorate make an informed choice in the upazila polls. Even so, we would like to believe, the EC has done its job so that the voters will be able to choose honest and dedicated leadership to run the administration efficiently.

A party-less election though in theory it may be, the fact remains that candidates in the electoral race are in an overwhelming number being backed by the major political parties, the ruling AL and the BNP. In this connection, we take note of the fact that some leaders of the ruling AL, far from welcoming their rival BNP's decision to take part in the election have rather criticised them. This is uncalled-for. In fact, such participation by BNP candidates will only lend credence to the election as well as provide the parties with the scope to test their popularity among the electorate, an opportunity they missed in the 10th JS election.

## Bangladesh off the grey list

### A positive development

WITH Bangladesh off the Financial Action Task Force's (FATF) 'grey list', local companies will now pay less for financial transactions internationally. Previously, foreign banks charged up to 1 per cent from Bangladeshi business houses to facilitate payments. This should now drop significantly. The country has consistently improved on its track record to fulfilling some 28 tasks including concrete steps taken against money laundering and terrorist financing by introducing various laws such as Anti-terrorism Act, 2009 and its amendment.

This is most certainly a step in the right direction to bring Bangladesh back into the list of countries compliant with the various conventions of the United Nations on money laundering and terror financing. With the setting up of a separate Finance Intelligence Unit (FIU), memoranda of understanding with 16 foreign similar institutions have been signed that will help facilitate the exchange of information, training and sharing of expertise. On a more local level, the government has appointed contact points in 21 ministries, divisions and agencies to help detect anomalies in transactions and better coordinate state agencies in the fight against terrorism financing and money laundering.

As financing of terror campaigns has gone global, it had become imperative to set in place the regulatory framework for detection and apprehension of such illegal activity. That Bangladesh is a compliant state has been recognised by the international watchdog is welcome news and the reduction in cost of doing business will provide reprieve for the business community.

Why are we importing junks?

ABDUL MATIN

OUR market is flooded with reconditioned cars which account for 90% of the registered cars. The rest of the cars were new. Most reconditioned cars require major maintenance soon after purchase and become practically useless after about five years. As a result, Bangladesh has also become a big market for spare parts, including fake ones. During maintenance, most people go for fake or reconditioned spare parts, genuine spares being very expensive.

Old cars are, in general, less efficient than new ones. Consequently, they burn more fuel and produce more pollution per kilometer of travel. One of the causes of traffic accidents is the large-scale use of fake spare parts. We have 6,300 traffic related fatalities per 100,000 vehicles per year in Bangladesh whereas it is only 100 in India. The number of our non-fatal casualties will also be proportionately higher. Only some African countries have traffic accident rates similar to or higher than that of Bangladesh.

A medium sized reconditioned car costs Tk 12 lac or more in Bangladesh. Its fuel cost and maintenance costs are also high. Add to it the indirect costs for healthcare due to respiratory problems caused by the extra pollution. We can hardly quantify the cost of any loss of life or permanent disability due to traffic accidents. Obviously, this is a high price we are paying.

In our neighbouring country India, a brand new car of the same size is available at INR 7 lac (=BDT 8.75 lac), an 800 cc car at INR 4.5 lac (= BDT 5.6 lac) and a smaller car at INR 2.5 lac (= BDT 3.2 Lac). Their fuel and maintenance costs are lower. They are causing less pollution and fewer accidents. They last longer with less maintenance.


By importing reconditioned cars, few traders have become very rich and politically influential. They have convinced our policy makers that reconditioned cars are cheap. This is not true. Even the basic price tag of a reconditioned car is higher than that of a new car in India. This is because of our taxation policies. If our neighbours can buy new cars at BDT 8.75 lac or at lower prices, why can't we? There is a need to review of import taxes also.

By importing reconditioned cars, we are only serving the interests of few importers causing great damage to the country in terms of higher pollution, higher import bill for fuel oil and a higher rate of traffic accidents. It is, therefore, in the national interest to discourage uses of reconditioned cars and import only new cars by adjusting the import duties in order to bring the prices down to the level of those in India.

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

# The other tales of February

GROUND REALITIES



SYED BADRUL AHSAN

In a country where hordes of people choose not to remember history or deliberately push it away in their narrow partisan interest, where the young have carefully been kept away from coming in communion with their past, we must do what needs to be done. And that is to go back in time to recall some of the men and events shaping the political legacy of Bangladesh.

This being the month of Ekushey, it is only natural that we will recall the sacrifices of the young men who lost their lives in the great struggle for the Bengali language to be upheld as the symbol of our cultural and political expression. Ekushey, as we keep reminding ourselves, led us inexorably to the future -- the Tagore centenary celebrations in 1961, the students movement in 1962, the Six Points in 1966, the mass movement in 1969, the great electoral triumph in 1970 and the liberation of the land in 1971.

All of this we remember as we prepare to observe yet one more anniversary of the Language Movement. And with that we remember another February, when Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, not yet Bangabandhu, first made us aware of the road map he was sketching for the Bengali nation insofar as their political future was concerned. There are myriad reasons to remember Bangabandhu, one being the clear perspective on the future that only he was able to shape. Study the history of other politicians in the period before 1971. At some points in their careers, they lost their way or showed themselves incapable of demonstrating the kind of steadfastness one expects in leaders. Mujib was an exception, the exception taking the shape of reality on February 5, 1966, when he informed a conference of Pakistan's opposition leaders in Lahore that he was going ahead with a radical programme geared to achieving regional autonomy for Pakistan's five provinces. Not one of his fellow politicians, either in East or West Pakistan, offered him support on the Six Points. He went ahead anyway.

Which is why February 1966 remains a significant point of reference for this country. Remember that it was only a month after Tashkent and Ayub Khan was yet Pakistan's strongman. The announcement of the Six Points prompted Foreign Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto into challenging Bangabandhu to a public debate on them at Dhaka's Paltan Maidan. On Bangabandhu's behalf, Tajuddin Ahmed took up the challenge. Bhutto then went silent. Nothing happened at Paltan Maidan.

In the epic tale of the Bengali struggle for freedom, February 1969 is a landmark you cannot avoid in your study of history. Through the gathering force of the mass movement and rising support for the Six Points, to which was added the Eleven-Point programme of the students of Dhaka University, Moulana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhashani made it clear that if Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was not freed and the Agartala Conspiracy Case was not withdrawn unconditionally, he would lead a march of millions on Dhaka cantonment to free the incarcerated leader. That threat, as also rising public indignation, worked. On February 22, 1969, all thirty four of the thirty five accused in the Agartala case (one had been shot in confinement by the army) were freed and the case withdrawn. It was left to Pakistan's defence minister, Vice Admiral A.R. Khan, to make the announcement of a dropping of the case.

The day after, February 23, is a point in historical time

when Sheikh Mujibur Rahman became Bangabandhu, friend of Bengal. Before a million Bengalis at the Race Course in Dhaka, student leader Tofail Ahmed spoke for an entire nation when he bestowed the honorific on the newly freed leader. On February 24, Bangabandhu left for Rawalpindi, to take part in the Round Table Conference convened by an embattled President Ayub Khan. Arriving in Rawalpindi, he quipped to newsmen, 'Yesterday a traitor, today a hero.' West Pakistan's leading political figures fell over one another trying to befriend him. Mujib was on his way to making even bigger history than he had thus far.

In February 1971 came the earliest of hints that the state of Pakistan was headed for disaster. Having failed to persuade Bangabandhu to agree to a grand coalition on the pattern of the CDU-SPD arrangement in West Germany, Pakistan People's Party leader Z.A. Bhutto told a crowd in West Pakistan on February 15 that his party would not attend the National Assembly session called for March 3 in Dhaka. The assembly, he said, would turn into a slaughter house because of the insistence of the Awami League on an incorporation of its Six Points in the new constitution to be drafted by the newly elected lawmakers from all regions of Pakistan. Bhutto's incendiary remarks would lead to horrible results. The assembly session would be postponed, talks to resolve the crisis would prove abortive, the Awami League would be proscribed, Bangabandhu would be jailed yet one more time and General Tikka Khan would inaugurate a systematic programme of genocide in East Pakistan. Pakistan's first ever general election would lead to the eastern half of it emerging as the independent republic of Bangladesh.

Move on, to February 1974. Leading figures in the Organisation of Islamic Countries (OIC), meeting in Lahore, were of the opinion that Bangladesh's prime minister ought to be present at the summit. Bangabandhu would not agree, unless Pakistan officially acknowledged Bangladesh as an independent nation. On February 22, five years to the day after the Agartala case was withdrawn, the Islamic Republic of Pakistan recognised the People's Republic of Bangladesh. Prime Minister Bhutto sent out an invitation to Bangabandhu, soliciting his presence at the Lahore summit.

On February 23, 1974, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman arrived in Lahore as the leader of a free Bangladesh. He was welcomed by Pakistan's President Fazle Elahi Chowdhury and Prime Minister Bhutto; a Pakistan army band played Amar Shonar Bangla as Bangladesh's flag fluttered beside Pakistan's in the breeze. Bhutto then introduced Bangladesh's leader to leading Pakistani personalities. When Bangabandhu came up to General Tikka Khan, by then Pakistan's army chief, Tikka saluted him. 'Hello, Tikka', said Bangabandhu, smiled and moved on. It was a patently embarrassing moment for Tikka, who had on March 25, 1971 had ordered Mujib's arrest. Asked at the time if he wished to have his prisoner brought to him, he had replied in disdain, 'I don't want to see his face.' He was now saluting his former prisoner.

And Lahore? It was that historic spot where the Pakistan Resolution had been adopted on March 23, 1940 by the All-India Muslim League. It was in Lahore where Bangabandhu came forth with his Six Point programme for a reconfigured Pakistan. In February 1974, it was a city where the reality of Bangladesh was acknowledged, fully and without ambiguity, by the state that had fought fiercely and pitilessly to prevent it from being born.

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The writer is Executive Editor, *The Daily Star*.  
E-mail: ahsan.syedbadrul@gmail.com

Intellectual property and economic development

VISIONARY VOICES



ROD HUNTER

In his recent State of the Union address, US President Barack Obama reiterated his ambition to complete the Trans-Pacific Partnership, a proposed trade agreement among the US and 11 Pacific countries. Meanwhile, the European Union and China are pressing to close their own deals in Asia and elsewhere. If these proliferating trade pacts are to spur virtuous cycles of growth for developing countries, they must not only reduce trade barriers; they must also build the institutional framework of a modern economy, including robust intellectual property (IP) rights.

Some activists and government officials get the relationship between strong IP protection and economic growth backwards, claiming that IP rights are an obstacle to development, and thus should not be enforced until after countries achieve high-income status. This attitude is particularly prevalent in India, which recently put trade negotiations with the EU on hold, and it was central to the failure of the Doha Round of global trade talks. As Indian Commerce Minister Anand Sharma put it, "inherent flexibilities must be provided to developing countries."

But the bottom line is that the ideas protected by IP rights are the dynamo of growth for developed and developing countries alike. Instead of diluting IP rights, developing countries like India should recognize that strengthening IP protection is a prerequisite for attracting the foreign investment that they need to help their economies grow, create jobs, and improve their citizens' capacity to consume.

Today, IP accounts for much of the value at large companies. One study found that in 2009, across a variety of industries in the US, intellectual capital -- patents, copyrights, databases, brands, and organizational knowledge -- held a 44% share of firms' overall market value. Such companies have little desire to put their IP at risk of erosion or outright theft; they want to do business where they know that their IP is safe.

Developing countries have a lot to gain from attracting multinational firms. Such companies bring technologically advanced imports and new management techniques that foster growth in domestic firms, while spurring industrial modernization. They also spawn new local companies that serve as suppliers, thereby boosting employment, augmenting workers' skills, improving productivity, and increasing government revenue.

Currently, India attracts a mere 2.7% of global spending on research and development; China, with its stronger IP rights, attracts close to 18%; and the US brings in 31%. United Nations data show that India's stock of foreign direct investment (FDI) was equivalent to just

11.8% of its GDP from 2010 to 2012 -- far lower than the developing-economy average of roughly 30%.

According to a new study by the economists Robert Shapiro and Aparna Mathur, if India achieved Chinese levels of IP protection, its annual FDI inflows would increase by 33% annually. In the pharmaceutical sector -- which is particularly vulnerable to IP infringement -- a stronger IP regime could increase FDI inflows from \$1.5 billion this year to \$8.3 billion in 2020, with pharmaceutical R&D doubling to \$1.3 billion over the same period. The increased FDI would create 18,000 new jobs in the pharmaceutical industry.

If India could transform its IP regime to resemble the US system, which is more robust than China's, the benefits would be even greater. Inward FDI could increase by as much as 83% annually by 2020; in the pharmaceutical industry alone, FDI could reach as much as \$77 billion, with R&D rising to \$4.2 billion and 44,000 new jobs being created.

The Indian government's ongoing assault on pharmaceutical IP makes these findings even more significant. Over the last two years, India has invalidated or otherwise attacked patents on 15 drugs produced by international firms in order to make way for local champions, claiming that exclusivity enables companies to charge high prices that harm consumers. Allowing local producers to copy patented medicines, officials assert, will bring down prices and expand access.

But drug patents and prices are not the main -- or even a major -- obstacle to patients' access to medical care in India. The bigger issue, as the IMS consultancy found last year, is the shortage of doctors, clinics, and hospitals, especially in rural areas. Even the public clinics and hospitals that do exist are often rendered useless by high rates of absenteeism by doctors. Medicine, however affordable, is of no value if no one is available to prescribe or administer it.

Furthermore, Indians lack access to insurance programs, particularly for outpatient care. This, coupled with the lack of a public safety net, makes health problems a leading source of economic hardship, even for middle-class families. Far from improving citizens' access to health care, weak IP protections are exacerbating India's formidable health-care challenges.

It is time for India's leaders to recognize the positive role that IP can play in fostering growth and improving citizens' wellbeing. It is equally important for trade negotiators worldwide to reject the notion that IP protection is a luxury that only rich countries can afford. The reality is that IP protection is an economic engine that developing-country citizens should not have to forego.

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The writer is a senior director for international economics on President George W. Bush's National Security Council, is a senior vice president at the Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturers of America.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

letters@thedailystar.net

Hatirjheel a living dilemma

Hatirjheel was supposed to be a beautification-cum-roads project that has turned into a living dilemma of Dhaka. The stench from the garbage dump and the poor traffic management along its bridges and roads are not only destroying the surrounding atmosphere, but also showing how little we care about our city.

While walking along the pathway on last Friday, I noticed how little we care about traffic laws as cars, CNG-run auto-rickshaws and rickshaws kept coming from the wrong directions. One can talk about traffic negligence if there is a traffic system but what would I say if there is literally no traffic at all? As far as the water is concerned waste water from different adjoining areas are released in the Hatirjheel canals that is not only polluting but also spreading out the stench. The crowds that gather on weekends and holidays should be carefully parking their vehicles as they cause obstructions, too.

I think the worst is yet to come with the rainy season not far away. The stink of pitch-black water and the poor state of law and order seemed to squeeze the joy out of my walking.

The project should be immediately brought under the scanner of a strict monitoring agency. The visitors of Hatirjheel should also act responsibly, especially regarding their movement and parking of vehicles.

Authorities concerned should look into the worsening condition of Hatirjheel as soon as possible.

Shahriar Feroze

Gulshan - 2, Dhaka

Why is Nayeem not playing in T-20 matches?

I was surprised that Nayeem Islam was not selected to play the T-20 matches against Sri Lanka. He bats very well in the lower order, very handy with the ball and his fielding is also exemplary. I believe he should be made a permanent T-20 player for Bangladesh.

Aminur Rahim

New DOHS, Mohakhali, Dhaka

SUST students need more buses

At present there are approximately ten thousand students at Shahjalal University of Science and Technology (SUST). Three fourths of them reside outside the campus for lack of dormitories. But there are not enough transport facilities available for this large number of students. The university has only 6 or 7 buses of its own. But that is not enough to meet the need of the students. Most of the students living outside the campus have to face immense sufferings because of the transport problem. Therefore, we draw the attention of the authorities to increase the number of buses as soon as possible.

Ajijul Hoque

Student of BBA

SUST

Comments on news report, "Selim warns diplomats," published on February 17, 2014

Voice

A dangerous game indeed! The diplomats are well aware that their own governments do not want Bangladesh to become a breeding ground for terrorists and gun smuggling. Then why are they so inclined towards the BNP and Jamaat led parties?

Rahul Ahmed

Because the diplomats know well this 'game of fear' that AL is playing.

Barkat

These AL leaders live far from reality. They are not the true representative of people due to this sham election. They allow Indians to interfere but not others. They banned newspapers and news channels for publishing false news, but they tell lie after lie with complete impunity. Shame on these so-called leaders who are actually power grabbers.

Thunder Voice

No wonder why Bangladesh is still 100 years behind the developed world in science and technology, economy, politics and social development. These kinds of politicians are a shame for the country.

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"Back to barbarism?" (February 17, 2014)

Shahin Huq

Such crimes may increase exponentially, as the government is using the police force to suppress opposition parties. The police and other forces do not have time to address the deteriorating law and order situation in the country.

Mofi

Oh God, it's beyond any limit. Will these criminals get punishment? When?

Goldenbangla2014

Down with the barbarian sadists. I hope they get RLI (rigorous life imprisonment)!

Shapath

Oh! The first thought that comes to my mind is: how can people be so cruel? Then I remembered, men have always been taught to be stronger than women, to dominate women in our society. This is the end result.