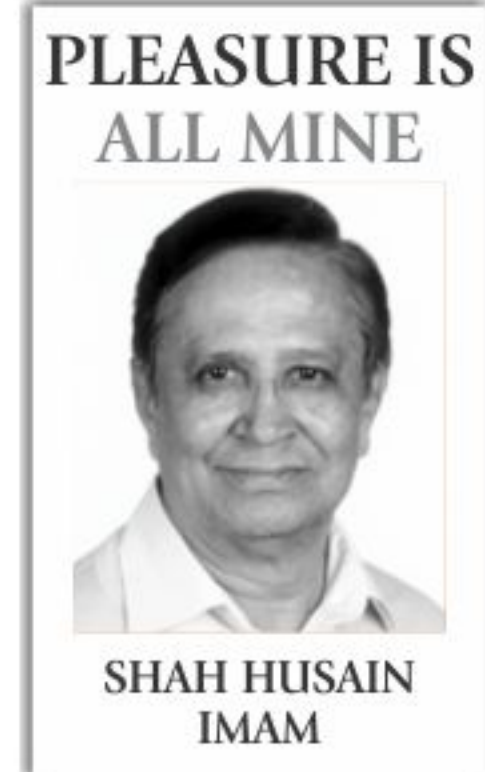


Rise of far right in the polls?



SHAH HUSAIN IMAM

Like it or not, it seems like the first wave if you consider more than 300 seats that will be up for grabs in the remaining upazila elections.

THAT the BNP-led alliance fared better than the ruling AL-led alliance in the first phase of the upazila polls was not entirely unexpected. But what has surprised many is the 12 chairman's posts bagged by the Jamaat-e-Islami. Let's not forget its tainted image centring around its terrorisation campaign during the countryside blockades, and the court's ruling on cancellation of party registration which is now before the Appellate Division for final adjudication. In spite of all this, the party's good showing as partner of BNP which had been under considerable pressure both internally and externally to delink itself from JI is a political statement that cannot be brushed aside.

In any case, this shows how little a bearing national politics has on the local level elections. However much the political parties may have hyped their backing of certain candidates, the fact remains that local factors determined the voter choices at the polls as these always did in the past. Some results will support this contention. Jamaat won in Nilphamari and Gopalganj, famous for their high-profile AL association. Conversely, Ashashoni upazila of Satkhira, known as a stronghold of Jamaat, has elected an AL-backed candidate. Abhoynagar upazila which hogged the news headlines because of minority persecution has chosen a

BNP-backed candidate as chairman. Surprisingly, two of the BNP candidates who had walked out midway through the polls have come out winners. You can even explain this apparent deviation by factoring in local predictions.

Multiple contestants including party rebels in the fray on the one hand gave a wider range of choices to the electorate and, on the other, the votes that could have gone either to the winning or the losing side in straight fights were split among many. It was highly competitive but may not have been a true measuring rod of relative popularity of one candidate vis-à-vis another. Jamaat may have come out a gainer amid multiple contests.

The constitutionally party-less character of the upazila polls divested the political parties from ensuring single candidate to stand in election in contrast to forcing the rebel candidates to stand down in the national elections as provided for in the amended RPO.

There you face the debate over whether we retain the party-less character of local elections or we allow party nominated candidates to stand for the elections, the latter being the practice in India. Time has come to shed the facade of so-called apolitical local elections behind which we press all the party buttons so as to transform these into elections to be fought on party tickets.

Just to measure Jamaat's rise you have only to recap the 467 upazila polls held in 2009 in which Jamaat secured a total of 20 seats of chairman. But this time in 97 upazila polls Jamaat has bagged 12 seats. Like it or not, it seems like the first wave if you consider more than 300 seats that will be up for grabs in the

remaining upazila elections.

The right and far right camp would, however, like to interpret the results as a reflection of pent up emotion among their supporters relieving itself at the first opportunity of participation in an election.

In this sequel, the message that ought to hit home is that the ruling camp is given to a flair for handling ideological extremism in a way which is perceived at the mass level as being anti-religion. Surely, this is not intended but those who exploit religion for politics are likely to impress on the gullible that that is indeed the case. It is not enough to merely assert that Islam literally means peace, we have to develop a fully-fledged ideological stance based on the quintessence of Islam. Then we disseminate it through an involvement of progressive Islamic scholars who strike a responsive chord in Muslims with a modernist temper.

As a matter of fact, in England highly knowledgeable champions of Islam grumble over the lack of initiative by middle grounders who have seemingly resigned to the perverse and sustained propaganda by a minority of at best 20% of the world's Muslims. The silent majority should be convincingly eloquent to spread the true spirit of Islam which has no place for terrorism and extremism, whether covert or overt.

Along with other countries like Malaysia and Indonesia, known for their moderate and liberal outlook, we may strategise to fend off obscurantism with the inner strength of our religion employed with a new civilisational vigour.

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Mind Your Language



NAVEED MAHBUB

HUMOROUSLY YOURS

URDU, and only Urdu, will be the state language of Pakistan!"

Wonder what went through the mind(s) in coming up with this fateful decision. Myopia? Well, that was not the only instance.

Ego? After all, Bangla did beat the other languages and dialects in the area to the punch in grabbing the Nobel Prize for Literature.

Ardent fans of George Orwell? 1984 saw the successful turning of the English language into a Slim Jim.

The genius in believing that English muffins were invented in England, French fries in France and the guinea pig being from Guinea (and being a pig)?

The paranoia of a language that reads from the left to the right? The decision makers must have counted their blessings that Japan, with its language reading from the top to the bottom, was not a part of the state (separated by a continent).

Was it the difficulty in pronouncing Bangla words (the closest they came to was pronouncing *Bangla as Bungglaaa*), rich with almost twice the letters in its alphabets covering every aspect of pronunciation (ok, we didn't quite cover the eternal dyslexia between 'z' and 'j')?

Was it thinking that there is really no difference between translation and interpretation?

Or was it based simply on humanitarian grounds? If a vegetarian eats vegetables, then a humanitarian eats...

Ugh! Getting complicated!! Just shove it down the throat with a decree. Surely, this will transcend well all throughout the country. So what if the Eastern part is separated by a huge land mass of another country, let alone being of a totally different culture and language? After all, it worked out just fine with English at the Falklands, separated from its source by the Pacific Ocean. Oh wait, that's English, the official international language, spoken even by strange aliens arriving on Earth from a distant dying planet. Bad analogy.

Repercussions? Imagine Mark Zuckerberg disabling the use of LOL and ROFL on Facebook. We're talking about a seventh of the Earth's population united in a cyber protest.

1952 saw exactly that.

The gimmick that took months to put together was translated overnight in the East as a collective, "Over my dead body!"

Literally.

Language is invented by humans, not computers. It is a human right, not to be tampered with by any watchdog. It reflects the creativity of the human race, which of course isn't a competitive race at all. Language is living and dynamic -- the only constant thing about it is change. Sure, there is the ever present battle between the purist and the progressive. That is fine, as anything short of that, and we're looking at the longevity of Latin and Sanskrit, despite their inherent beauty and richness. That is why we see *Google* and *Selfie* in our every day lexicon (and in the Oxford English Dictionary) -- something that makes the 1952 powers-that-be turn in their graves.

And so, no court ruling can change the way we speak. Nor can forcing the non-use of English, as was the drive a couple of decades ago (while sending their own kids overseas), position us well in a competitive world. We may have realised our folly, as seen by the stampede to learn English overnight for just 800 Takas (or your money back).

The practice of a language is not a mutually exclusive proposition. This gives us the rare upper hand of empowering us into becoming perfectly bi-lingual. After all, what do you call someone who knows just one language? English!

So, today, it is not only a tale of two languages, but of all languages. On the International Mother Language Day, it is not only just Bangladesh, but the whole world salutes you -- Salam, Barkat, Rafiq, Jabbar...

The writer is an engineer & CEO turned comedian (by choice), the host of NTV's *The Naveed Mahbub Show* and the founder of *Naveed's Comedy Club*. E-mail: naveed@naveedmahbub.com

First round of upazila elections: An appraisal

A.T.M. SHAMSUL HUDA

UPAZILA elections are very important for the democratic process of our country because upazila is one of the pillars of the local government administration. This is the election where people can directly see the impact of their votes whereas the result of the national assembly elections seem too far to them. That's why we see great enthusiasm among general people for upazila polls.

This time, upazila elections have special significance because the major opposition party and its alliance did not participate in the recent national elections to the parliament. That election was marred by very low turnout, large scale violence and violations of electoral rules. So it was a real challenge for the government and the Election Commission (EC) to hold free and fair upazila elections within one and half months. They also had to address two other important challenges: apprehension of violent attack against members of minority communities, as it happened during the 2013 national elections, and concern about safety of women voters.

Thanks to all the political parties that they decided to contest in the elections and ensured peaceful environment for voters to come and vote. It seems from various reports that the government and administration also employed satisfactory level of security measures. But there are also reports of rigging, violence and intimidation in at least 65 centres. One cannot ignore this large number of incidents. It is not an encouraging record for the EC. The EC should have taken extra precaution in these centres. Usually, the EC has a list of violence prone electorates. For example, it is known from election history that Bhola is a difficult area. So the EC usually takes special security measures in Bhola.

Upazila elections are staggered elections. The EC does not need to use all its resources, like in national assembly elections. So it can plan adequate deployment of security and polling staff. EC can quickly evaluate their performance in a round and take corrective measures for the next round. I hope the EC will review the situation of these 65 centres and ensure better security for the next round of upazila elections.

One important aspect of upazila election is that it is non-political in nature. But in reality we see that political parties have done many things that are not morally and legally right. They tried to pick candidates according to their choice. There is no problem in having many candidates because



voters usually know details about each of the candidates. They can pick good candidates from many contenders. Political parties should have stayed out of maneuvering and influencing the elections. The EC ought to have taken up the issue with the political parties and urged them to stay away.

In India, local level elections are held on political basis. If our political parties genuinely feel that local level elections should be held on political basis then the law can be changed. Without changing laws, interference in local elections is illegal and contradictory. It actually hurts our democratic institutions.

Upazila Parishads are kept powerless and dysfunctional. If the government does not empower the upazilas with adequate decision making power they will remain just as another adjunct in the administrative hierarchy. In this situation, holding upazila election will be waste of time and resources and the ultimate result will be regressive. There should be a clear division of labour between MPs and upazila chairmen so that MPs cannot dictate or create hindrances for the chairmen.

If you see the result of the first round of upazila elections from the perspective of national politics, it is really difficult to measure the success of the major political parties. In national elections, political parties can control the number of candidates. Each party gives nomination to one candidate and other candidates of the same party have to withdraw from the election. But in upazila election, votes of a party get divided because there can be multiple candidates from one party. I remember that, in a municipal election in Bhairab, which was a stronghold of AL, AL lost because they had three candidates. But the total number of votes of the three AL candidates was more than that of the winning BNP candidate.

BADIUL ALAM MAJUMDER

THE recent upazila elections were held in time, and can be said to be a positive thing since the tenure of the upazila parishads was coming to an end. It's not possible to form the upazila parishad without elections, and it's a constitutional obligation too. Moreover, as per our constitution, it's mandatory to have upazila parishads.

We are concerned at the allegations of vote rigging, anarchy and unruly behaviour of the ruling party in some upazilas. Almost none among the few thousand elections that were held in Bangladesh since October, 2008 saw any violence, so we were optimistic that the culture of violence had finally been curbed, but it did not happen, as we saw from the recent elections. More specifically, with the last parliamentary elections held on January 5, we are witnessing the return of the culture of violence.

It should also be noted that the Election Commission (EC) failed to perform as per expectations. The EC, if it had intended, could have ensured security in all the 97 upazilas more effectively. If it had wanted to, the EC could have prevented the incidents of ballot box snatching, fake voting and ousting of rival candidates with proper deployment of law enforcers. The situation in 35 centres of the Sonatola upazila especially was not in favour of the voters. The 11 upazilas where the local wings of the BNP had declared *hartal* were the ones that seemed chaotic.

The Chief Election Commissioner's (CEC) declaration that the local election was a non-partisan one was, perhaps, a big contradiction as we saw how actively the political parties had

participated by nominating their candidates with a festive mood. The CEC's comment about being indifferent towards election results and doing nothing other than holding elections sounded as if the Commission had no other duties. In fact, the EC's main job is to ensure acceptable elections by making sure that all parties participate. It is supposed to function as a constitutional establishment.

As far as the election results are concerned, it is evident that it represents BNP's sequential victory over its arch rival AL. Beginning with the mayoral elections until the last upazila elections, it's BNP that has been taking the upper hand. The results from the recently concluded elections have a significance that should be noted with importance. There was a popular perception that BNP has been dismantled, disorganised and demoralised; the results have, however, proved it to be wrong. BNP was neither outwitted nor manoeuvred into obliteration. From some of the speeches delivered by the ruling party members, it appeared as if BNP didn't exist at all. And we now see that BNP is still more popular than AL when it comes to local elections.

The disturbing fact is that candidates backed by Jamaat-e-Islami, a key ally of the BNP-led alliance, won 12 chairman posts. Because of all the violence committed by Jamaat, we had not expected such performance by the Islamist party. Another point is that both the parties had to make hectic efforts to select single candidate from their respective sides.

The recently held elections have some implications that are not positive in some cases. For instance, from the nature and outcome of the elections it cannot be said that future elections at the national level will be all-inclusive in nature. Then again, local elections are not indicative of a credible national poll in the future.

In the end I would say that, with the 15th Amendment in effect, a change in governance by holding free, fair and credible elections is not possible. I think some fundamental changes in the 15th Amendment -- regarding the election time government -- are needed with the help of another amendment. And the EC must exercise its authorities while behaving more responsibly.

The writer is Secretary of Shujan, Citizens for Good Governance.

QUOTABLE Quote

Inferiors revolt in order that they may be equal, and equals that they may be superior. Such is the state of mind which creates revolutions.

Aristotle

CROSSWORD by Thomas Joseph

ACROSS

- Heels
- Genetic copy
- Hosni's predecessor
- Reclusive sort
- Long attack
- 44th president
- Finished off
- NHL team
- NHL team
- Jargon suffix
- Concept: Prefix
- Melody
- Carnival attraction
- Cell feature
- Handful of
- Winter blanket
- In the past
- NHL team
- NHL team
- Workout unit
- Bygone
- Steakhouse order
- Scoundrel
- Kenya neighbor
- Cab costs
- Dissolve

DOWN

- Hacienda house
- Writer Brookner
- Nerdy fellow
- Decline
- Satiated
- Timber wolf
- Running wild
- Formidable rival
- Pencil part
- Wanes
- Sugar suffix
- Relieve
- They have needs for
- reeds
- King's finery
- "Hmmm ..."
- Cobbler's tool
- Remote
- Negative link
- Eat away
- Kidney-related
- Wasn't thrifty
- Heredity unit
- Cuts off
- Lazy fellow

YESTERDAY'S ANSWER

10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33	34	35
36	37	38	39	40	41	42	43	44	45	46	47	48	49	50	51	52	53	54	55	56	57	58	59	60	61

CRYPTOQUOTE

JS R UZTRI ZFCRSQT, TRQG LTZOFS YROJQRXXA LXRAO R LRZI IGRI IGT FIGTZ ZTRXXA XJWTO.

- TXJMRYTIG ROGXTA

YESTERDAY'S CRYPTOQUOTE: Choose the life that is most useful, and habit will make it the most agreeable. Francis Bacon

BEETLE BAILEY by Mort Walker

HENRY by Don Trachte

YESTERDAY'S ANSWER

DEBATE	SCOT
ARABIA	CHOW
BATONS	HOHO
USED	UP
LIFT	USHER
ILL	HANSOLO
BIO	OREUSA
RAPTOR	SIR
ADHOC	SEES
OF	HELP
OEUF	DILATE
FUSE	GEISHA
TREE	ESTHER

A XYDLBAAXR is LONGFELLOW

One letter stands for another. In this sample, A is used for the three L's, X for the two O's, etc. Single letters, apostrophes, the length and formation of the words are all hints. Each day the code letters are different.