

Non-students rule the roost

Elected bodies should replace selected ones

WITH non-students still hanging on to leadership positions, many student bodies active in the universities and different educational institutions have lost their student character. It is hardly surprising that these student organisations, which are out of touch with general students, cannot serve the interests of the student community.

It could be learnt from a recent report that many of the leaders of Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD), the student wing of BNP, are over 40 years of age, while around a third of the central committee members of this student body have entered married life.

This is very unfortunate. Alienation of the major student organisations from the common students is also the reason why these student bodies have become a mere handmaiden of politics in power. A corollary of this state of affairs is that they have turned the educational campuses into a hotbed of violence, corruption and crime. Which is why student organisations have now become a mere shadow of their glorious former self.

This degrading trend among student bodies needs to be reversed. What is of crucial importance is to rid student politics of pollution. To that end, university and college authorities should make arrangements for holding long pending elections to hall, college and university unions with the Duscus election at the apex.

Also, the student bodies should practice intra-organisational democracy based on election rather than selection.

Industrial parks underperforming

Improper planning to blame

WHEN the news surfaced that more than a quarter of the 74 industrial parks under the stewardship of Bangladesh Small and Cottage Industries (BSCIC) were established without having undergone any feasibility study, we are not at all surprised that these special zones are performing below par. The whole idea of establishing these special zones was to foster the growth of small and medium enterprises. Yet, the lack of planning and muscling in of bigger industries to gain foothold in these parks have defeated the purpose to a large extent.

A recent study has found that most industrial parks suffer from poor infrastructure support in terms of power and communication. That explains why many entrepreneurs have chosen not to set up shop there. While the plots were designed for small scale enterprises, we are astonished to find that large industry has made inroads into these estates by purchasing numerous plots over time to transform them into a single plot. Needless to say such unscrupulous activity could not have occurred without the connivance of some BSCIC officials.

Looking beyond the problems related to infrastructure and unauthorised practices, policy support in terms of easy access to credit sorely needed by small enterprises has been missing from inception of many of these parks. All this goes to show lack of interest at policy level towards small and medium enterprises. Industrial parks constitute a serious investment of public funds. We would urge BSCIC to treat the matter seriously as such estates are ideal for food, poultry and fishery sectors.

Enforcement of traffic rules: Need of the hour

RIDWAN QAUIUM

THE rate of road accidents in the capital city has been quite high for some time. Vehicles violating traffic signals, traveling on the opposite side/wrong side of the road, speeding and reckless driving, and illegal parking are common in the capital as there is reluctance among road users to follow traffic rules because they know that they generally do not have to face the dire consequences for not following traffic rules. Violation of traffic rules, reckless and aggressive behaviour of all road users, including motorised and non-motorised vehicles and pedestrians, are some reasons for the high road accident rate in Dhaka. Enforcing traffic rules may help to curb the road crash rate and also help to generate revenue for the city.

It is quite difficult to escape the law in the developed cities after violating the traffic rules. The severity of the consequence of violating traffic rules encourages road users to abide by the rules and drive more sensibly. Traffic violators are hardly penalised in Dhaka, and this must change as it entices people to violate traffic rules. Enforcing traffic rules will not only help to reduce the road crash rate but also help to reduce congestion and improve traffic operation.

In developed cities, money that is received as fines from traffic violators is used for maintenance of roads and enhancing the capacity of the traffic police system, such as acquiring radar or laser gun to measure speed of traveling vehicles, installing red light camera and acquiring other necessary tools and technology to enforce traffic law. Several roads in Dhaka are in poor condition due to lack of maintenance for several years. In addition, the capacity of the traffic police in Dhaka maybe limited due to a shortage of manpower and modern equipment, tools, vehicles and technology to catch traffic signal violators and speed-limit violators. Enforcing traffic rules will provide an extra source of revenue for the city, which may be used for maintenance purposes and to upgrade and enhance the capacity of the traffic police force. Therefore, to reduce mayhem on the roads in Dhaka, there is no other option but to enforce the traffic rules.

The writer is a transportation engineer working in Thailand.

UZ elections: Will AL strategy pay off?



THE second phase of upazilla elections starts today. And although it is a tad premature to draw any definitive conclusion from the results of the first phase of UZ elections held on February 19, less than 25% of the total UZs were involved in the first phase, there are nonetheless some very interesting phenomena that one can see in the results of the 97 UZ polls.

It must have surprised many to see the EC announce the UZ election schedule. And one cannot be faulted for discerning motives behind this. Apparently, the plans were devised by the ruling party which was wallowing in the notional victory in the January 5 elections, which they managed to pull off keeping the main opposition out of it. The EC's haste with the upazilla election was quite in contrast to its indifference to the Dhaka Municipal election that has been due for over five years. In fact, quite contrary to the PM's expressed aversion to the idea of non-elected persons holding statutory posts, the now bifurcated Dhaka City Corporations are headed by government nominees. And the idea behind the bifurcation was not entirely due to the government's concern for bettering the quality of public service.

So what was the EC's hurry so soon after an election, the conduct of which did nothing to redeem the image of the EC? Well it was not as much the EC's as it was the AL's. It was not unnatural for the AL to be overcome by complacency after having, what they thought, routed the BNP in the battle of attrition that cost the country dearly. It was, therefore, the right time to deliver the killer blow, the coup de grâce so to say, to write the party off once and for all. BNP was reeling, and the UZ elections were meant to catch them off guard at a time when the party was busy with putting its house in order.

However, one could not help notice an effort to keep the BNP out of the UZ polls too. The very vituperative, impolitic and sometimes uncivil comments, by very senior members of the AL, questioning why the BNP had chosen to participate in the UZ polls when they had boycotted the national elections, betray their intentions. The only conclusion that one can draw from it is that the AL was not quiet sure of the results of the UZ polls and hoped to provoke the BNP enough to boycott the UZ elections too.

The result of the first phase is not surprising. It belies the conclusion of several opinion polls, held soon after



January 5, that had the BNP participated in the parliament elections it would have garnered at least five percent fewer votes than AL.

There are many critics of the BNP who fail to see the reason for the party boycotting the national election and feel that they might have carried the day had they chosen to take part. It is very difficult to provide an adequate answer to "what if." As for me I am reminded of a comment, purportedly by Chou-en-Lai, who, when asked what he thought of the consequences of the French Revolution, replied that it was too early to tell. It may be too early to say what consequences the BNP might have to endure for boycotting the January 5 election.

The ruling party has used the results as a saving grace, made a virtue of it and claimed that free and fair election was possible with the incumbent in office. The BNP, on the other hand, have said that the margin would have been more had the AL cadres not been able to get their way in

many polling centers. The Jatiyo Party, having played the most dubious and double role in the parliamentary elections, is a moribund party and thus may not support the idea of an immediate election.

But the joker in the pack was Jamaat. And much as some would like to brush its performance aside, the phenomenon must be analysed seriously. A political party that was on the run literally, having invited the wrath of not only the public but also the law enforcing agencies, its garnering 12% of the seats, cannot be discarded out of hand. And they did not ride on the BNP's back either.

Thus, one wonders whether the AL will get expected dividends from its strategy of holding the UZ election now. Or, on the contrary, it will have provided the scope to BNP and Jamaat to regain lost grounds.

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Who won the first round!

MOZAMMEL H. KHAN

THE first round of upazilla elections is over. The BNP and its ally the Jamaat-e-Islami (JI) won the highest number of posts in the elections conducted in 97 upazilas. Since it was a local body election, it will be somewhat premature to carry out critical and microscopic analyses of the results at this time without knowing the local issues which took centre-stage in different upazilas. The reactions of different stakeholders during and after the elections could be summarised as follows:

When the vote casting was going on the BNP Joint Secretary General Ruhul Kabir Rizvi said in a press conference: "It has been proved today that the upazila elections are just a continuation of the January 5 [national] election. Everyone should now get an idea what would have happened to the BNP if it took part in the January 5 poll. That free and fair elections are not possible without a non-partisan government has been proved yet again today." However, after the elections results were known and when the BNP won more posts than its arch rival the AL, the BNP acting Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir went somewhat overboard and claimed: "If the first phase of upazila parishad elections were 'fair', the BNP would have won 95% of the chairman posts."

The ruling AL, however, said the first phase of the upazila elections was free and fair and BNP's allegations about the polls were a "sheer lie." "We have made many complaints to the Election Commission (EC). In some places, our activists were thrown out of the polling centres by BNP and Jamaat-e-Islami men," H.T. Imam, co-chairman of party's election steering committee, told journalists at a press briefing after the voting had ended. Imam alleged that BNP was trying to sell the lie and claimed that law enforcers had thrown AL supporters out of many polling centres. He, however, expressed satisfaction over the independent role played by the EC.

Ironically, JI did not have any reactions vis-à-vis its unprecedented and unexpected victory.

"The EC was successful in holding elections to 97 upazila parishads in a free and fair manner," said Chief Election Commissioner Kazi Rakibuddin Ahmad. "The first phase of the elections was held peacefully, with some stray incidents of violence," he told reporters on the evening of the election day at the EC Secretariat's media centre. About the BNP's allegations of vote rigging, he said: "Local government elections are non-partisan in nature. So it is not of much importance if any political party raises any allegation. Rather, a candidate can raise allegations. We have taken their allegations seriously."

No reports or reactions were available from the election observer groups except for the BROTEE, which disclosed in a preliminary report that, according to the 330 observers it had employed in 24 upazilas, voters were free to cast their votes. The presence of voters, including women voters, was noteworthy and spontaneous. There were a few stray incidents of clashes between the supporters of rival candidates. However, the EC was firm in quelling the clashes and taking actions as per law. The law enforcing authorities were quick in dispensing justice on the spot. This was supported by a report of The Daily Star, which said that a number of AL activists were jailed and fined on the spot for various offenses.

So what does the whole process mean for the different stake holders? For BNP, the results worked as a revitalising force for its adherents and for the party, which had been demoralised following the January 5 election. It also gave a

clear message to the party's supreme leader that the pro-election party's decisions should be guided more by the grassroots supporters of the party, not by the former pro-Chinese pro-revolutionary 'intellectuals' whose 'love' for BNP is solely due to their 'detraction' for its rival. As per a report of The Daily Star, it talked to either the presidents or the general secretaries of BNP's 15 district units. They all said Khaleda should have "kept a second option" before boycotting the elections when it became clear that Sheikh Hasina would not accept the opposition's demand for holding the polls under a non-party administration. The most challenging aspect for BNP would be to convince people, both at home and abroad, that a nonpartisan CTG is indeed required to hold a free and fair election. So, in the event of a midterm election, BNP would have no option but to accept the PM's earlier formula of an all-party interim government, not the CTG it has been demanding so far.

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AL, even in defeat, can boast that a free and fair election is indeed possible while Sheikh Hasina remains the PM. It will take away the wind from the BNP's sail once and for all. In January 5 election, the ruling alliance did not get the opportunity to prove that a free and fair election is indeed possible under a so-called all-party government, which it has done now. By the same token, the opposition at that time, through their nonparticipation, also did not get the opportunity to prove otherwise.

all. In January 5 election, the ruling alliance did not get the opportunity to prove that a free and fair election is indeed possible under a so-called all-party government, which it has done now. By the same token, the opposition at that time, through their nonparticipation, also did not get the opportunity to prove otherwise. From that perspective, AL's claiming victory carries genuine merit. Also, AL can take solace from the fact that there was no opportunity for the opposition to use the 'war crimes trials,' its trump card, in the local election.

The EC did a superb job in this phase of the upazila election, notwithstanding the ceaseless allegations of its detractors. It could further strengthen itself in the successive phases of the process.

For JI, it is all victory. The sweet victory for JI came as a stunning surprise for its friends and foes alike. It would be premature to pass any comment on it without further research on the causes behind its electoral success.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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'Gunde' distorts history

The Hindi film 'Gunde' has aroused huge controversy. It is a complete distortion of the historical facts of our Liberation War. It shows that the War of 1971 was between India and Pakistan. And Bangladesh was born as a consequence. What an unscrupulous concoction by the Yash Raj Films! Have not they vilified the image of Bangladesh? The film should be censored for further screening. I hope the film producer and the Indian government will look into the matter and take necessary steps to save the dignity of Bangladesh.

Sayed
On e-mail

Replace 'BAN' with BD or BGD for Bangladesh

Have you ever wondered why the short form of 'Bangladesh' is written as 'BAN' in cricket? We see this during the live telecast of matches. The same is written on <http://www.espncricinfo.com>. We are the only cricket playing nation whose short name (BAN) actually forms an English word which has a negative meaning.

The English word 'ban' means 'an official order that prevents something from being used or done,' 'expel from a community or group,' or 'prohibit especially by legal means or social pressure'. It's not that they use the first 3 letters of a country's name in case of all countries: Sri Lanka is not written as 'SRI' but 'SL'; New Zealand is not written as 'NEW' but 'NZ'.

My point is, since the word 'BAN' has a negative meaning, why not shorten the name Bangladesh as 'BD' or 'BGD'? We've got so many people in the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) and there are former cricketers, commentators, politicians, journalists, fans; why hasn't anyone ever raised this question? Why haven't we ever felt offended? Why haven't the Bangladesh cricket fans ever protested?

Mohibul Islam Masum
Faculty member of a private university and former Immigration Visa Team Leader, U.S. Embassy Dhaka

Extortion using elephants!

Nowadays on Dhaka streets a couple of persons are seen riding 2 or 3 big elephants. They block the roads and ask for money from the passers-by and the car owners. It is nothing but extortion. They do not move their elephants until they get the money. As a result, road traffic gets stuck for a long time. I have seen these elephants in Kalyanpur, Shyamoli, Gulshan, Banani, etc., areas. Please stop these extortionists immediately.

Shazzad
Gulshan-2, Dhaka

Comments on news report, "Police cite 160 attacks on Hindus," published on February 23, 2014

Shahin Huq

Is there any report stating the number of attacks on the Muslims in Bangladesh in the said time period? Have the attacks on Hindus occurred because of their religious affiliation or because of ordinary disputes? Associating BNP-Jamaat with attacks on Hindus is part of the larger politics, because any fair survey will show that Awami League men are the worst attackers on Hindus.

Mehreen Alam

If Jamaat and BNP men were behind "most" attacks, then who were behind the other attacks and how many of the attackers were arrested? I believe the court would be interested in factual evidences and exact numbers, not in which party was mostly involved.

"Polls mostly fair with some anomalies: EWG" (February 23, 2014)

Aasfisarwar

The irregularities are not minor when you add the reportable incidents: (40+38+63+27+55+16+31+45+17) = 332 out of 1000 polling centres. It is 36%. The additional people were present in 13% polling centres and if you add these two figures it is 49%, meaning irregularities were certainly major not minor by all counts.

Deep Purple Blue

EWG should have reported how many upazila elections were fair and how many were flawed.

"Haze of denial and complacency" (February 24, 2014)

Waliul Haque Khondker

Jamaat's 'popularity' in the recently held UZ polls is quite surprising! But would it be fair to give credit to the party for such a victory? UZ polls are local body elections, where voters vote for candidates through personal knowledge about the quality and capability of the individual candidate. This could be an area of survey to determine if the voters cast ballots based on the party affiliation of the candidates or by the quality and popularity of the individual candidate alone!