

Upazila polls end on disquieting note

Erosion of electoral process worrying

THE fifth and last phase of the upazila polls concluded on Monday amid rigging and violence under the seemingly helpless watch of the law-enforcers. Evidently, the incidence of violence and irregularities has progressively been on a rising curve, which reached the peak in the final phase. Many voters have not only been virtually disenfranchised, their faith in the electoral process has touched a new low.

All the incidents of capturing polling centres, driving away of voters and rival candidates' polling agents from polling booths and stuffing of ballot boxes with fake votes, and so on, with impunity have only destroyed the sanctity and integrity of the upazila electoral exercise.

The EC by its brazen-faced complacency about the elections is only trying to defend the indefensible.

The fact that instances of vote-rigging with attendant violence increased from the third phase of the polls to the fifth phase is also indicative of the ruling party's desperation to see its favourite candidates win by fair means or foul. An impression that is difficult to shrug off.

So, neither the EC nor the ruling party can wash their hands of the dismal state the election process has been relegated to.

If it is to ensure the credibility of future elections, the EC must probe the incidents of rigging and irregularities and set an example by bringing the culprits to justice.

Lack of land holding up industrialisation

Could unused public land be answer?

THAT is what the major business associations have proposed to the government. The issue of diverting agricultural land to industry has always been a contentious issue. In a country with more than 160 million mouths to feed, the continuous depletion of agro land has become a major headache for policymakers. Indeed, the lack of suitable land has been cited as a major reason for the lack of foreign direct investment in the country.

In the midst of this entire crisis, the government has been sitting on a large estate in Savar for the proposed relocation of the leather industry. That saga has gone on for more than a decade over the question of who will pay for the establishment of central effluent treatment plant. Similarly, there is in government possession significant amounts of land in and around closed nationalized mills. Needless to say, the issues of dependable power and requisite infrastructure are also major impediments. However, without land, which remains the primary requirement for setting up any industry, there can be no movement forward on any meaningful industrial investment, be it domestic or foreign.

Given that land scarcity has reached critical levels, some basic rethinking about the usage of land lying unutilised in government possession be thought of as sites for economic zones and industrial estates.

No-medicine medicine of homeopathy

ALAMGIR KHAN

HOMEOPATHY, founded by Hahnemann, is derived from the principle of 'like cures like.' Its other fundamental principle is the 'law of infinitesimals,' according to which the smaller the quantity of the substance in a solution, the stronger is its effect upon the patient. These are extraordinary ideas. The basis of the law of infinitesimals postulates that, though the quantity of the medicine becomes non-existent after a certain point of dilution in water, the healing power of the substance exists more strongly in the 'memory' of the water. All these are not only extraordinary ideas but also bizarre, and not corroborated by modern science. Yet, there are millions of people who take homeopathic medicine and will profess that it cured their disease. Thus, homeopathy, in the garb of science, defies the established logic of science and yet has supporters all over the world proclaiming their experiences of its power of healing.

Mr. M.H. Haider struggled with this old homeopathic dilemma in his article 'Homeopathy: faith, fact and fiction' in *The Daily Star* (February 18). His concluding lines reveal the contradictions: "Perhaps one day, homeopathy will gain mass acceptance of scientists and laymen alike. Perhaps it'll always remain an issue of debate. Between these two extremes will be people ... who cherish homeopathy having a beautiful magic of its own."

Not all are in such a pickle. *The Daily Star* issue of October 18, 2010, reported that a team of Rab busted a fake homeopathic medicine factory. One reader posted a comment online regarding this news, asking: "What differentiates 'fake' homeopathy from 'real' homeopathy?" Ben Goldacre, the author of the book *Bad Science* and the *Bad Science* column writer in *The Guardian*, finds no difference, and wrote in an article in *Lancet* ("Benefits and risks of homeopathy," November 17, 2007) that trials showed homeopathy had no more benefit than a placebo.

Homeopathy's success points to the inherent failures of the capitalist system of mainstream medicine, which is mainly a big business run for profit. Homeopathy's low cost, the close doctor-patient relation through the long discussion between them, and the harmlessness of its no-medicine medicine are its advantages over allopathic treatment.

Until and unless mainstream treatment can cure itself from the ills of high cost, lack of compassionate doctor-patient talk, and the harm caused by wrong prescriptions, and can catch up with homeopathy on these fronts, there will always be people who will keep seeking the magical power of healing from homeopathy.

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A brief history of distortions

GROUND REALITIES



SYED BADRUL AHSAN

THE mother and son team dominating the Bangladesh Nationalist Party has been stirring up fresh controversy over matters settled in history. They have suddenly stumbled on the truth that Ziaur Rahman was Bangladesh's first president, that indeed he was the man who first proclaimed the independence of this country.

We are not surprised, for distortions and lies have with a fair degree of regularity drilled holes in the history of the subcontinent. In modern times, the very first attempt to undermine history came in 1905, when the British colonial power decided that Bengal needed to be partitioned in the interest of a better administration of the region. Well, governance does not have to depend on an exercise of authority through effecting a shrinkage in area of the territory concerned, but the colonisers did it anyway. That original distortion was pushed aside, thankfully, six years later in 1911.

A clear distortion of history and heritage became the goal of the All-India Muslim League when it decided, at its March 1940 session in Lahore, that India needed to be partitioned in order for Muslims to have a state of their own. The suave, educated Mohammad Ali Jinnah came forth with the discovery that religious communities were indeed nations. And so it was that he needed Pakistan for his 'Muslim nation.' The ramifications of that act are out there, seventy four years later.

A major distortion of history resorted to by Jinnah came in 1946, when he deftly and stealthily replaced the phrase 'independent states' recorded in the 1940 Lahore Resolution with 'independent state' and tried to pass off the original phrase as a typing error. It is amazing that the illustrious figures of the Muslim League had not noticed the error in 1940 or over the subsequent six years, that only Jinnah was wise enough to spot the mistake.

Historical distortion hit a new low when the ruling circles of newly independent Pakistan convinced themselves that an Islamisation of the country was in order. And the one surefire way of going about that was to inform Pakistanis that Urdu was the language of the Muslim state, to a point where every other language, especially Bengali, could be pushed aside. Pakistan paid the price for that bad move. Jinnah, Liaquat and Nazimuddin forcefully argued the case for Pakistan in the 1940s. Ironically, they were to become the agents responsible for the future destruction of the country through their unabashed irresponsibility.

History took a new battering in 1956, when Huseyn Shaheed Suhrawardy in grandiose manner declared that Pakistan's constitution, adopted nine years into inde-

pendence, had guaranteed ninety eight per cent autonomy for the Bengalis of East Pakistan. The truth was something else: the 1956 constitution demeaned the Bengalis through ignoring their numerical majority and pulling them down to the level of minority West Pakistan. And lumping the Punjab, Sind, Baluchistan and the North-West Frontier Province into a monstrosity called One Unit was one more shining instance of the state playing footsie with history.

When the Ayub Khan regime, through information minister Khwaja Shahabuddin, decreed a ban on Rabindranath Tagore in 1967, it was clearly trying to fashion history in its own mould. Tagore, the imbeciles in the junta let it be known, was a Hindu who had no place in Muslim Pakistan. Tagore was banished, officially. For their part, Bengalis made it clear that the ban was of no consequence, that their heritage was their own to nurture and uphold.

In free Bangladesh, history was dealt a body blow in August 1975 when the assassins of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman brought in the slogan 'Bangladesh Zindabad,' in clear imitation of Pakistan, thereby consigning the militant Bengali slogan of *Joi Bangla* to the woods. Within months, the country's first military dictator Ziaur Rahman, through extra-constitutional fiat, knifed socialism and secularism in the constitution to dead meat and brought in clear communal elements to replace them.

In the five years in which Zia wielded power, Bangabandhu and the Mujibnagar government were airbrushed out of history, the Pakistan occupation army was referred to as a mere 'occupation army' and the murderers of the Father of the Nation were sent abroad as diplomats for the country. Bengalis were converted, in ignorant manner, into being Bangladeshis. And Bengali nationalism, long our vocal symbol of patriotism, was replaced by the outrageous concept of 'Bangladeshi nationalism.'

Historical distortion scaled new heights per courtesy of the nation's second military dictator, General Hussein Muhammad Ershad. He decreed that the state needed a faith, and that faith was Islam. The state of Bangladesh donned the attire of religion. For the country, it was a moment of unremitting shame.

Distortion is when foreign diplomats based in Bangladesh condescendingly enlighten us on the 'moderate Muslim state' we have fashioned out of Bangladesh. No one, either in government or in opposition, rebuts that outrage. Someone should be giving these diplomats a pep talk on the history of Bengali secularism. Someone should tell them we are not amused.

Every historical deviant must know that when it comes to a choice between memory and forgetting, we choose to remember.

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Growing dissonance in the BJP

PRAFUL BIDWAI COLUMN



PRAFUL BIDWAI

backing, is now running riot. It has monopolised election-ticket distribution, and marginalised the BJP's entire senior leadership, which had pulled the party up from the abyss of two Lok Sabha seats in 1984.

The veterans include Messrs. L.K. Advani, Jaswant Singh, Murli Manohar Joshi, Kalraj Mishra and Lalji Tandon, all in their seventies or older. Mr. Advani, who wanted to assert his independence by contesting from Bhopal, was forced to fight from Gandhinagar.

The "Iron Man" lumped the insult and "chose" Gandhinagar in keeping with a shoddy RSS-proposed formula. His supporter Harin Pathak was refused Ahmedabad-East despite winning the seat seven times. Yet, he didn't protest.

Mr. Joshi was moved from Varanasi for Mr. Modi's sake. Mr. Mishra was shifted to Deoria, ignoring former state president S.P. Shahi. Mr. Tandon vacated Lucknow for Rajnath Singh, who isn't confident of winning Ghaziabad a second time.

Only Jaswant Singh (and Lalmuni Choubey in Bihar) protested on being refused tickets. Mr. Singh's nomination from Barmer was opposed by Rajasthan Chief Minister-turned-Modi-crony Vasundhara Raje to favour a Congress defector.

Mr. Singh publicly broke down, accused the BJP of "betrayal," and filed his nomination as an independent. Sushma Swaraj alone expressed solidarity with him. Mr. Jaitley advised him to "retract." This only highlights the rifts at the BJP's apex.

The message is clear: these seniors' "experience" doesn't count; they must obey the clique; they perhaps shouldn't expect important portfolios if a BJP-led coalition wins.

The Modi clique is restructuring the BJP's national leadership along the lines of Gujarat, by crushing dissidence and subordinating the party to one person's authoritarianism. Nobody matters in Gujarat except Mr. Modi. He has reduced the RSS to irrelevance there and wants to repeat this nationally.

Even the RSS couldn't have dreamt that its organisational "Fuehrer principle," *ek-chalak anuvartitva* (following one leader), would be realised so grotesquely within the BJP by Mr. Modi.

The RSS appointed the BJP's state and national organisation secretaries a decade ago. It has further tightened its grip as the BJP's ideological mentor, political master and organisational gatekeeper. It now has the last word in every BJP decision.

This secretive "cultural" organisation, which doesn't hold internal elections, now dictates to a party which should have a democratic internal structure under India's electoral law. This huge contradiction warrants serious legal action.

The RSS is culpable too. The ban imposed on it after Gandhi's assassination was lifted on condition that it "should adopt a written ... constitution, restrict itself to culture, forswear violence and secrecy, profess loyalty to India's flag and Constitution and provide for a democratic organisation." It never fulfilled these conditions.

However, the ruling Congress is unlikely to initiate action: why, it hasn't even pursued the "Hindutva" bomb-blast cases -- despite compelling evidence!

Amit Shah's imprint is starkly evident in Uttar Pradesh, where he was sent as chief campaign manager last June. His has run a campaign dedicated to Mr. Modi's election, not the BJP's victory.

He has handpicked all UP candidates on the basis of caste, local base, loyalty to Mr. Modi, etc. He is micro-managing the campaign by trying to revive the defunct party apparatus, pouring in vast sums of money, and spreading communal poison, as in Muzaffarnagar.

Mr. Shah is credited with ruthlessness and great micro-management abilities. But had micro-management been all-important, the BJP wouldn't have won just 15 of Gujarat's 26 Lok Sabha seats in 2009.

Uttar Pradesh is vastly more complex than Gujarat -- with sharp social divides, strong caste/community allegiances, and substantial numbers of upper-caste Hindus, Muslims and Dalits (respectively 21%, 19% and 21% of the population). The results of its multi-cornered contests aren't easy to predict.

In recent years, more than two-fifths of UP's seats have changed hands between parties as vote-shares got translated into seats disproportionately. In 2009, the Congress and the BJP got 18.3% and 17.5% of the vote, but ended up with 21 and 10 seats.

The Samajwadi Party and Bahujan Samaj Party, both strong cadre-based organisations, together polled over 50% of UP's votes. They remain formidable. Nor can the Congress be written off. Although it has lost much popu-

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lar support, it maintains a strong presence in pockets. Its ally Ajit Singh also commands sizeable strength in Western UP.

Mr. Modi's stock has definitely risen in UP after Muzaffarnagar. But it's hard to say that there's a "Modi wave." In fact, the Modi campaign appears to have lost some momentum recently.

Mr. Shah has embarked on a gamble in UP. Whether he will succeed or not remains unclear. What's amply clear is that the BJP will need to win at least 40-45 seats from UP's total of 80, and another 25 or so from Bihar's 40, to approach the 200-seat mark nationally -- even if it performs brilliantly in its "home states" (Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh) and does reasonably well in Andhra Pradesh/Telangana and Karnataka.

In Maharashtra, another key state, the BJP could have done better on its own, but it's allied with the Shiv Sena, which is challenged by the stronger, combative rival Maharashtra Navnirman Sena. This will further increase the BJP's dependence on its UP gamble.

The entry into the BJP of defectors and small parties -- Gen. V.K. Singh, Jagdambika Pal, D. Purandeshwari, and more significantly, the (Kurmi-based) Apna Dal and Ram Bilas Paswan's Lokjanshakti Party -- seems a big gain. But it will probably extract a price too.

That price is internal dissidence and sabotage. This seems to be happening not just in UP, but Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Bihar and elsewhere. How the gains balance the losses still remains unclear.

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LETTERS

TO THE EDITOR
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A memorable

Independence Day

This year's Independence Day will remain memorable. As Bangladesh turned 43, nearly two and half lakh people gathered at the national parade square to take part in the national anthem singing. They sang in unison to make a world record. Let it not be a mere symbolic show of patriotism. Let it mark the beginning of a spirit of fellow feeling and genuine love for the motherland. Let us translate this spirit into action and do something selflessly, just for the benefit of our country.

Zabed Wali
Chittagong

How safe are our spices?

We have learnt from the newspapers that Pran's turmeric powder is not good for health due to its high degree of lead content. From now on, we can stop using Pran's turmeric powder but what about the other brands of spices? Are they free from poisonous substances? BSTI should test all brands of spices, publish the test results and punish the unscrupulous companies for marketing poisonous spices. We want to live a healthy life and don't want to give them any chance to feed us with poison.

Abu Jar Gifari
One-mail

Consistency expected from Tigers

Bangladesh has passed quite a long time in international cricket. But our cricket team's performance is still not satisfying. The recent performance of Bangladesh against Hong Kong and West Indies in T-20 World Cup has really disappointed us. They have also been defeated by India and Pakistan. Although sometimes our team has shown us a ray of hope by beating strong teams, there is no continuity in their success.

We are truly a cricket loving country. We want to see our Tigers playing good cricket consistently. We hope that our Tigers will roar once again in the field to meet our expectations.

Nabila Ahmed
Student of BBA
SUST

Comments on news report, "Rigging spoils AL's image," published on March 27, 2014

Aasfisarwar

When the CG system was scrapped, the intent was clear. As long as AL can hang on to power without people's support, image does not matter. The question remains though, how long?

SM

Well, stuffing ballots and violence was started by AL from the very first election of liberated Bangladesh. (was there any need?) Then it had BAKSAL to make it easier. We remember 90% + voting under the military regimes of Zia and Ershad. Then in '96 and 2014 under BNP and AL. So, we have gone back to our black days -- as Khan Ata said, "Abar Tora Manush Ho". We have a long way to go to be "manush".

S.M. Iftekhar Ahmed

Only a 'section' is irked? Shouldn't they all be ashamed or is it too much to ask to overcome their ego?

"Ban Jamaat" (March 26, 2014)

Komol

Jamaat has emerged as the 3rd largest political party in the upazila elections. Is it justified to ban them?

S.M. Iftekhar Ahmed

Just goes to show that Bangladeshi voters still need to do more research. Jamaat played the religion card for their own benefit and people in the rural areas fell for it. Would they have voted, had they known what Jamaat truly stood for?

Guest

Deport them to the countries that feed them with money and weapon. An elegant religion that had been prominent for science, commerce and its tolerance for other religions became so contentious with prejudiced fanatics that now that some quarters don't hesitate to tag it as 'terroristic'.

S. M. Iftekhar Ahmed

Bangladeshis can be so naive. Just because a party claims to be Islamic doesn't necessarily mean so. Jamaat has been abusing the good name of a peaceful religion like Islam for too long and they have killed innocent people during the Liberation War for their own benefit and amusement.