

## Approaching DCC polls

*BNP should seize the opportunity to re-enter electoral politics*

WE believe that the BNP should participate in the upcoming DCC polls as it presents a good opportunity for the party to engage in the electoral process once again. We can only hope that the BNP has realised that the decision to boycott the elections in January 2014 was a mistake, for it has thrown the party into a wilderness. To be counted in a democracy, there can be no sustainable alternative to participating in the electoral process.

Since 1991, the BNP has been an integral part of the democratic process, being in power twice and in the opposition twice. Now it is in a relatively beleaguered state, with most of its leaders arrested or in hiding. Its senselessly continual blockade and hartal programme, marked by violence and chaos, has not only fizzled out over time, but also caused deaths and maiming of a large number of people. Overall, the party has alienated itself from the public at large. The government has used BNP's violent programmes as a pretext to involve law enforcement bodies arbitrarily and often, in questionable manner.

The elections provide a much-needed opportunity to boost the spirit of party activists and also provide a test of BNP's strength, particularly in light of the fact that it fared well in the local elections that it had previously decided to participate in.

Meanwhile, the government has to ensure fair, free and peaceful DCC elections, if it wishes to prove to the people and the world at large that neutral elections are still possible. At a time when the political horizon looks bleak, a credible and participatory DCC election can surely help clear the deck for a start to constructive politics.

## Deforestation in Bandarban

*Stop plunder of timber resource*

TURNING a blind eye to the laws that govern preservation of forest resources, timber merchants in cahoots with unscrupulous forest department officials are plundering away the trees. This is not only a criminal act but is also costing the government huge loss of revenue. Going by what has been published in this newspaper, reserve forests covering 120,000 acres in Lama, Alikadom, Ruma, Rowangchari and Thanchi upazilas of the district have mercilessly been decimated. Loggers are reportedly felling trees in the thousands of cubic feet almost every night.

We wonder if the environmental consequences of such nefarious activities are of any concern to the relevant department and government bodies responsible for guarding forest resources. Teaks, mahogany and gamer are precious varieties of wood and it takes years to grow these trees. It is not without reason that forests are declared 'reserved' in an effort to protect them and the environment from degradation. When will we learn that forests are a natural barrier against the harsh side of natural calamities?

The most common excuse furnished by the relevant authorities is shortage of manpower and properly equipped and trained guards to stop illegal logging. In our view what is pronounced here is corruptibility and incompetence. It is high time that something was done about this for we cannot afford any complacency over such debilitating disappearance of precious natural forests.

## COMMENTS

**"Tigers out, but not down"**  
(March 20, 2015)

Saifur Rahman

Where was Bangladesh's run chase strategy? Instead of going for the big hits, a sedate start would have been far better. Rohit is an example. He being a big hitter controlled himself very well. If Tamim was at the crease for 25-30 overs picking up singles, the boundaries would have come anyway it would have given us a solid foundation and the Indians a lot to worry. But that was not to be. We lost 2 wickets in 7 overs, the pressure came on and the mid overs were disastrous.

**"30 lakh expats may lose jobs"**  
(March 19, 2015)

Snr Citizen

Seems like we were sleeping or sitting on the issue. Half the job may be given to another supplier in some other country with speed, accuracy, quality and experience of producing such travel documents (MRPs). Please take action immediately.

**"2 Moulvibazar transport workers burnt in sleep"**  
(March 18, 2015)

Toufiq Hasan Protik

Where is the end to these cruelties?

# City elections: A window of opportunity

TOFAL AHMED

THE doors are closed, but a small window seems to be open. It could be a silver lining, it may show a feeble light on the other side of the dark tunnel! I am talking about the elections of the Dhaka and Chittagong City Corporations -- two of the prime cities of the country. The elections are not 'the solution' for the national political crisis, but they may pave or show the way to some extent. The ruling AL has been playing cat and mouse with Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) election for the last six years, which will remain as a black spot in the history of AL's democratic credential. The BNP is also to be blamed, even if not equally, for its indifference and failure in appreciating the problem and also for not launching any movement for the DCC election.

Election, be it local or national, is like a 'lifeline' for the political parties as it creates opportunities to reach out to the electorate and the citizens. It inculcates policy thinking and political maneuvering, activates and encourages competition among the party activists and gradually refines and moderates party persons, personalities and policies. It is also equally true that election brings tension, creates divisions and often incites violence. In the end, election is a milestone every democratic polity has to pass through for having a stable governance system. In Bangladesh, elections and constructive political engagements were so far at bay; elections were merely taken as a short cut to acquire power. Once in power, manipulation of the next election becomes a priority for the incumbents. This has been a vicious cycle in our political history and has taken us from crisis to crisis.

The crisis we are currently facing started in

2006, and with many twists and turns culminated in a deadlock of deadly nature. City Corporation elections in Dhaka and Chittagong have been declared in the midst of all these crises. Is it going to ease or increase the tension? What is there for the feuding and fighting giants in these elections? The ruling party is perceived to be in the most advantageous position as it is in the 'driving seat.' The adversary may seem to be at the receiving end. The above perceptions may not be accepted straight away. The currents and cross-currents of social and political dynamics of a particular time and space can transform advantages into disadvantages, and vice-versa.

My assessment and analysis of the situation is that these three elections can be turned into an opportunity, and there is ample scope for creating a win-win situation for both parties. BNP can inject new life into its movement by remobilising the party and the people. Even if it loses the election it wins the movement. If it wins the election it wins on both counts. It may go through a revitalised resurgence. It has nothing to lose. The AL also wins on all counts. Even if it loses, its democratic credential wins. The biggest win is that violent and deadly political actions will be contained during the elections. The union and pourashava elections are due in 2016, and will be held nationwide. Election-centered constructive engagement in Bangladeshi politics has to be accepted by all, irrespective of position and opposition, for obvious and pragmatic reasons. There is no other way out.

The ruling party has the responsibility of satisfying the people and giving them the confidence and hope that a level playing ground has been ensured for free, fair and participatory election, and that the Election Commission, civil administration, including law enforcing authorities, remain firm for fair

play. Instigative and hate speeches from all quarters have to be restrained. The EC may issue order in this respect banning unacceptable speeches and behaviour. The EC can have continuous dialogues with major parties and should arrange regular press briefings. A strong monitoring team can work for ensuring the enforcement of the Commission's directives. The declaration for removing the posters, signboards and bill boards is a bold and appropriate step which must be heeded. The BNP should talk to the Commission regarding its demands for a level playing field. It may need to separate the issue of local elections from the national. Its position on national electoral process can stand as it is in spite of its participation in the local elections. The way the government has been dealing with the elected mayors, councilors, and the upazila and union parishad chairmen from the opposition is deplorable. In the name of punishing the leaders, they are punishing the people who voted for them. It erodes the confidence of people in the institution and the system.

Bangladesh is a unitary state with unicameral legislature. Local government institutions are one of the vital political institutions through which the practice of political pluralism can get an expression. Space for all parties and people should remain open to participate in local elections, and that will help to sustain our pluralistic social and political space. It can promote balance in the greater polity. A monolithic party structure and imposed indoctrination in the medium and long term cannot hold the society together. We have to learn to live with differences. The city elections may help to some extent towards that direction.

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## Sink or swim: The need for water guardianship

AMINUL ISLAMZ

ACCESS to water for life is a basic human need and a fundamental human right. But leading experts now predict that as early as 2025, large parts of the world could experience perennial water shortages. Even now, around four billion people live in a situation where they don't have enough and suitable water for drinking, generating electricity, agriculture and so on. In fact, just as wars over oil played a major role in 20th-century history, many commentators are now making convincing cases that many 21st century conflicts will be fought over water.

With this rather grave background and with renewed sense of urgency the world is celebrating World Water Day with the theme 'Water and Sustainable Development.' Water is central to the sustainable development of our country, and something that we must all take responsibility for managing properly. As we celebrate World Water Day, we must look to empower communities as water guardians and establish strong national governance structures to protect and sustainably manage our precious water resources for the benefit of all!

In Bangladesh the crisis has some familiar faces. Water bodies such as rivers, canals, haors, etc. are increasingly being encroached upon. Various forms of pollutions and contamination due to industrial and agricultural chemicals, arsenic contamination, impacting etc. are limiting the supply of drinkable water. Additionally, salinity intrusion and water logging in the coastal regions are making the available supply of water unsuitable for many uses. On the other hand, the demand for water is increasing with industrialisation, intensive agricultural practices and population growth. As a result, demand for fresh water con-

tinues to outstrip supply, with the gap growing. If these challenges were not enough, the impact of climate change is set to complicate things further.

The good news is we can solve this. We can overcome adversity. With the Bangladeshi brand of resilience and innovation we can adopt new collaborative models from the grassroots right up to the national level authorities to address the challenge.

Communities can play an important role as local guardians in sustainable water management. National level enforcement agencies are incapable of monitoring and managing the challenge of water pollution, encroachment and salinity intrusion. In contrast, community level interventions have already established credibility. For example, after the oil spill in the Sundarbans in December last year, it was the people from the local area who were the first to respond, whose contributions in part assisted in avoiding a major environmental catastrophe. The Joint UN-GoB Mission recommended an action plan including community preparedness, highlighting appropriate safeguards and mitigation measures to prevent and prepare for oil spills in the Sundarbans and throughout Bangladesh for all significant marine routes.

To this end, empowering communities with the right tools and skills is a useful first step. Building local and regional networks of stakeholders including, community, local government, police and media is a holistic way to tackle the problem. This network can act as a watchdog to crowdsource water management at the grassroots and as a mechanism or conduit for communicating to the national level. Engagement of community organisations in such initiatives can follow the good practices learnt through UNDP's Urban Partnerships for Poverty Reduction programme and many other

international examples of empowerment and participatory resource management.

Local level guardianship must also be supported nationally in a holistic and coordinated way. Having stronger institutional governance at the national scale would help in enforcement of existing laws that help to protect and manage the water resources of Bangladesh. There are three areas which would strongly support the national process, including addressing planning issues, developing an information management system and using community voices and research to inform decision making.

*The master and local plans for water management should be revisited with public participation encouraged in the review and revision process.*

The master and local plans for water management should be revisited with public participation encouraged in the review and revision process. Starting this process will ensure integrity, coordination, and efficiency of the plans, whilst also improving accountability issues associated with their implementation. This will help to keep powerful vested interests in check, and develop an information system that is both a repository of water related information (such as public documents on river boundaries, water related public investments, water quality data) and a platform for

crowdsourced reporting of violations. Such a tool will increase transparency, improve enforcement of existing laws and create greater equity of water resource distribution and access.

The third step is the establishment of an informed decision making process. There should be an independent experts' platform, like that responsible for the 7th Five Year Plan, constituted by the government. This platform should be made up of all the key water actors including the Ministry of Water Resources, Department of Public Health Engineering, City Wasa, Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority, Water Resource Planning Organisation, and the private sector amongst many others. This coordination mechanism of local and national level guardianship must be driven by a result-oriented management structure, in order to deliver the urgent changes needed in the water sector. To support this approach, a recent study compared the water governance and management systems across nearly 30 river basins around the world. The results indicated that governance systems with distributed political power and good co-ordination help to implement the principles of good governance in water management practice.

With a federation of regional community organisations helping to raise local voices to the national level, and stronger institutional governance and national guardianship, protection and management of the water resources of Bangladesh can be achieved, promoting sustainable development for all. Working together, Bangladeshis can accomplish anything.

The writer is the Senior Advisor, Sustainable Development at UNDP Bangladesh. (Opinion expressed, is his own and may not be subscribed by UNDP or any of the member states that it represents.)

\*(Human Development Report 2006).

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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### Printed circuits for aircraft jet engines

This fantastic news item from AFP published in a daily a few days ago is awesome news for the future safety feature of aircraft jet engines. Essentially, conventional electric cables will be replaced by printed wiring circuits. This has already been demonstrated in two prototype jet engines. One is on display at the Australian Air Show, while another is with the French aircraft jet engine maker 'Microturbin' in Toulouse in France.

In my opinion, it is possibly the most revolutionary and a very significant safety development in the modern aeronautic jet engine technology. Among others, apart from weight saving compared to heavily insulation protected aircraft engine cables, it is most advantageous compared to conventional insulation copper wire cables now used in the aircraft engines that can logically eliminate all potential threat of sparking and igniting hazard for aircraft.

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### Reduce diesel price

We know from newspaper reports that petroleum analysts suggest that the government adjust prices of petroleum products on a quarterly basis. But the government generally does not go against the common phenomenon that if prices go up in the international market, we do not raise the domestic prices and if international prices go down, we do not reduce the domestic prices. However, it is learnt from newspaper reports that BPC has to spend Tk 120 billion a year as subsidy which mostly goes to the quick rental power plants. It used to purchase the petroleum fuels at a cost ranging between \$105 to \$107 a barrel a few months back. Now, it purchases a barrel of

petroleum fuel at around \$70 or less. It is true that BPC's liability is gradually shrinking due to the huge gap between the past and the current prices. But the reality is, BPC will fail to reap from it in the long run due to its cash crisis and even limited storage capacity.

It is undeniable that a depressed fuel price provides leverage for the government to keep domestic fuel prices low. And it gives some respite to consumers, particularly the low and fixed income groups who can then spend their savings on other purposes. However, we hope the government would reduce the price of diesel soon for giving some direct benefits of it to the people.

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