

See no evil, hear no evil.....

CEC's comments not in sync with reality

IT is difficult to accept the comments of the CEC that the three city corporation elections were held in a fair and peaceful manner and that there were no threats or anomalies. The elections may have been generally peaceful since there were few instances of violence, and whatever violence there was, was between two groups of the ruling party, but we must take issue with him regarding the anomalies and fairness of the polls.

What prevailed in the polling centres, most of which were taken under control by the ruling party cadres from the very beginning, was intimidation enough. And the many instances of lack of a fair and free atmosphere, broadcast on the electronic media on the day of election and published in many newspapers yesterday, demonstrate the so called free and fairness of the elections. It is regrettable that the EC did not take suo moto cognizance of these.

It would be wrong to correlate the instances of violence with fairness of the polls since the opposition BNP was not in the scene to put up resistance at all, and the actual situation in most centres did not get reported because of the connivance of the agencies with the AL cadres.

The manner in which the elections were conducted has further demeaned the credentials of the state's institutions and agencies. And it has even further discredited the election commission – a situation that bodes very badly for democracy in this country.

It is disappointing that as one of the most important democratic institutions of the state the EC seems to have abdicated its duty to create conditions for the voters to exercise their right. Regrettably, many could not. Refusing to see and acknowledge the reality will not change the facts.

Unprecedented attack on journalists

Media denied free access and prevented from covering city polls

IT is disquieting to see that the media was conspicuously barred from properly covering the city polls. They were denied access to polling centres and in many cases came under attack by ruling party cadres. Unfortunately, the election administration and police showed an apathetic attitude towards these acts of intimidation. It has been alleged that in some cases they colluded with the perpetrators.

According to various reports, at least 10 journalists were assaulted by ruling party men. In many cases they threatened journalists not to enter the polling booths and drove out those who were already inside. Some media persons were robbed of their mobiles, cameras, phones, handbags and cash. Two reporters of this newspaper were beaten by BCL men in a polling centre at Dhaka University and several others including two photographers were prevented from covering the elections. Though the Election Commission was repeatedly informed about these incidents they did not take any effective action.

We strongly condemn such blatant attacks on the media right under the nose of the Election Commission and law enforcing agents. The EC as well as the government cannot shrug off their responsibility of ensuring a favourable election environment for the media. Media plays the role of a watch dog during elections to ensure that they are held in a free and fair manner. Obstructing the media from covering elections has only made the city elections controversial which does not bode well for the future of democracy.

Witnessing another ELECTION CHARADE

ZIAUDDIN CHOUDHURY

STUFFING of ballot boxes whether in national or local elections is nothing new in Bangladesh. It has happened under the watch of every political party when it held the charade of elections, but the degree varied from time to time, based on the fear of election loss of the party in power and the ability to muster enough muscle power to "capture" booths. Of all types of election engineering, ballot stuffing is perhaps the crudest but also the easiest. It is much easier to cast false ballots by intimidating a helpless lot of polling officers (who are mostly lowly government employees) than to manipulate election results at a higher level. After all, in an election system that is still bound by a medieval practice of casting paper ballots and manual counting of the votes the number that comes out of an election centre is a safer bet for the election engineer than other more sophisticated techniques. It does not matter how the result was obtained; all that matters is there is physical, paper based evidence of ballots that were allegedly cast in favour of the winning candidates.

In the "famous" referendum of 1977 held by then President Ziaur Rahman asking for people's confidence in him and his nineteen-point development programme there were no contestants. Yet, the advisors to the then president who was actually seeking legitimacy of his presidency through this confidence vote were concerned that a low turnout in this referendum would mar the very objective of this exercise. Therefore, the advisors launched a nationwide campaign through senior army and civil bureaucrats rallying people to vote. The entire government machinery at field level was engaged in this countrywide rally to ensure a hefty turnout of people at the referendum. A lower than seventy-five percent turnout would be consid-

ered to be poor, and therefore directives were sent to the field officials to "guarantee" a good turnout of voters. The officials at peril of losing their jobs went out of the way to ensure a healthy voter turnout by any means, while a nominal election commission presided over what became a farce of an election. The only occupants in most polling booths in remote villages were the polling officers guarded by police and ansars, while the ballot boxes were stuffed by obliging Union Parishad members. The result, as

machine. There has not been a single national or local election in the country, whether held by a political or non-political government, where accusation of vote fraud or vote rigging has not been made. But each time we seem to cross new bars in vote manipulation. Each election becomes more a charade than an actual exercise of franchise.

Is there any way we can have elections that are above board? Is there any manner by which we can restore people's confidence in a fair and just election process?



we all know, was an astounding 99 percent vote of confidence for President Ziaur Rahman, with an average turnout of 88 percent of voters nationwide.

But that was a referendum held by a military dictator that time who no one dared to oppose. A manipulation of one kind or another really did not matter. What followed next is a perpetuation of a practice that showed that election results can always be manipulated through political muscle power, use of government apparatus, and a manageable election

Having an independent institution to conduct free and fair election may be a necessary precondition, but this institution cannot work in an environment that is divested from the practice of democracy. The institution becomes ineffective if it is not reinforced with proper political support and guarantee of its neutrality in the conduct of elections. People's faith in democracy and the institutions that are meant to strengthen democracy wither away when political rhetoric is not propped up by firm actions.

Despite dismal outcomes of many recent elections and poor performance of our leaders and institutions, people rejoice at times of elections. They are probably under the delusion of exercising their rights to choose a representative, be it for the Union, Upazilla, City, or the Parliament. Each cycle they go through this charade hoping that this time around they will get their candidate. And each cycle they find that either they cannot approach their voting booth or someone else has cast their votes.

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The debate should not be whether the most recent civic elections were marred by wrong doing or manipulation. The debate should be whether there is a genuine commitment of our powers that brings democracy in the country, and freedom in the exercise of democracy by people. For if there is a commitment it needs to be demonstrably shown in all future elections. Otherwise we will continue to have these charades.

The writer is a political analyst and commentator.

PROGRESS OF THE WORLD'S WOMEN 2015-2016

Transforming Economies, Realising Rights

PHUMZILE MLAMBO-NGCUKA

OUR world is out of balance. It is both wealthier and more unequal today than at any time since the Second World War.

We are recovering from a global economic crisis – but that recovery has been jobless. We have the largest cohort ever of educated women, yet globally women are struggling to find work. Unemployment rates are at historic highs in many countries, including those in the Middle East and North Africa, in Latin America and the Caribbean as well as in southern Europe.

Where women do have jobs, globally they are paid 24 percent less than men, on average. For the most part, the world's women are in low-salaried, insecure occupations, like small-scale farming, or as domestic workers - a sector where they comprise 83 percent of the workforce.

Why isn't the global economy fit for women?

In our flagship report Progress of the World's Women 2015-2016: Transforming Economies, Realizing Rights, we investigate what this failure means – and propose solutions.

We take a fresh, holistic look at both economic and social policies and their implications for the entire economy. We look particularly at the 'invisible' economy of unpaid care and domestic work that anchors all economies and societies. Conventional measures like GDP have historically been blind to a large proportion of the work women and girls do, and unheard of the voices of those who would wish to allocate public resources to their relief, for example through investments in accessible water and clean energy.

We suggest the need to apply a human rights lens to economic problem-

solving. We propose specific, evidence-based solutions for action by both government and the private sector, to shape progress towards decent, equally paid jobs for women, free from sexual harassment and violence, and supported by good quality social services.

Our public resources are not flowing in the directions where they are most needed: for example to provide safe water and sanitation, quality healthcare, and decent child- and elderly-care ser-

vices. Yet water is essential, families still have to be nourished, the sick still have to be tended, children brought up, and elderly parents cared for.

Where there are no public services, the deficit is borne primarily by women and girls. This is a care penalty that unfairly punishes women for stepping in when the State does not provide resources and it affects billions of women the world over. Data from France, Germany, Sweden and Turkey

suggest that women earn between 31 and 75 percent less than men over their lifetimes. We need policies that make it possible for both women and men to care for their loved ones without having to forego their own economic security, success and independence.

Our globalised economy seems to be working at cross-purposes with our universal vision of women's rights; it is limiting, rather than enabling them. Where there is no choice, there are few rights.

Shareholders can and should ask corporations to act with responsibility to the countries in which they operate. Annual tax revenue lost to developing countries due to trade mispricing, just one strategy used by corporations to avoid tax, is estimated at between USD 98 and 106 billion dollars. This is nearly USD 20 billion more than the annual capital costs needed to achieve universal water and sanitation coverage.

With the right mix of economic and social policies, governments can make transformative change: they can generate decent jobs for women and men and ensure that their unpaid care work is recognised and supported. Well-designed measures such as family allowances and universal pensions can enhance women's income security, and their ability to realise their potential and expand their life options. Finally, macroeconomic policies can and should support the realisation of women's rights, by creating dynamic and stable economies, by generating decent work and by mobilising resources to finance vital public services.

Ultimately, upholding women's rights will not only make economies work for women, it will also benefit societies as a whole by creating a fairer and more sustainable future.

Progress for women is progress for all.

The writer is an Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations and the Executive Director of UN Women.



Three quarters of a penny for your thoughts

But there are solutions. The report proposes a number of specific ways in which to mobilise resources to pay for public services and social transfers: for example by enforcing existing tax obligations, reprioritising expenditure and expanding the overall tax base, as well as through international borrowing and development assistance.

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COMMENTS

"All BNP-backed mayoral candidates pull out of the race" (April 28, 2015)

Sazeedul Islam

Wrong decision of BNP again.

Ariful Hoque

I did not get the opportunity to cast my vote. I am an eye witness of election anomalies.

Samim Osman Jewel

Good job, Awami League! Carry on.

Tuhin Sk

There was no way for BNP. Pro-ruling party men carried out massive rigging. It is not possible to hold a fair election under Awami League.

"Switzerland happiest country" (April 25, 2015)

Md. Mustafa Hasan

Despite all the statistics, proud to be a Bangladeshi living in Bangladesh.

"Dhaka - A woman-unfriendly city" (April 23, 2015)

Raz

How can we accept such crimes against our mothers and sisters so easily? What's wrong with the people of Bangladesh?

Enlightenedview

What a shame! On one hand the country is lurching towards fundamentalism and on the other hand, sex maniacs are prowling the streets undeterred. Lawlessness and immorality have taken over the country.

Sabreena Leya

Politicians don't care because their sons and daughters live abroad and are safe.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

letters@thedailystar.net

Bangla-washed Pakistan

Bangladesh is no longer one of the minnows in world cricket. In the World Cup 2015, odds were against us to qualify for the second round but we have managed to do so. In fact we would have made it to the semis if the umpiring error had not occurred. Now they have won the ODI series and the T-20 against Pakistan. It's great to witness our Tigers being able to whitewash any team but it's a proud moment for us if the team that we whitewash is Pakistan. Bangladesh did not just win but they have outplayed Pakistan in all departments. Our captain led from the front. Tamim has regained his form and Musfiqur is our most dependable batsman now. Shakib has once again proved why he is

the number one all-rounder. Mahmudullah is someone who we can rely on and Sabbir is a formidable batsman. One of our finest finding in the series is Soumya Sarkar. He has got all the shots in the world and is great to watch when he takes the attack to the opposition. One of my Pakistani friends could not digest the outcome of the series at all and was complaining that had Afridi not been wrongly given out, they would have won the match! We won the T-20 with 22 balls to spare. Even if Afridi had helped his side to get to 160, we would still have convincingly won the game. Pakistani batsmen could not score runs freely at all.

 Syed Nazmul Alam
 Bashundhara, Dhaka

Garbage all around

Pile of waste on the roads and roadsides is a very common scene in Dhaka city. Everyday many people throw away their garbage indiscriminately which is a very unhealthy practice. It creates various types of pollution. It is high time the authority took appropriate measures to stop this malpractice.

Tanjila Hossain

Ahsanullah University of Science and Technology, Dhaka



ANURUP KANTI DAS