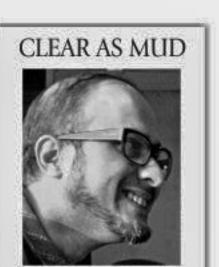
# THE NETHERECT



AHMEDE HUSSAIN

Tuesday's elections in Dhaka (North and South) and Chittagong city corporation elections have seen some significant mechanisms that the candidates have

used to woo the voters. The use of different digital platforms to get votes has been the latest among them. We have seen vote-seeking elephants and caps with the symbol of a candidate pasted on it, not to mention black and white leaflets and pamphlets that have been thrust into the hands of the voters on their way out of the mosques or of schools. But the use of digital media is new and it is something that has come here to stay and make its presence felt in future election campaigns.

During the nearly month-long electioneering for the mayor of Dhaka, Bangladesh Awami League (AL)-backed Dhaka (North) candidate Annisul Huq has perhaps used the digital media way better than his competitors. Hug's team has made some interesting internet advertisements that were put in popular Bengali webpages. A Facebook (FB) page supporting his candidature was also made which has given him some significant fanfollowing. Gonoshonghoti Andolon leader Zonayed Saqi's FB page has also boasted some 'likes' and has had some active online activists supporting his

cause, save for that other mayor aspirants have limited their online activities only to setting up FB pages.

It is indeed surprising that only ALblessed candidates Huq and Sayeed Khokon had sent bulk text messages to the voters of their respective constituencies. Of the major mayoral candidates only Khokon has a web presence. His site (http://www.sayeedkhokon.com) is filled with old photographs and news clips, the latest being a month and a half old. Hug does not have a personal webpage, a google search will result only in his personal page at the webpage of Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industries. Huq last tweeted in December 2011.

Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP)blessed two candidates do not have any significant web presence either. Dhaka city party stalwart Mirza Abbas, who ran for Dhaka (South) mayor, has a FB page with 100,000 likes and is quite active. But his reach to the voters online stops at that. He has never tweeted, and except for a mention in a bank's webpage, his online presence is limited to the bare minimum. Another candidate Tabith Awal's FB page has some strong following, but he, too, does not have a webpage. He did not send any sms to his voters prior to the election, neither has he put up any online advertisement.

Be that as it may, it is indeed surprising that for the cities that are thriving with hundreds and thousands of internet users, the AL and BNPbacked candidates have put their trust more in meeting the voters in person

in Bangladesh has not been developed into a serious mode of communication inside the country. It is true that there are 44.6 million internet users in the country and Skype, Viber and Whatsapp are considered to be a cheap way to be in touch with the loved ones at home and abroad. But e-commerce in Bangladesh is still at its infancy: ordinary Bangladeshis do not yet see the internet as a medium using which one can be a part of egovernance or other such serious matters. This trend is reflected in the election results of two major left leaning candidates. Saki, who has a FB following of around 20,000, has seen his security deposit forfeited. The same goes for the Communist Party of Bangladesh and the Socialist Party of Bangladesh's joint candidate Abdullah Al Kafi Ratan. Another mayor aspirant MD Golam Maula Rony, despite a towering online presence has failed rather

and there are reasons for that. Internet

into real votes. None of the candidates has made use of mobile apps, pre-loaded with bios, manifestos and short videos that could have come handy to put their messages across. Even though all of them had participated in several faceoffs on television, we did not see them engage in any mass online chat or creating any FB or Twitter hashtag in their favour. In fact, the use of internet has been a subdued affair in the city elections. The only two trending that deserve some mention here are #CityPolls2015 and #CityPolls, the last

miserably to translate his online support

being used by the US Ambassador from her official Twitter handle.

Bangladesh's online scene wore a different colour altogether from the early afternoon of the Election Day. Facebook timelines were flooded with first time voters proudly displaying their thumb along with the ink mark that signified the casting of their votes. Along with it came, perhaps more in number, the stories of disgruntled voters, who went to the centre en masse only to realise that their votes had already been cast. Jibes hurled at the ruling AL and the Election Commissioner, and humourous images of the latter were soon made and shared.

More serious perhaps were the videos of rigging that started to circulate online. Some of these clips are from the news of different television channels, but most of them are taken by private individuals, frustrated at being denied their rights to vote in such a despicable manner.

There is, however, no denying that online is the new frontier, and the battles of the future are to be fought on different platforms of the digital media. If Mao Zedong were alive, in his Problems of War and Strategy, he would have written: political power grows out of the click of a mouse. Only time can see how the country's political leader uses the internet and the social media in the days to come.

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# When the dead speaks to you



suicide of Gajendra Singh last Wednesday at a political rally in New Delhi organised by Aam Aadmi Party casts a shadow over India's

democracy and development. The farmer from the western state of Rajasthan hanged himself from a tree in an apparent attempt to spotlight the needless suffering of his country's impoverished farmers as Modi's administration throws its weight

for the country's development. The reality, however, is a 41-year-old father of three hanging from a tree, lifeless.

behind land reforms, citing it essential

Gajendra Singh is not alone. Farmer suicide is a long-standing problem in India. Since 1995, the number of suicides by India's farmers has passed 290,000, according to the National Crimes Records Bureau, although the numbers do not specify the reason for the suicides.

Even suicide is a stop gap solution for these farmers. They often leave behind huge debts which pass to their widows and children. There are many instances where no sooner have the family members cut the farmer's body down than a money lender has shown up, threatening to block the post-death rituals until the family members paid him. Almost nobody goes to the police to complain, but when they do, appeals to officials for help are often met with indifference, according to news reports. Many local level officials blame farmers for 'mismanaging' their finances.

The story of Singh's suicide has roots going back to much earlier times. When market reforms were introduced in India in 1991, the state reduced subsidies and lifted barriers to import, thrusting small farmers into an unforgiving global market. They adopted new technologies, switching to commercial crops and genetically modified seeds, investing more in their children's education in the hopes they would land better jobs.

But soon they found themselves

threw a suicide note into the crowd. 'I am the son of a farmer. He threw me out of home because of damage to the crop. I have three children. I don't have the money to feed my children. Hence, I want to commit suicide.'

The rally continued as usual even after his death. It also immediately set off a political blame game, with some AAP politicians reportedly calling his death a "conspiracy," and the opposition Congress Party demanding legal action against Modi and AAP leader



Gajendra Singh standing on a tree before committing suicide.

sinking deeper into the quagmire of even bigger loans at outrageous interest rates, all the while hoping a bumper harvest would allow them to clear their debts, so that they could take out new ones. This vicious circle has left a trail of human wreckage.

Gajendra Singh's crops were reportedly devastated by unseasonable rain and hailstorms in March that destroyed large areas of farmland in northern and western states, which led to dozens of debt-ridden farmers killing themselves.

Before taking his own life, Singh

Arvind Kejriwal.

Modi said the nation was "deeply shattered and disappointed" over the farmer's death. "At no point must the hardworking farmer think he is alone. We are all together in creating a better tomorrow for the farmers of India," Modi said on Twitter last Wednesday.

Perhaps, to Singh, that's exactly the kind of rhetoric that seemed far removed from reality. Last year, in an interview with The Dawn, Indian writer and activist, Arundhati Roy said, "The contracts are all signed and the compa-

nies have been waiting for years. He has been chosen as the man who does not blink in the face of bloodshed, not just Muslim bloodshed but any bloodshed."

Of course Roy was referring to Modi whose role during the bloody communal riots in Gujarat in 2002 remains questionable till date. "Bloodshed is inherent to this model of development. There are already thousands of people in jails," she said. "But that is not enough any longer. The resistance has to be crushed and eradicated. Big money now needs the man who can walk the last mile. That is why big industry poured millions into Modi's election campaign."

Small farmers once were the backbone of the Indian economy and their voices were heard during elections. But last year was different—major parties mostly jockeyed for the urban middle class votes and the farmers' voices were all but silent.

With globalisation and rising costs cutting into their lean profit margins, their ranks are dwindling, as is their contribution to the economy. They are increasingly being left behind, bypassed by ambitious development projects and programmes.

Costs of development are many. But development does not have to come at the cost of human lives. If the world's largest democracy can spend billions of dollars to import and develop advanced weapons, surely it can find ways to adequately compensate farmers for their land and provide them with crop insurance.

India must do it now before the dead begins to speak and insists on a hearing.

The writer is an engineer-turned-journalist.

### Remembering

## KHALIDA FAHMI

#### A woman of substance

DR SUFIA AHMED

HALIDA Fahmi, the former Deputy Director General of Bangladesh Television passed away on April 30, 2014 at 83 years of age.

Born on March 5, 1931 at Matiaburj, Kolkata, her father Salimullah Fahmi was a senior civil servant and her mother Sayeeda Salim Fahmi was a homemaker.

After the partition of India in 1947 she came to the then East Pakistan with her family. She started her schooling in Moslem Girls High School located in old Dhaka and later was admitted to the Eden College for higher secondary studies. Thereafter, Khalida joined the Department of Islamic History and Culture of Dhaka University in 1950, founded by the celebrated historian of the subcontinent Professor A.B.M. Habibullah. In our honours class there were only five female students among whom there were two girls who bore the common name, Shamsunnahar. The rest of the three were Suraiya, Khalida and myself.

Khalida was a charming, very generous friend and often invited us to her house, treating us to delicious meals. As an individual she was conscientious, helpful and very good company. Even though she was usually reserved and reticent by nature, she radiated warmth and affection in an unconventional manner. She was admired for her devotion to work. She did her B.A Honours and M.A. degree from the Department of Islamic History and Culture in 1953 and 1954 respectively.

When her father was transferred to the then West Pakistan she obtained her second M.A. degree from Karachi University in bengali literature. Both her father and mother were liberal minded individuals and protagonists of the development of literary and cultural activities. Being brought up in an enlightened environment, Khalida naturally evolved as a noted cultural personality and emerged as a tirelessly dedicated social worker. While she was in Karachi, she took part in a drama titled Sirajuddowla which provided a glimpse of her innate dramatic abilities. She soon became involved with various noted socio-cultural organisations.

Since her childhood, Khalida was passionate about music and particularly about subcontinental classical music. After returning to the then East Pakistan, she took training as a classical singer under the tutelage of the famous maestro Ustad Gul Muhammad Khan along with Ustad Yasin Khan and Ustad Muhammad Hussain Khasru. Apart from classical music training, she took pains to master the art of



Khalida Fahmi

recitation and anchoring different shows. She had a natural gift for sewing and embroidery and was a connoisseur of gourmet cuisine and cooking.

When Bangladesh Television (BTV) was founded in 1964 at the DIT Building she joined as a producer in 1966. Her dedication to her work was appreciated by the concerned authorities and she earned the coveted position of Deputy Director General of BTV. It may be mentioned, that she earned the distinction of becoming the first Muslim woman of the subcontinent to occupy the position of Deputy Director General of the electronic media world.

After her retirement from BTV, she devoted herself to work for different development-oriented social activities. She soon became chief of the publication department at BRAC, vicepresident of JAICA, member of the Diabetic Association, High-Care and was closely associated with the SAJIDA Foundation and SWD Bangladesh.

I parted from my friends after my M.A examination to go to England for higher studies. After my return to Dhaka in the early sixties, I used to meet her occasionally after long intervals. But yet, the firm bond and affection for each other which began from our university days was always there. We sometimes met socially, as her late uncle Kalimullah Fahmi was a dear friend of my husband's second elder brother Syed Mushtaq Ahmed, who was a civil servant. My husband's family and the Fahmis were very close and remained so forever.

Khalida never married. When she died, she left behind her family consisting of four sisters and one brother. After her parents passed away, Khalida being the eldest child became the natural guardian of her siblings. She shouldered the great responsibility by taking exemplary care of her family with dogged determination and exceptional commitment till the last days of her life.

To pay tribute on her first death anniversary, I remember Khalida with great sadness for losing a very precious friend with extraordinary accomplishments, a true woman of substance.

The writer is National Professor and former director of Bangladesh Bank.

**BEETLE BAILEY** 

PEOPLEONTHIS

**SHOW LOOK** 

THEY'RE ZOMBIES

WHAT'S A







HENRY













be so blind with patriotism that you can't face reality. Wrong is wrong, no matter who does it or says it."



Malcolm X

## CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

Termite's cousin

War room topic

Williams

Quite a sight

Cook's aid

33 Slugger

34 Very bad

37 Created

39 Mature

40 Was overly

fond

41 Brooklyn

basketball team

**ACROSS** Dying tubs Get naked Lotion ingredient Followed the

path of Jab 13

"Yes indeedy!" Convenient, as a store

Plus Tourists' cars Do a checkout job

27 Light brown

Maximum amount Residence

Marine predator Less polite Designer Michael

Solitary Be dizzy

DOWN Mist

Game piece Casual walk

Stumbles

30 Mirror sight 31 West Point student 32 Winter coasters

36 In shape

name

player

25 Suggestive

29 Gray-brown

27 Put off

**16** Chat

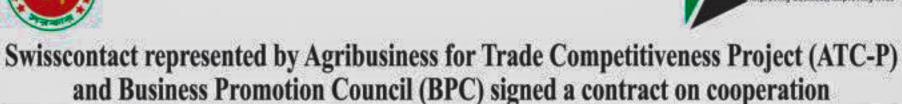
Cloth scrap Sleepy Hollow "Snookums," for one 12 Los Angeles 21 Fox chaser 22 Rink user Mellifluous **24** 1920s style

> **AY'S ESTERD**

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Representatives from Agribusiness for Trade Competitiveness Project (ATC-P) and BPC at the signing ceremony Swisscontact represented by Agribusiness for Trade Competitiveness Project (ATC-P) and Business Promotion Council (BPC) have signed a collaboration contract on 29 April 2015. Mr. Markus Ehmann, General Manager ATC-P, and Mr. S. M Rejoan Hossain, Coordinator, BPC,

signed the contract. The objective of this contractual agreement is to engage Business Promotion Council (BPC) with Swisscontact represented by ATC-P in assessing, designing and effectively intervening in the areas of fisheries, agriculture, ICT, and capacity development. These activities are expected to contribute to poverty alleviation through improved trade competitiveness and export readiness in the agriculture sector.

ATC-P is a market development project that aims to contribute to sustainable poverty reduction in Bangladesh through inclusive growth, supporting Bangladesh on the way to become a middleincome country by 2021. On the other hand, Business Promotion Council specifically works towards improving competitiveness of specific sectors with the aim of enhancing export diversification and reducing import portfolio.

Among others, Md. Hafizur Rahman, Deputy Coordinator, BPC; Gupta Bahabur Banjara, Head of Sectors, Nasir Uddin Ahmed, Head of Capitalisation, Communications and External Relations, and Emdadul Haque, Advisor, External Relations, ATC-P were present during the signing ceremony.

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