

THE GREEK ODYSSEY

SHIFTING IMAGES



MILIA ALI

THE placid Aegean Sea, the whitewashed villas dotting its Islands and “Zorba’s Dance” could delude some into believing that all is well with Greece.

However, the harsh reality is diametrically different: for five long years Greece has been on the brink of bankruptcy, with indescribable hardships for its economically disempowered citizens. The Greek standoff with the European Union (EU) reached a crescendo on July 5, when its government, a coalition of the radical left, called for a referendum on the bailout package offered by the Troika (comprising the European Central Bank, the European Commission and the International Monetary Fund). Surprisingly, Greece voted “No” to the austerity measures recommended by the Troika. The “No” vote does not mark Greece’s exit from the EU. It simply means that its people have expressed their collective wish to control their country’s future trajectory, rather than yield to the diktat of outside players.

As a conscious citizen of the world, I am elated that the Greeks have united as a proud nation and decided that they want to take full control of their future – bleak as it may be. We have witnessed once more how mature democracies operate in the face of temporary reversals and disagreements. The day following the referendum, the German and French leaders publicly acknowledged their high respect for the



PHOTO: APB

“Greek people’s verdict”, and invited Greece to put its counter proposals on the table. There were no victory laps for Greek Prime Minister Tsipras just as there was no reactive retribution from the Troika. The erstwhile adversaries are already engaged in the business of finding concrete ways to make Greece a viable EU partner. Our leaders, please note that in democracies the point of no return is rarely crossed!

As the Greek drama of financial collapse, unemployment and bankruptcy unfolds, economists and politicians are busy debating the causes and effects of the country’s failure to meet its debt terms. At the epicenter of this discussion is the accusation that

Greece has lived beyond its means and must pay its debts since there are no “free lunches” in life.

There is plenty of truth in this accusation. But I would like to offer a slightly different perspective: Can we simply dismiss Greece as a financially bankrupt nation unable to pay its debt, without recalling how much we owe its ancient minds? It is the country that gave us democracy, the Olympics, philosophy, medicine, mathematics and fascinating mythological stories. Even the word Europe is derived from a maiden in Greek myth, Europa!

It is in Greece that the debate over public versus private goods first took place between Plato and Aristotle more

than two thousand years ago. Plato advocated “the institution of communal arrangements for the begetting and rearing of children.” His pupil Aristotle dismissed this idea as impractical arguing: “that which is common to the greatest number has the least care bestowed upon it.” Ironically, the debate is alive even today as Greece is criticised for its unsustainable social welfare programmes.

As a gentle reminder to the readers it might be useful to recount Greece’s numerous gifts to science and mathematics. What would our world be if Archimedes had not discovered the principle of buoyancy, if Pythagoras had not worked with geometrical angles and

Hippocrates had not revolutionised ancient medicine? Yes, there is much that the world owes Greece – much that is not quantifiable in terms of Euros and Pounds! I realise that in real life tangibles and intangibles need to be separated before balancing equations. Also, one cannot exonerate Greece from its decades old bad policies, hollow leadership, corruption and cronyism, and welfare culture. The European taxpayers have enough reasons to feel short-changed that they are paying for Greece’s dysfunctional state. However, let us not throw the baby with the bath water. Perhaps, somewhere in the equation of decision-making, the Troika will give some weight to the fact that, as a rich, ancient civilisation, Greece deserves special consideration.

It’s probably true that once the victory celebrations simmer down, Greece will be faced with hard reality. It might find more pensioners waiting outside banks, more youths lining up for jobs, more mothers of hungry children queuing up for subsidised food. But it’s a domestic battle that Greece has opted to fight on its own terms. Whether it will succeed in alleviating its economic and social tensions, only time will tell. Perhaps this is another lesson in democracy that the Greeks are giving the world – a sovereign nation must run its own course and take full control of its fate, however risky it may be.

If the country can once again live up to its ancient traditions, it might be well poised to tackle its problems. Let us not underestimate the Greek spirit that Tennyson (Ulysses) described as “strong in will to strive, to seek, to find and not to yield”.

The writer is a renowned Rabindra Sangeet exponent and a former employee of the World Bank.

One cannot exonerate Greece from its decades old bad policies, hollow leadership, corruption and cronyism, and welfare culture. The European taxpayers have enough reasons to feel short-changed that they are paying for Greece’s dysfunctional state.

Gender-gap in electoral roll and some additional questions

BADIUL ALAM MAJUMDAR

A credible electoral roll is a prerequisite for free and fair elections, and the allegation of 1.25 crore fake voters in our electoral roll was one of the reasons for not holding the ninth parliament elections on time. The matter eventually landed in the Supreme Court, and based on the Court’s direction, an electoral roll with photographs was prepared in 2008 by the Election Commission, headed by Dr. ATM Shamsul Huda. The electoral roll thus prepared was audited by the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES), which found it to be 99 percent accurate. As per the 2008 electoral roll, we had a total voter count of 8,10,58,698, of which female voters were 4,12,36,149 and male voters were 3,98,22,549. Thus, there were 14,13,600 more female voters than male voters, culminating in a +1.74 percent gender-gap. The total number of voters increased to 9,19,80,531 after a revision in 2013 by the EC, headed by Kazi Rakibuddin. In the revised roll, female voters were 4,58,44,566 while there were 4,61,35,965 male voters. Thus, in the revised roll, the number of male voters exceeded female voters by 2,91,399 and the gender-gap was -0.32 percent. The EC carried out its next revision of the electoral roll during May to November of 2014 and published a draft supplementary list on January 2, 2015, with a deadline of January 22 for correction. According to the draft supplementary list, the new voters were over fifty lakh and gender-gap was -11.67 percent.

On February 1, 2015, the EC published a summary of the revision on its website. According to the summary, the total number of voters, after the correction, increased to 9,61,98,652, of which 4,77,47,010 were female and 4,84,51,642 were male. Thus, as per the latest revision, there were 7,04,632 more men voting than women, producing a gender-gap of -0.74 percent. According to the published summary, by November 2014, the new voters increased by 46,95,650, of which there were 20,66,144 women voters and 26,29,506 men voters. Thus, among new voters, there were 5,63,362 more male voter than female voters, resulting in a -12 percent gender gap. To fully realise the seriousness of the gender-gap in our latest electoral roll, one needs to disaggregate it to the district level. Unfortunately, the EC has not published the final electoral roll for each district, and the formal and informal efforts to receive the information from the Commission were unsuccessful. However, the draft supplementary list published by the EC on January 1 shows the number of new voters, both female and male, for each district, from which we can see the extent of the disaggregated gender-gap. As per the draft supplementary list, of the 64 districts, eight had gender-gap of lower than 5 percent; 28 had between 5-10 percent; nine had between 10-15 percent; 11 had between 15-20 percent; four had between 20-25 percent; two had between 25-30 percent, one had between 30-35 percent; and another had 35-40 percent.

The highest gender-gap was -35.3 percent in Feni. It was followed by Laxmipur with -30.82 percent, Noakhali with -26.44 percent, Chandpur with -25.72 percent, Comilla with -23.4 percent, Cox’s Bazar with -22.58 percent, and Bhola with -20.84 percent. The lowest gender-gap was -2.1 percent in Dhaka. It was followed by

gender-gap. Only greater Noakhali and two districts of greater Comilla show high rates of gender-gap. We deserve an explanation from the EC on the reasons behind the high rates of gender-gap, which disenfranchised a large number of women voters throughout the country. Another problem with our electoral roll is that the observed

among our new voters. Another serious problem with the revised electoral roll is that the rate of increase in voters is not consistent with the rate of increase in our population. During the last six years, the average yearly rate of increase of voters was 3.11 percent. Those who became voters for the first time last year were born 18 years ago, when

(January 26, 2015), stated that “the enumerators did not go to many houses. Some of them collected the information from influential persons and their acquaintances in the neighbourhood. Many aspiring voters of the capital city, districts and Upazilas did not see the enumerators. Many enumerators paid no attention to the legal requirement of their going from house to house for collecting information. In addition, there was not enough publicity about the revision of the electoral roll.” Incidentally, no enumerator visited this author’s house during the revision. To conclude, the EC is a constitutional body which has the responsibility of strengthening our democratic process by holding free and fair elections. To this end, Article 118 of our constitution assigns four specific responsibilities to the Commission, including the preparation of an electoral roll for parliament elections. The Commission has also been given almost unlimited powers to faithfully discharge its responsibilities. However, it is not only failing to do its job, it is also getting embroiled in one controversy after another because of its partisan actions. Controversies could not be avoided even in revision of the electoral roll, which is bound to be an issue in our next election. It is therefore imperative that a third-party audit of our electoral roll is initiated immediately to establish its accuracy so that necessary corrections can be made on time. The writer is Secretary of SHUJAN: Citizens for Good Governance.



PHOTO: STAR

Khulna with -2.64 percent, Gaibandha with -2.92 percent, Rangpur with -4.02 percent, Sherpur with -4.08 percent, Bogra with -4.26 percent, Panchagar with -4.42 percent, and Khagrachari with -4.54 percent. From the information above, we see no discernible pattern in the

gender-gap, especially among new voters is inconsistent with the prevailing sex ratio in our population. According to the 2011 census, Bangladesh’s sex ratio is 100.3, that is, the number of men and women in our country is almost the same. Thus, there is no justification for the high gender-gap

the rate of increase of population was less than 1.8 percent. Such inconsistency is bound to raise questions about the authenticity of our latest electoral roll. In fact, the media has already raised serious questions about the accuracy of the revised electoral roll. For example, a report in Jugantor

QUOTABLE Quote

VIKRAM SETH

And an equation is the same whether it's written in red or green ink.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

1 Brass band instruments

6 Equinox month

11 Road reversal

12 Honolulu hello

13 July 14 celebration

15 Bashful

16 Industrial tank

17 Bro's sibling

18 Puzzled

20 Add up

23 Chopped into cubes

27 MP's quarry

28 Candidate of 2000

29 Extend as a subscription

31 Havana native

32 Scouting group

34 Fitting

37 Big beagle feature

38 Lock opener

41 Where 13-Across originated

44 Bit of history

45 Decorate

46 Looks for

47 Yoga position

DOWN

1 Bath spots

2 Provo's state

3 Hard at work

4 Paintings and sculpture

5 Be whiny

6 Fountain order

7 Saloon order

8 Gangsters' guns

9 Spiced tea

10 Robert of "Airplane!"

14 Indulgent

18 Man's man

19 Uncover

20 Black gunk

21 Have debts

22 Great weight

24 Corn core

25 Stretch of history

26 Private room

30 Gains by force

31 Ranch pen

33 Clumsy fellow

34 Some primates

35 Make roads

36 Pine or palm

38 Shoelace problem

39 Beige

40 Longings

42 Pen filler

43 Commotion

YESTERDAY'S ANSWER

TRUCE GULP
RECAP ISAAC
AMORE SANTA
BARBER DIM
BINS HIPHOP
INS CURIOS
ROBOT
TRUMAN GAS
BOOMER DOLE
ART BARBIE
RIGID TILED
DEUCE OVENS
STEW METS

KATALYST

Improving business, improving lives.

Request for Proposal

Katalyst is a market development project that aims to contribute to increased income for poor men and women in rural areas. It does so by increasing the competitiveness of farmers and small enterprises by facilitating changes in services, inputs and product markets. Katalyst is co-funded by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), the UK Government, and the Danish International Development Agency (Danida). It is implemented by Swiss contact under the umbrella of the Ministry of Commerce, Government of Bangladesh.

Katalyst is looking to finance a project on the following topic:
Commercial compost promotion and/or improvement in quality of product of compost companies

Katalyst wants to work with consulting firms, international and local non-government organizations with associated experience who can work to promote commercial compost nationwide.

Details regarding the Request for Proposal and the templates for submitting the proposals are available at:
<http://katalyst.com.bd/category/opportunity/>

In partnership with

Implemented by

Funded by