



PHOTO: STAR

MUNICIPAL POLLS 2015

Losing faith in electoral processes

M. SAKHAWAT HUSSAIN

No elections in a democratic world are perfect, be it in a liberal or an emerging democracy. In liberal democratic countries, where elections are routine, systemic flaws in elections are termed as 'margin of error' which occur due to unacknowledged ignorance. However, such errors were not taken lightly after the US presidential election of 2000 where electoral dispute, due to unacknowledged 'margin of error', could not be resolved in the absence of rule for electoral dispute resolution. And results were decided in the court. That event changed the edifice of the electoral system in liberal democracies. But that is not true in most emerging democracies like Bangladesh where systemic flaws coupled with electoral manipulation damage the electoral culture in most cases under partisan governments and, perceived to be partisan, the Election Commission. In emerging democracies, by and large, systemic flaws are hardly addressed. Bangladesh is no exception to that.

The history of Bangladesh is a history of sustained struggle to establish democracy for economic emancipation and social justice. The country's liberation was based on the cardinal issue of democracy and rule of majority through a free fair and credible election. The founding father, Bangabandhu, fought his entire life to establish democracy and peoples' right to vote. Democracy cannot be established without a free fair and credible election on a regular basis.

Unfortunately, in the first two decades, Bangladeshi voters did not experience credible elections until 1991 when democracy was restored through acceptable elections under a caretaker government, except the short-lived 1996 February parliamentary election. The situation changed with the 15th amendment that abolished the caretaker system. The electoral administration saw the beginning of the slide in the electoral culture with the flawed, non-inclusive election of January 5, 2014 under a partisan government. It was the beginning of a downturn in the country's electoral culture that continued with subsequent elections including that of the three city corporation elections marred by vio-

lence, booth capture, false votes and other irregularities. These elections, in comparison to previous parliamentary and local elections, could not pass to be fair, free and credible even by minimum acceptable standards set by many Afro-Asian emerging democracies. The recent 234 municipal elections too, could not pass the litmus test of being different from the trend set by previous elections, though many certified them to be better than the last city corporation elections. But is that so? The facts do not support such contentions. From published media reports, it seems that this election too, was marred with violence, well-planned systematic manipulation and other forms of electoral corruption.

However, if one were to assess the municipal elections of 2015, one would need to look at the voting pattern, percentage of vote and compare them with the municipal elections of 2011, though the recent municipal elections marked the first time that the party symbol was used for the mayoral post only, breaking away from past practice of non-partisan system.

Last month's municipal elections did not meet the expected standards. The Election Commission missed a chance to enhance its deteriorating image in the January 5, 2014 national assembly election, 4th Upazilla elections and city corporation elections held in 2015. One expected better performance from the Election Commission, the ruling party as well as from BNP. Instead, elections were marred by violence in many places which forced the Election Commission to suspend 20 polling centres and one municipality poll, whereas, to my estimate, at least 25-30 municipality polls should have been scrapped due to corruption, violence and uncontrolled manipulation. The analysis of the results would support the observations.

The statistics just made available to the media shows that the mayoral poll percentage is 73.98 percent; it implies that a large number of municipalities went to poll and more than 74 percent voters turned out for continuous voting, well beyond the stipulated poll time, but that was reportedly not the case. Newspaper reports show that a total of 137 of the declared result of 207 municipalities had polled over 75 percent. The stats reveal that five of the municipalities had

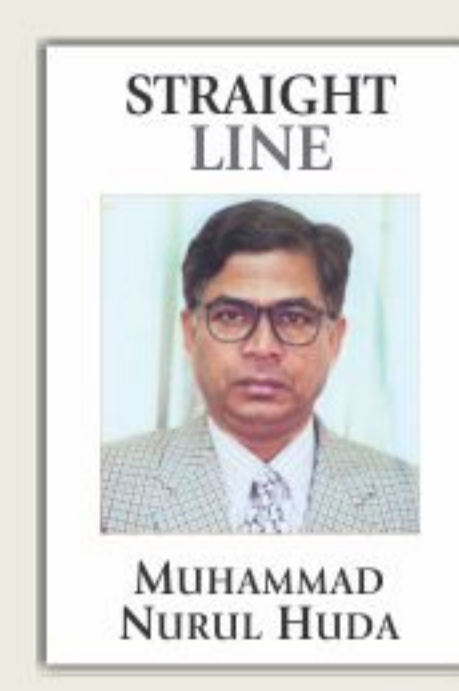
polled over 90 percent, and in a few places the tally is 100 percent. These figures seem unfeasible and indicate misconduct with the ballot. Experience shows that three separate ballot voting, with familiar and less familiar candidate symbols, requires a minimum of three minutes per voter. Senior citizens and women voters take one or a couple of minutes more to complete the voting cycle. But we are yet to know whether or not the percentage of votes for councillors have shown similar figures. The contrary would pose questions on the integrity of the poll.

In analysing the aforementioned facts, one does not need to be a genius to calculate the standard number of votes cast in a given polling booth which is designed to handle around 400 voters. In this regard, considering the minimum amount of time, only 20 voters could cast vote per hour. Within the given duration of voting, from 8 in the morning to 4 in the evening, a maximum of 160 voters per booth, more or less, could cast vote which in aggregate could exceed slightly over 50 percent. There is hardly any evidence that polling extended beyond the stipulated time in many centres. One may note that in the 2011 elections, where 254 municipalities went to poll in five phases, the voting percentage was 56.88 percent. The fact remains that our voting and counting system is not digitised; it is still manual which results in more time being consumed. It is easier to scrutinise the state for voting corruption simply by tallying the ballot account sheet, including other relevant documents, whenever one digs into any election result.

Nevertheless, past experience, media reports and comparative analysis all point to the fact that the recent municipal elections were far from free, fair and credible. An election is termed free, fair and acceptable only when the voters can vote freely and their votes are counted and translated into their choices. How credible and acceptable these municipal elections were can only be certified by the voters. However, the fact remains that it would need Herculean efforts to stop the electoral system from the systematic downward slide that has been seen since January 2014.

The writer is Former Election Commissioner and columnist.

The imperative of a counter-terrorism strategy



MUHAMMAD NURUL HUDA

ONE may wonder if our politico-bureaucratic elite suffer from a lack of tradition on strategic thought. Such a worry arises in the present scenario when we see

incipient signs of battles of proxy and low-level terrorism unleashed by the so-called religiously motivated extremists. There is no doubt that terrorism, in all its guises, not only flouts the law, but seeks, through acts of arbitrary and unforeseen violence aimed at the general public, to undermine their confidence in the security that the state is mandated to provide.

On ground, there is no denying that both state and the international community have found it difficult to frame effective counter measures to adequately tackle terrorist activity. That, however, cannot be a justification for the alleged procrastination on devising an adequate counter-terrorism strategy. The terrorist phenomenon, operating as it does undercover and unseen, represents a mortal threat to democracy everywhere.

A very significant imperative of a durable counter-terrorism strategy is to get the political consensus that such strategy needs. Have we in Bangladesh succeeded in achieving such a political consensus? Doubts would persist because in yesteryears, political establishments were not earnest in equal measure in fighting the menace. To state the obvious, a regime-centric approach does not only expose the myopia on a vital subject of public concern, it also adversely impacts the durability of a strategy with attendant confusion and inaction at the functional level.

Coming to specifics of the strategy, are we ready to legally legitimise the use of technology as a "neutral standard in intelligence gathering", thus giving the government absolute powers to monitor private communications and access personal information. The United States Anti-Terrorism Act of 2001 has done that to ensure airtight surveillance of terrorists. One has to note that in a country almost fanatic about privacy and related issues - with constitutional safeguards for individual liberties - the passage of the US Anti-Terrorism Act 2001 was possible due to overbearing and extraordinary circumstances.

Consultation between political parties across the broad spectrum and resultant consensus on counter-terrorism strategies assumes heightened significance. This is because a subject that affects every single citizen perhaps provides the executive a permanent alternative to the existing penal and criminal procedure code. Even infringes on the right to information must necessarily be accompanied by a wider public debate. The inclusion of the country's entire political spectrum in the anti-terrorist initiative is perhaps the best

way to end the turf war that has often marked the executive-judiciary relationship over the issue of special powers and where the judiciary's writ ends and the executive's begin.

In view of incidents over the last two months, it appears that the terrorist attacks form part of a consistent pattern of violent terrorist action, instead of isolated or sporadic action. Therefore, the appropriate step now is to have the conditions for self-defense met. For individual self-defense, the State has to be directly affected. The use of force has to be necessary and proportional to the terrorist attack.

Whatever might be the strategy, at the operational level, it might be impossible to measure the degree of seriousness of an armed strike or to judge the degree of consistency of terrorist strikes or assess, for that matter, how much action is "proportional" to balance the attack. One has to appreciate that the rules of war cannot always be applied to terrorism.

Our strategy should be such that enables the framing of administrative and legal measures which would make all acts of terrorism for political purposes unjustifiable; such arrangements would be "irrespective of the considerations, political, philosophical, ideological, racial, ethnic, religious or any other" that may be invoked to justify terrorist actions.

Experience indicates that the main obstacle to dealing with terrorists in ordinary courts was the intimidation of judicial officers and witnesses by the terrorist organisations. Therefore, to deal specifically with terrorism, the required adjudication may take place outside the purview of ordinary criminal law.

In dealing effectively with the terrorists, the transgression of individual rights, at times, would be a necessary compromise that citizens would have to be willing to accept in the interest of durable peace. Counter-terrorism measures would necessitate some loss of liberty and human freedom. Our strategy has to ensure that the security forces have every assistance in their task of bringing terrorists before the court and that the integrity of the legal system is maintained.

While proscription could be a significant feature of our counter-terrorism strategy, we could perhaps allow the lawful use of interception as an investigative tool. We could also make use of evidence gathered through such interception admissible as evidence in courtrooms across the country.

Finally, we cannot possibly countenance a situation where all human rights are reserved for terrorists, while governments dealing with the menace are arraigned continuously on grounds of violation of human rights - real or imaginary. What is desirable is perhaps the need to delineate the parameters that harmonise the defense of constitutional values with respect for human rights.

The writer is a columnist of The Daily Star.

QUOTABLE Quote

ARTHUR CONAN DOYLE

Mediocrity knows nothing higher than itself, but talent instantly recognises genius.

BEETLE BAILEY by Mort Walker

BABY BLUES by Kirkman & Scott

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

- 1 Moves, as freight
- 6 Acted wordlessly
- 11 Patriot Ethan
- 12 Make amends
- 13 Churchill trademark
- 15 Language suffix
- 16 Early auto
- 17 Used a couch
- 18 One walking a line
- 20 Numerical prefix
- 21 Salt, to Simone
- 22 Garden areas
- 23 Flower part
- 26 "Water Lilies" painter
- 27 Waiter's aid
- 28 Sty resident
- 29 Baseball score
- 30 Idle talkers
- 34 Cider girl of song
- 35 Place to park
- 36 Farrow of film
- 37 Winner's celebratory circuit
- 40 Old anesthetic
- 41 Book parts
- 42 Run-down
- 43 Abrasive powder
- 8 Make damp
- 9 Fencing cry
- 10 Crown repairer
- 14 Film unit
- 19 "By Jove!"
- 22 Marshy areas
- 23 Tries hard
- 24 Learned
- 25 Flair
- 26 Hit the wrong key
- 28 Destitute
- 30 Renown
- 31 Mirror sight
- 32 Pan, for one
- 33 Impudent
- 38 TV's Danson
- 39 On the -- (fleeing)

DOWN

- 1 Rich folks
- 2 Celebrator
- 3 Stomach woe
- 4 Rent out
- 5 Breathing tube
- 6 City leader
- 7 "-- a Small World"

YESTERDAY'S ANSWER

T I D A L A R I D E S
 A W A R E R I D E S
 G I V E N O M E G A
 U S E T I M E L A W
 P H Y S I C A L I T Y
 M A I D S P E A R
 I R M A A W E
 C R I T I C A L I T Y
 H I T N E T R Y E
 E V A D E T R A L A
 L A T E R E A T E R
 L E N T D Y E R S

জাতীয় পরিকল্পনা ও উন্নয়ন একাডেমি(এনএপিডি)

পরিকল্পনা মন্ত্রণালয়
 নীলক্ষেত্র, ঢাকা-১২০৫
 ফোন : ৫৮৬১৪৭০৫-৬, ফ্যাক্স : ৫৮৬১৫৬৯৫
 Email: info@napd.gov.bd, website: www.napd.gov.bd
 একাডেমির বিভিন্ন প্রশিক্ষণ কোর্সে আবেদন আহ্বান

পরিকল্পনা মন্ত্রণালয়ের অধীন জাতীয় পরিকল্পনা ও উন্নয়ন একাডেমিতে আগামী জানুয়ারি-জুন, ২০১৬ মেয়াদে নিম্ন প্রদত্ত বিবরণ অনুযায়ী বিভিন্ন প্রশিক্ষণ কোর্স অনুষ্ঠিত হবে। এ কোর্সসমূহে মন্ত্রণালয়/বিভাগ, অধিদপ্তর, আধা-সরকারি ও স্বায়ত্বশাসিত সংস্থার প্রথম শ্রেণির জুনিয়র এবং মধ্যম পর্যায়ের কর্মকর্তাসহ উক্ত বিষয়ে অভিজ্ঞতা অর্জনে ইচ্ছুক কর্মকর্তাদেরকে মনোনয়ন/ আবেদন পত্র "মহাপরিচালক, জাতীয় পরিকল্পনা ও উন্নয়ন একাডেমি"র বরাবর প্রেরণ করতে হবে। কোর্স শেষে সনদপত্র দেয়া হবে।

নং	কোর্সের নাম	মেয়াদ	আবেদনের শেষ তারিখ	সময়	কোর্স ফি
১	প্রজেক্ট এপ্রাইজাল, ইআইএ এন্ড ফরমুলেশান অফ ডিপপি	০৩.০১.১৬-২১.০১.১৬	২৩.১২.১৫	রবি থেকে বৃহস্পতি সকাল ৯:০০ থেকে বিকাল ৫:০০	১৫,০০০/-
২	প্রাণি ফর লোকাল ইকোনমিক ডেভেলপমেন্ট	২০.০৩.১৬-২৪.০৩.১৬	১৩.০৩.১৬	ঐ	৬,০০০/-
৩	মনিটরিং এন্ড ইভালুয়েশান অফ ডেভেলপমেন্ট প্রজেক্ট	০৭.০২.১৬-১৮.০২.১৬	২৮.০১.১৬	ঐ	১১,০০০/-
৪	রিচার্চ মেথডলজি	২৮.০২.১৬-০৩.০৩.১৬	১৮.০২.১৬	ঐ	৬,০০০/-
৫	পাবলিক প্রকিউরমেন্ট ম্যানেজমেন্ট (২য় ব্যাচ)	২০.০৩.১৬-০৭.০৪.১৬	১০.০৩.২০১৬	ঐ	১৫,০০০/-
৬	ই-গভর্নেন্স এন্ড ই-কমার্স	০৬.০৩.১৬-১০.০৩.১৬	২৫.০২.১৬	ঐ	৬,০০০/-
৭	ফাইন্যান্সিয়াল এন্ড ইকোনমিক এপ্রাইজাল অফ প্রজেক্টস	২০.০৩.১৬-২৪.০৩.১৬	১০.০৩.১৬	ঐ	৬,০০০/-
৮	অফিস ম্যানেজমেন্ট (২য় ব্যাচ)	১৭.০৪.১৬-২৮.০৪.১৬	০৭.০৪.১৬	ঐ	১১,০০০/-
৯	ইংলিশ ল্যাংগুয়েজ প্রফিসিয়েন্সি (২য় ব্যাচ)	০৩.০১.১৬-১৩.০৪.১৬	২৩.১২.১৫	রবি, মঙ্গল, বুধবার সকাল ৬:৩০ থেকে রাত ৮:৩০	১৫,০০০/-
১০	অফিস অটোমেশান	১০.০১.১৬-০৩.০২.১৬	৩১.১২.১৫	ঐ	৮,০০০/-
১১	পাবলিক প্রাইভেট পার্টনারশীপ (পিপিপি)	২৭.০৩.১৬-৩১.০৩.১৬	২০.০৩.১৬	ঐ	৬,০০০/-
১২	পার্সোনাল কম্পিউটার ট্রাবলশুটিং	১৪.০২.১৬-১৬.০৩.১৬	০৪.০২.১৬	ঐ	১০,০০০/-
১৩	ওয়েব পেইজ ডেভেলপমেন্ট এন্ড ডেপলয়মেন্ট	১৩.০৩.১৬-০৮.০৪.১৬	০৩.০৩.১৬	ঐ	১৫,০০০/-
১৪	ম্যাক্রোসফট প্রজেক্ট	১৭.০৪.১৬-২৬.০৪.১৬	০৭.০৪.১৬	ঐ	৬,০০০/-

২। অগ্রহী প্রার্থীগণ অনলাইনে আবেদন করতে পারবেন। নিবন্ধনের সময় কোর্স ফি নগদে অথবা ক্রেডিট চেকের মাধ্যমে মহাপরিচালক, জাতীয় পরিকল্পনা ও উন্নয়ন একাডেমি এর অনুকূলে দাখিল করতে হবে।

৩। বিস্তারিত তথ্যের জন্য একাডেমির প্রশিক্ষণ কর্মকর্তা জনাব মোহাম্মদ জিয়াউর রহমান (ফোনঃ ৯৬৭৫৩৯২) এর সাথে যোগাযোগ করার জন্য অনুরোধ করা হলো।

ড. মোঃ নূরুজ্জামান
 পরিচালক (প্রশিক্ষণ)
 ফোনঃ ৫৮৬১১২৫৯