

# The Daily Star

FOUNDER EDITOR  
LATE S. M. ALI

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# The referee has left his whistle at home

## Deaths at Bashkhali

Was excessive force used?

**W**E are compelled to ask, after reading the news reports, whether the death of four people and injuries to at least 30 (including police) in Banskhalhi upazila (Chittagong) could have been avoided? It seems that a volatile situation was allowed to escalate because of false promises made to the local people.

In a country where land is scarce, land acquisition must take place following proper, just measures in terms of giving the people, whose land is being acquired, the rightful compensation they deserve. In this case, they had been promised jobs from a new industry when their plots were bought up by a company. Instead, it is planning to install a coal plant that locals believe will destroy the land and take away their livelihoods. Why such deception? We think the protest should have been handled with more concern for people's lives.

The tragedy occurred when two groups, one against the installation of the coal plant and another supporting it, called rallies at the same venue. Although the police declared a ban on the rallies (Section 144), according to locals, many of the demonstrators were not aware of it. That four people were shot by police indicates the propensity of our law enforcers to take the most extreme measures of crowd control. Using gunfire is considered the last resort in such situations, that too it should not be a 'shoot to kill' policy. The police version is that they were compelled to shoot in self defence as they were being attacked. Locals say only brickbats were hurled at the police, not bullets.

The crisis at Bashkhali is far from over. There has to be an impartial probe to find out what happened on April 4. Also, the grievances of the locals regarding the land where they have lived and earned their livelihood must be addressed, fairly and with compassion.

## Projected growth to hit 7 percent

Address the income inequality

**A**CCORDING to Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics' (BBS) provisional data, the economy is projected to grow at a rate exceeding 7 percent in the current fiscal. This is very good news and the government and the people should be complimented for it. We should, however, take into account the nagging problems that the economy faces to make the targets achievable. There is concern whether the growth target can be achieved in the current fiscal as tax collection, the principal means of revenue for the government remains below target. With the slowdown in the labour markets, particularly where Bangladeshi expatriate workers are concerned, the reduction in inward remittance is another factor that has to be taken into account.

An increase in per capita income does not necessarily mean a greater and equitable distribution of wealth for the greater populace. One must contend that there is greater disparity in incomes with each passing year and a large percentage of the populace linger below the poverty line. Indeed, the only sector that is showing optimistic growth is exports. There has been an expansion in the services, in large-scale manufacturing, construction and transport.

For the economy to sustain the projected growth rate will require substantial increase in private investments, and this is perhaps where the major concern lies. BBS data tells us that private investment to GDP ratio has actually declined from 22.07 percent to 21.78 percent in the current fiscal. Our focus should be towards removing the hurdles that hold up private sector investments, like addressing infrastructure bottlenecks and lowering lending rates. That would allow for the 7 percent growth rate to become sustainable over the long term.

### STRATEGICALLY SPEAKING



BRIG GEN SHAHEDUL ANAM KHAN  
NDC, PSC (RETD)

**T**HE Election Commission has become a metaphor for ineptitude. The gradual downslide in the performance of the main democratic institution of the country is disconcertingly palpable. And even more distressing it is to witness the willful renunciation of the power that the state has vested on the commission to perform its tasks effectively and efficiently.

How can one rationalise the EC's decision in 2013 to recommend doing away with article 91E of the RPO which deals with the power of the commission to declare null the candidature of any aspirant found violating the election codes? The arguments put forward by the EC was absurd at best because nothing can justify its willingness to divest itself of the only effective mechanism to maintain some sort of discipline in the candidates, and his or her supporters, during the period of canvassing. That article remains in vogue though, but the EC has been either unwilling to, or incapable of, enforcing it.

And when one of the main guardians of democracy resorts to an unintelligible whimper and tries to pass the buck on others for the shoddy conduct of elections, then people, and there are a good many of them, can't be blamed for projecting a bleak future for democracy in the country

The manner in which the two phases of the union council elections was conducted leaves little room for optimism. The disparaging remarks from some ruling party, even ruling coalition members are testimony to the ineffectual role of the commission in the conduct of the current elections that has surpassed its feat in some of the elections in the recent past including its peerless performance in the 5th January, 2014 national election.

A free and fair election empowers the voters. It happens when people can vote freely for candidates of their choice. It empowers by enabling one to offer oneself as a candidate.

Have the elections so far been free and fair? 85 candidates have been elected as chairman unopposed. Shortage of candidates is something unheard of in the lowest tier of local body election in our country when the election commission would sometimes run out of symbols because of the large number of candidates for this post.

Violation of code of conduct started from the very initial process of the election with the ruling party aspirants hindering others' candidature, first by persuasion, and when persuasion failed coercion was employed. Even the AL rebel candidates had to face impediments.

It is a given in our country that a ruling party will try to dominate the polls and resort to actions to get the results its way. It is at such a time as this that the election commission must work as the honest referee and blow the whistle at any infringement of rules. And it has the yellow and the red card to show as deemed appropriate. It seems the referee has left the whistle at

The commission has not understood the heavy responsibility that the nation has reposed on it to safeguard democracy since a good election is a precondition for a good democracy. Its responsibility is to the people and it owes nothing to the government or the ruling or opposition or any other political party.

But it is not the responsibility of the EC alone that the situation has come to such a pass. It appeared powerless in the face of the violence perpetrated by the ruling party men which elicited the most pungent comment even from AL alliance partners.

The AL as a party cannot absolve itself of the responsibility for the actions of its candidates and their



home. Very few of the breaches have been taken cognizance of, if at all, and even fewer violators have been committed to the law. It was waiting for formal complaints from the aggrieved candidates. What prevented it from taking the media reports into consideration and initiating suo moto action, and conducting some sort of investigation to verify the reports?

33 lives have been lost so far in the first two phases, and it is debasing to explain it away saying that election-related deaths occur in countries of our region too. The EC cannot pass the buck.

supporters. And that compels one to assume that there is an apprehension in the AL that an 'un-tampered' election might not fetch it the desired results. One fails to understand why so? The government policies have had a good approval rating, and as per a very recent survey by the International Republican Institute, among other positive indicators, 73 percent respondents think that the country is going in the right direction. If that be so, why the lurking fears to allow the election process run unhindered? Or is there a mismatch between what such surveys project and the reality on ground?

The writer is Associate Editor, The Daily Star.

## COMMENTS

**"No mask on Pahela Baishakh"**

(April 4, 2016)

Zonayed Hossain Rana

It's a very good decision. Safety should be the first priority in any occasion.

**"Better cyber security a must for banking sector: analysts"**

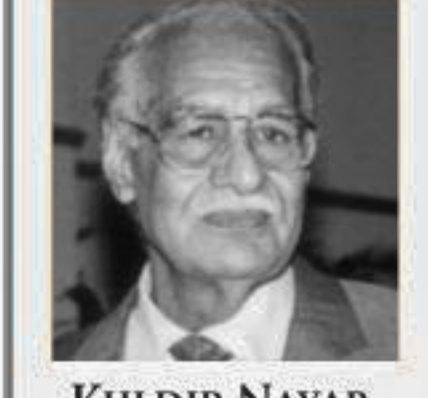
(April 4, 2016)

Anisur Rahman

We should train people to deal with cyber security issues.

## Money makes the mare go

### BETWEEN THE LINES



KULDIP NAYYAR

**T**HAT some Indians have stashed money abroad was known even when I began my journalism career almost 60 years ago. The West German government once provided us with a list of depositors from

India, but nothing came out of it because the people involved enjoyed political patronage. The much-hidden Swiss accounts were also given to the government when it made an official request. No action followed since it was once again seen that the people who had kept their money were influential.

I recall the Union Home Ministry once making an inquiry into the foreign funding of political parties after a furore in Parliament. The report was never revealed, but it was revealed unofficially that all political parties, including the Left, had their accounts in West Germany or Switzerland.

The revelations made now about the offshore investments by Indian businessmen and industrialists are in the same category. One must congratulate the intrepid journalists for this. After talking to the journalists, I found that it had taken more than six months to collect information about the money deposited here and there, and collate it.

Understandably, Prime Minister Narendra Modi has set up a panel of officials from the income-tax department, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) and Enforcement Directorate to probe the matter and apportion responsibility. Yet, nothing concrete would come out of it because the persons connected with the dealings have political clout.

The Parliament may take up the matter, since the entire nation is horrified over the disclosures. Yet again, the matter would not go beyond accusations and counter-accusations, since all political parties are involved in some way or the other. Parties have to oil their setups, and they have to have some sources to do so.

The bane of the problem is the money

needed during elections. Election cost to assembly constituencies is estimated at Rs. 10,000 crore. Naturally, the Lok Sabha elections would need several more crores of rupees. Even individual voters are being paid in cash or kind by different political parties to woo them. For example, Tamil Nadu, which is going to the polls next month, has already had the maximum number of arrests connected with pre-poll unaccounted money.

Many parliamentary committees have gone into the funding with the purpose of reducing the expenditure. Instead, the expenses have gone up. The Election Commission has banned publicity and several ills which were spotted during the electioneering process. But the overall situation has worsened, not improved. In fact, every political party, particularly the ruling ones, use all kinds of methods to win elections.

Power has come to mean not only authority but also money for the cadres. Therefore, no method is 'mean' enough to win. The manner in which caste is exploited, makes a mockery of free balloting. The Constitution debars all these practices, and yet parties use castes and sub-castes because this, apart from money, influences voters the most.

Finance Minister Arun Jaitely's statement that there are "no holy cows for them: is all right as it goes. Yet, he knows that those who finance political parties cannot be touched because they are the ones which sustain them. How can a political party cut the hand that feeds it?

The Election Commission in its various reports has complained that a candidate spends more than the limit laid down. According to the limits defined, an assembly candidate should not spend more than Rs 28 lakh while the Lok Sabha's limit is up to Rs. 70 lakh per constituency. However, candidates spend many times more. Since there is no limit placed on the expenditure by political parties, the Election Commission is helpless in taking action when it finds that a candidate for assembly or the Lok Sabha does not stay within the limit.

The accounts which the legislatures submit to the Election Commission are all cooked up

because they find it not possible to adhere to the rules if they have to cover the constituencies. Several vehicles and volunteers are required to reach every part of the constituency and yet the candidates find it difficult to cover all of them. The television medium has made things easier. But a candidate does not want his message go out as an advertisement. One, it costs a lot of money, and two, the viewers do not like canvassing through advertisements.

If the Prime Minister can live with statements of bogus election expenses, he can very well accept the offshore investments which are unethical but not illegal. After all, this is their way of avoiding paying high taxes in India. High taxation in the country is again the reason why businessmen and others prefer to keep their money abroad. The government has declared amnesty many a time and made it attractive for businessmen and industrialists to disclose their assets abroad. But how to make them keep money at home and pay taxes is the problem.

I recall that India was facing acute foreign exchange crisis when I was the High Commissioner in London in 1990. I made a personal appeal to the people of Indian origin living there that the country which they called Bharat Mata required their contribution urgently. But my request fell on deaf ears. They were looking for good returns. Once they were offered bonds which would ensure high returns in foreign exchange, they were very willing to invest. For them, the love of the country had to be translated into money.

By all means, the Prime Minister should probe offshore investments. And he is justified in doing so. But he should realise that the investors who found tax havens abroad will find some other ways to evade taxes. In fact, a probe is needed to find why Indians prefer money to the interests of their motherland? For this, mere slogans like Bharat Mata Ki Jai will not help. The RSS which has coined the slogan should find ways to evoke that kind of love. But how can it do so when it doesn't believe in a pluralistic society, the ethos of India?

The writer is an eminent Indian columnist.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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### "The last of the Tigers"

I am writing to address some important issues raised in the above piece published in TDS on March 23, 2016. The writer raises several important issues concerning the importance of protecting the tigers in the Sundarbans. Deforestation, climate change and hunting the tigers' prey, e.g. deer, have had a deleterious effect on tiger population. Criminals also hunt tigers to sell the body parts for medicinal uses and trophies.

However, I do not agree with the writer's opinion that the efforts by USAID funded Wild

Team to raise awareness about preserving tigers is incompetent. In fact, USAID's Bengal Tiger Conservation Activity (Bagh) has a multifaceted approach to assist in the preservation of the tigers. The Bagh Project has engaged in serious research on the tigers in the Sundarbans, their prey and their environment. This work is carried out in collaboration with Bangladesh's Ministry of Environment and Forests and the Smithsonian Institution in the US and it forms a scientific basis for efforts to increase the tiger population. Bagh works with the Forest Department in SMART (Spatial Monitoring and Reporting Tool) patrolling to reduce illicit

trafficking, it has trained local villagers on how to avoid human-tiger conflict and it is actively engaged in developing alternative livelihoods for those that live on the periphery of the Sundarbans with a view to preserving the natural state of the mangrove forests. Our objective is to ensure that our children and their children live in a world where the tiger roams free in its natural habitat. Too many species have passed into extinction; it would be a tragedy of enormous importance if we were to lose this noble animal.

Gary F. Collins  
Chief of Party, USAID's Bagh Activity

### Clean the Parliament premises

It is very unfortunate that the premises of the National Parliament are often dirty. People throw all sorts of garbage in front of the security fence. The authority should keep the parliament area clean and guard it properly in order to uphold the sanctity of what the Parliament symbolises.

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