

# Elections and the Ershad factor



PLEASURE IS ALL MINE  
SHAH HUSAIN IMAM

CONTRASTING speculations linger over the Rangpur mayoral election results. Was the poll “stage-managed” or was it a “calculated game”? Awami League and Jatiya Party, having been broadly on the same side of the political spectrum, means

that a JP win could cut both ways: Cushioning against AL nominee's defeat, dividing votes to seal BNP candidate's debacle; and secondly, getting a signal across that a credible election is possible under the incumbent government. In the process, a “model election” was held by the Election Commission adding to a previous list of city corporation polls in which ruling party-backed candidates had lost.

Jatiya Party nominee Mostafizar Rahman's highly convincing victory at the Rangpur mayoral election, however, appeared diluted by the party contestants' share of the councilors' posts. The JP mayor-designate bagged only two councillor posts in contrast to Awami League's 18 councillors and BNP's eight only. Clearly, and meaningfully, the equation at the working level is tilted towards the ruling party.

An election atmosphere has started gathering momentum revolving around the by-election to Dhaka North City Corporation (DNCC) falling due after the premature death of Annisul Huq. The Election Commission is known to be working towards conducting DNCC mayoral by-election and the vote for 18 new councillors each for Dhaka North and South City corporations by the last week of February.



Jatiya Party Chairman HM Ershad casts his vote in the Rangpur city polls.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

There are complications with regard to new councillors' election to be tied up with the mayoral by-election. The points at issue are: What will be the tenure of the councillors to be elected to the new wards? Would voters of the new wards be eligible for vote in the mayoral by-election? These questions will have to be sorted out before the polls. If, as the EC has reportedly given to understand, that the term of the new councillors will have ended with the end of corporation's tenure, legal complications might arise, according to experts.

After the Rangpur polls, Dhaka mayoral by-election is poised to be a pivotal test case

for the ruling party. Dhaka is the nerve-centre of national politics, a win or loss here is likely to impact, one way or the other, the shape of things in store for the major political parties.

It is going to be a highly charged, defining contest. Business leaders, politicians, even cultural figures have shown their interest to participate; but the AL chief has understandably given a go-ahead to Atiqul Islam, a business leader. He has already started his campaign.

From the BNP side, Tabitha Awal, son of Abdul Awal Mintoo, is the most likely choice. He had polled 3.25 lakh votes against AL candidate Annisul Huq's 4.6 lakh votes before he withdrew from the race in the after-

noon alleging “intimidation and false voting.”

In this context, one may not be surprised if an ambitious Ershad, buoyed up by the success in Rangpur, throws his party's hat in the ring for the DNCC poll. Even though his choice in Dhaka is limited. For Ershad's constituency has been regarded to be limited to northern districts.

Perhaps his party's triumph in Rangpur City Corporation election has strengthened his bargaining power in national politics. Keeping the 2019 general election in front, Ershad may once again be a “trump card”, rather than a third factor between two fiercely

rivaling major political parties—the AL and BNP.

The AL government in 1996 was formed with the support of JP. By taking part in January 5, 2014 non-participative AL-held general election, Ershad's party, with its Naziur and Manzur splinter groups, gave a stamp of legitimacy to the controversial polls and their results.

A history of elections in 1991, 1996, 2001 and 2008 reveals why JP's electoral strength played a catalytic role between the major political forces, either directly or indirectly.

A table of comparisons speaks for itself: In the February 1991 election BNP bagged 140 seats to AL's 88 and JP's 35; In 1996, AL got 146 seats, BNP secured 116 and JP got 32 seats; in the 2001 election, BNP tallied 193 seats to AL's 62 and JP's 14 (plus JP Naziur's 4 and Manzur's 1); and in the 2008 election, the grand alliance led by AL obtained 230 seats compared to the four-party alliance led by BNP's 30 seats while JP got 27 seats. In terms of the share of votes, JP's best showing was 16.4 percent in 1996 and the leanest was in 2001 with 7.22 percent.

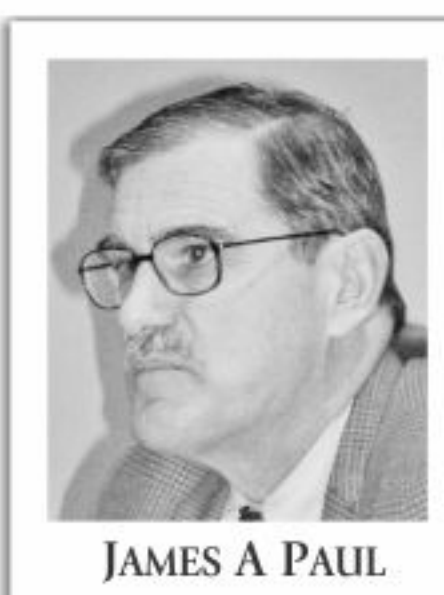
In the present context, the survivalist Ershad is aiming to be a revivalist. And, he is sought after. Recently, BNP secretary general Mirza Fakhrul Islam said, “In future, BNP's alliance with JP cannot be ruled out.” AL general secretary Obaidul Kadir was cryptic saying, “Time hasn't arrived yet to hear the last word from Ershad.”

Only time will tell whether Ershad, the *Palli Bandhu* and Raja of Rangpur to his loyalists, can widen his image at his age.

Shah Husain Imam is adjunct faculty at East West University, a commentator in current affairs, and former associate editor at *The Daily Star*. Email: shahhusainimam@gmail.com

## Should foxes rule the chicken coop?

### Reflections on Security Council reform



JAMES A PAUL

*Adding a proposed six new permanent members, each with a veto, would create an impossible blockage on the Council. With more than twice as many veto-wielders, each one protecting their particular interests and manipulating the Council's machinery to suit their purposes, the Council would be even more oppressive than it is today.*

SINCE the end of the Cold War, the UN Security Council has dramatically increased its activity and authority. Though the Council has exercised unprecedented global power, it has remained a very insular, secretive and undemocratic body, dominated by its five

Permanent Members, armed with their notorious vetoes and benefiting from perpetuity in office.

The United States holds the leading position in this oligarchy. It is the “*capo dei capi*”—the boss of bosses—ruling with overwhelming authority and towering above the other four: the United Kingdom, France, China and Russia.

The Council's 10 Elected Members, serving for only two years, have very little ability to influence Council action even though they have the electoral backing of all the other member states.

For the past 25 years, most of the world's governments have insisted on the need for Council reform to overcome these retrograde arrangements, made more than 70 years ago in a very different world.

They have sought to create a more open, representative and democratic Council. In 1994, the UN General Assembly set up a Working Group to consider far-reaching reform for a new era.

The New Zealand ambassador, who had served on the Council during the Rwanda genocide, said that the Council's practices were “nothing short of primitive.” The Mexican Ambassador told the General Assembly that Permanent Membership was “obsolete.”

From that time to the present, the Council oligarchy has continued to infuriate the international community by defending the status quo, while the UN General Assembly has continued to press for Council reform.

Some proposals, especially reform in Council membership, involve a change in the UN Charter, requiring a two-thirds vote in the General Assembly, followed by a two-thirds endorsement by all national parliaments—subject, of course, to P5 veto.

Assembly members are well aware of this high hurdle, but they have examined hundreds of specific proposals and engaged in spirited debates on the issues. In light of the difficulty of Charter change, opposition by the Permanent Five (P5), and other problems, the Assembly has been

unable to adopt noteworthy reforms.

In the shadows of all the debates, the P5 have firmly defended their privileges. To those that want to change the Council's stifling procedures, they have said that the General Assembly has no right to interfere in the Council, no right to tell the P5 how to run their shop. P5 resistance to change has at times been fiercely aggressive. Washington has forced governments to recall prominent UN ambassadors who have pushed too hard for change.

To blunt public engagement with the reform debates, the US has also pushed for heavy cuts in the UN's public affairs budget. P5 anti-reform leverage is backed up by economic and military power.

debate to promote their own narrow interests.

The aspirants include Germany and Japan, India and Brazil, South Africa and Nigeria. They have insisted self-servingly that they themselves are the key to a diverse and fair Council, working to promote the peace.

The aspirants have insisted that their permanency would be a “realistic” approach to reform, but in fact their approach has proven to be far from realistic. The P5 remain unwilling to accept them into the inner circle. Nor do the aspirants command the two-thirds majority needed to advance their cause in a Charter amending process.



The Security Council remains a very insular, secretive and undemocratic body, dominated by its five Permanent Members.

PHOTO: AFP

Beyond the oligarchs' opposition, there is another source of blockage—the inability of the other 188 member states to stand together and take up a common reform programme. Most countries believe that new members on a reformed Council should be elected, but the so-called “rising powers” want to become permanent members themselves.

They want to join the Council oligarchy rather than work to eliminate this odious privilege. So those who have the most clout to push through significant reforms have hijacked the reform

A bloc of regional rivals oppose new permanencies. Italy works against a German seat; South Korea and China are against Japanese permanency; and Argentina is unhappy about the elevation of Brazil. Egypt, Nigeria and South Africa vie for the hoped-for two African permanent seats. This complex political geometry makes success for the aspirants virtually impossible.

Adding a proposed six new permanent members, each with a veto, would create an impossible blockage on the Council. With more than twice as many veto-wielders, each one

protecting their particular interests and manipulating the Council's machinery to suit their purposes, the Council would be even more oppressive than it is today.

The P5's multiple advantages in the UN system raise another set of issues. Would the new permanent members expect to have the same privileges as the P5—their own judge on the World Court, for example, or control of certain high-level appointments in the Secretariat?

The campaigning aspirants say nothing negative about the institution of permanency and they mute their comments about the existing system and its many abuses. They curry favour with the P5 so as to avoid a future veto—if and when their candidacy reaches the ultimate stage.

This favour-currying has been going on for 25 years and it has had poisonous effects on the reform process and on the regular business of the Council too. In recent years, when the aspirants have joined the Council as Elected Members, they have generally played a muted and unimpressive role. This is definitely not a pathway towards constructive Council renovation.

For years, the aspirants' campaign for new permanent members has overshadowed all other reform discussions. It has diverted energy from serious alternatives. Smaller states alone simply cannot challenge P5 domination without hefty assistance from the middle powers.

Presently, reform progress depends on the support of strong non-aspirant states like Italy, Spain, the Netherlands, Sweden, Korea, Indonesia, Egypt, Mexico and Argentina, in combination with the rest of the democratically-inclined UN membership.

Germany, where elite opinion about a permanent seat has long been divided, could break the ice and renounce its aspirations for permanency, leading the march towards a different future.

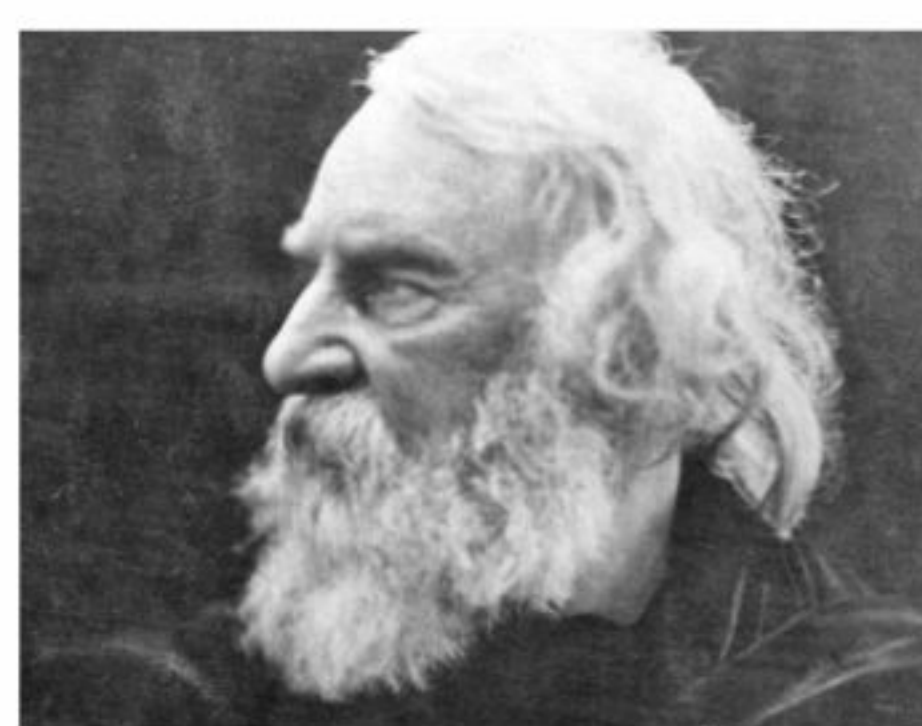
Political crises over the past 25 years have revealed the Council's despotic failures. They have shown that the foxes cannot be expected to protect the global chicken coop.

As crises multiply, it is time to step up efforts to radically reform this outworn institution, to mobilise broad support for fundamental change and to energise a worldwide citizen movement for Council transformation and UN renewal.

James A Paul, a writer and consultant, was the executive director of Global Policy Forum (1993-2012), an NGO monitoring the work of the United Nations, and author of the newly-released book *Of Foxes and Chickens: Oligarchy & Global Power in the UN Security Council*.

Copyright: Inter Press Service

### QUOTABLE Quote



HENRY WADSWORTH LONGFELLOW  
AMERICAN POET AND EDUCATOR  
(1807-1882)

*Every man has his secret sorrows which the world knows not; and often times we call a man cold when he is only sad.*

### CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

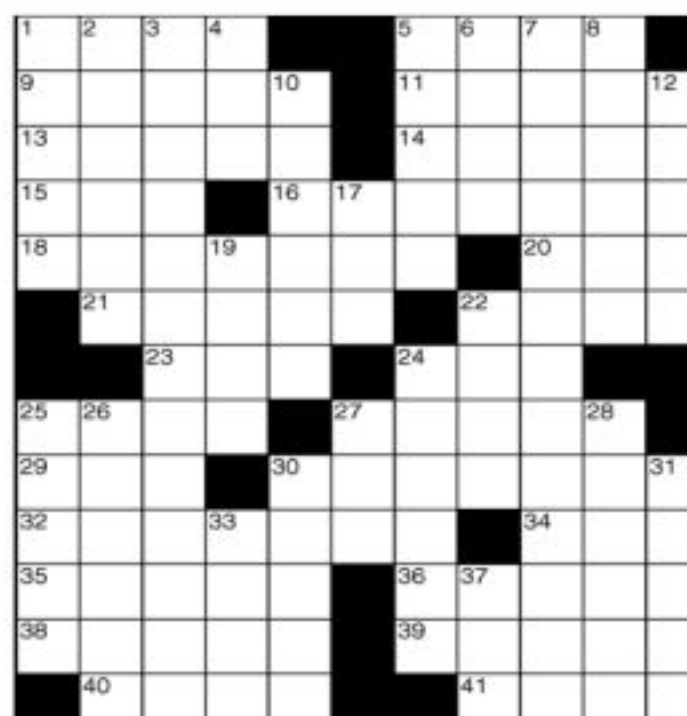
#### ACROSS

- 1 Matador's need
- 5 First-rate
- 9 Make a speech
- 11 Fuming
- 13 Showed again
- 14 - cotta
- 15 Small worker
- 16 Table protector
- 18 Establish
- 20 Desire
- 21 Reject with disdain
- 22 Play parts
- 23 Writer Harper
- 24 Nasty dog
- 25 Petty argument
- 27 “Paradise Lost” figure

#### DOWN

- 1 Deep pink
- 2 Bowl game settings
- 3 They may work with caterers
- 4 H look-alike
- 5 Moon of Saturn

- 6 Metal sources
- 7 Uninvited guests
- 8 Manhole setting
- 10 Audience cry
- 12 Brings in
- 17 Hold
- 19 Love song, often
- 22 Sedan or compact
- 24 Fiddle string material
- 25 Dropped tomato sound
- 26 Illinois city
- 27 Bart, to Homer
- 28 Not far from
- 30 Adorns, in a way
- 31 Cart pullers
- 33 Social misfit
- 37 Lush



#### YESTERDAY'S ANSWER



### BEETLE BAILEY



### BY MORT WALKER



### BABY BLUES



### BY KIRKMAN & SCOTT

