

# The Daily Star

FOUNDER/EDITOR  
LATE S. M. ALI

DHAKA SUNDAY JULY 22, 2018, SRABAN 7, 1425 BS

## Candidates' disregard for election rules

The EC must not repeat its mistakes

WE read with concern a report by this newspaper that major mayoral candidates in the upcoming city corporation elections are failing to comply with election rules. And that the election commission has turned a blind eye to such disregard for rules and discipline. The election commission has broad poll-time powers sanctioned by the constitution and other laws. It is therefore unfortunate that the commission continues to choose not to use them.

The previous two city polls in Khulna and Gazipur were marred by widespread—and at times, credible—allegations of ballot stuffing and other serious irregularities. If the commission does not want the upcoming polls to suffer a similar fate, it must assert its authority over the polling process as soon as possible.

What apparently impacted the electoral outcome in the previous two polls the most was the police's heavy-handed approach towards activists of opposition parties. Back then, too, the election commission failed to contain the police's actions against opposition activists, disrupting the even playing field which is a major prerequisite for a free and fair election. In fact, the commission never acknowledged its shortcomings; on the contrary, it gave itself a pat on the back for supposedly presiding over "excellent" elections.

In Rajshahi, the police have already lodged new cases against opposition activists, in an apparent violation of the Supreme Court directives, and arrested many. If such harassment and intimidation continue, it is almost certain that the upcoming elections would become a repetition of the previous two city polls—something the election commission must strive to prevent from happening, if it wishes to be credible.

## The case of the missing coal!

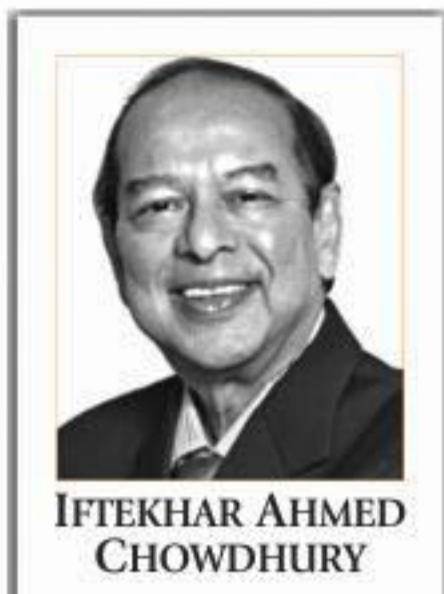
Probe must find the guilty parties

ABOUT 1.42 lakh tonnes of coal with a value of Tk 227 crore has disappeared from Barapukuria Coal Mining Company Ltd (BCMCL). Astonishing as it may sound, apparently the BCMCL officials failed to inform the senior management of Petrobangla of the situation, and it didn't dawn upon anyone to cross-check inventory regularly on how such a huge consignment of coal could disappear from the yard of BCMCL. We understand that a number of officials have been suspended pending an investigation into the matter.

In the meantime, the lack of coal has already stopped power generation at two plants that used to produce a combined 250 megawatts (MW) and we are told it is affecting another unit that would otherwise be producing 275MW. Hence, the "missing" coal has managed to take 525MW of power off the grid and its effects are already being felt in terms of power cuts. The sheer magnitude of the coal in question begs the question as to how long it took for the coal to be spirited away from BCMCL. This theft could not have taken place without the connivance of officials and yard workers. At the end of the day, all we can hope for is that the probe committee will make a genuine inquiry and identify those involved in the scam and bring them to justice. The authorities should also introduce security measures so that such an event does not recur in the future.

# PROGNOSIS OF POLLS IN PAKISTAN

## Imran Khan, the prime minister-in-waiting?



IFTKHAR AHMED CHOWDHURY

As one heads towards the elections in Pakistan on July 25, the main question in concerned minds is whether Imran Khan, the leader of the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), is

going to be Pakistan's next prime minister. Mr Khan has much going for him. He is a refreshingly fresh face in high political office untainted by corruption with rivals whose reputations stand in stark contrast. He is the blue-eyed boy of Pakistan's "angels"—also known as the military establishment—who see themselves as the "mirror image" of the Pakistani society with scant respect for civilian political leaders drawn from feudal and business backgrounds, most of whom they accuse of having exploited the people. And finally, for a nation that thirsts for glory that has generally eluded it, Mr Khan is someone who earned huge admiration by winning for his people the World Cup in cricket, the holy grail of recognition in South Asia. Undeniably, Mr Khan has also toiled long and hard for victory at the polls. Is he going to get it? The question merits analysis.

Imran Khan's party, the PTI, has two main rivals. The Pakistan Muslim League (Nawaz), led by Nawaz Sharif, a former prime minister, currently in jail on charges of corruption; PML (N) is said to be the most popular party in Pakistan's largest province, Punjab. The other is the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP), jointly headed by the father-son combination of Messrs Asif Zardari and Bilawal Bhutto, which holds sway in the province of Sindh (though not in its principal urban centre, Karachi). The PTI currently rules Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), where Mr Khan continues to enjoy massive popularity. Finally, in Balochistan, the principal political players known as "electables" are those who are tribal leaders with assured electoral seats, who are more likely to be influenced by offers in kind than by any ideological predilections.

Now to look at numbers. The distribution of seats in the 272 contested constituencies (60 more are reserved for women and non-Muslims) in the Parliament (called the National Assembly) is as follows: Punjab 141,



Imran Khan gives a speech during a political campaign rally outside Lahore.

PHOTO: ARIF ALI/AFP

augmented by 3 in Islamabad the capital, which geographically lies within the province; Sindh 61 (including 21 for Karachi); Khyber Pakhtunkhwa 39; Balochistan 16; and Federally Administered Tribal Areas 12. So, the magic number to secure an overall majority is 137. Simply put, the party that wins that number gets to provide the prime minister. It would be stretching facts to say that the fiercely fought electoral battle is being conducted on a perfectly level playing field. Partly because of their past performance, or lack of it, in office and partly because of their poor relations with the military, the "angels", with aid and comfort from the higher judiciary, surprising activist in Pakistan, both PML-N and PPP are left ploughing a difficult furrow on the political ground. This gives Mr Khan a decent leg-up. But can he, in the end, bring home the bacon—or in this case—the beef?

As of now, he is likely to win a huge majority in KP. In Sindh, he can pick up a few seats in Karachi, particularly as the influence of the earlier dominant Muttahida Quami Movement (MQM) comprising Urdu-speaking refugees from India is on the wane. In rural Sindh, where the PPP generally calls the shots, Mr Khan has articulated, at least at stated

levels, sufficient religiosity to earn him blessings of some right-wingers, now organised as Grand Democratic Alliance (GDA). This can be converted into a few more seats. The Balochi "electables" will give him, a fellow Pathan, succour and solace, should he win. But to win, the battleground he will need to triumph in is Punjab. He has made significant inroads into the less developed southern part of the province, which has 45 seats. But in central and northern Punjab, which commands 95 seats, the PML-N, who currently govern at provincial level and claim some credits in development deliveries, are clear favourites.

So Mr Khan will have to rely on the 25 or so independent candidates for whom purse and perks can be major attractions to clinch the requisite majority. In all, should Mr Khan manage 110 or so of those numbers, he may have fortune smile on him. In that case, the president, who incidentally is a PML-N member but with the army looking over his shoulders (in this case, the act of "looking" may be accompanied by a modicum of "gentle pressure"), would have to offer him the first bite at office. If that happens, the number of parliamentary supporters is likely to swell because

belonging to the government party always brings along certain welcome advantages.

But that remains, at least as of now, quite an "if". There is always the possibility that immediately following the polls, the PML-N and PPP could join hands and demand to form government. Of course, by doing so, they would risk the ire of the "angels" and the possibility of their leaders following Mr Sharif into jail at some point in time. But the immediate temptation of office can boost audacity even against unsavoury odds. While this scenario is not far-fetched, right now Mr Imran Khan increasingly seems to be assuming the aura of a prime minister-in-waiting. It is true that given his internationally recognised charm and charisma, his appointment will make global headlines. But of course, Mr Khan himself more than most would know that just as in a game of cricket, politics is fraught with uncertainties. He surely understands that there is many a slip between the cup and the lip, and in this particular case, it would have to be "a cup that cheers but does not inebriate" (with power, that is!)

Dr Iftekhar Ahmed Chowdhury is a former foreign adviser to a caretaker government of Bangladesh and is currently Principal Research Fellow at the Institute of South Asian Studies, National University of Singapore.

# Indiscriminate use of drugs: An emerging health concern?

SARWAR J. MINAR

OLIVER Wendell Holmes, the 19th-century American writer, physician, and dean of Harvard Medical School, once said, "If all the medicine in the world were thrown into the sea, it would be bad for the fish and good for humanity." Medicine is meant to cure diseases and save life, right? How is it a problem then?

Part of the answer lies in the understanding that medicines save life but not without a cost. It is often noted that legally prescribed medicines sometimes have a negative effect on the human body. Many of us remain dependent on medicines for various diseases which have a long-term effect on our body. As Charles E Page, M.D. remarked, "The cause of most diseases is in

provisions are often considered to be inadequate, many people living in the villages just cannot afford standard healthcare. Many government-appointed doctors have private arrangements for "better care" which are even more unaffordable for the general public. There are then the "unnecessary" tests that haunt the patients. As standard services are rendered expensive, and therefore largely inaccessible, often patients are left with cheaper alternatives such as low-cost services and non-prescription medicines. Things get worse when the drugstores take up the task of prescribing medicine, which they do a lot!

In small towns and especially in the villages, this is a common practice although it is less frequent in the big cities. Those at the drugstores often prescribe unnecessary and sometimes low-quality drugs

military-centric security in the post-Cold War era. The main theme of the human-centric security approach is that any issue that poses challenges to the survival and well-being of people is a security threat. The human-centric approach addresses issues like climate change, natural disasters, resource scarcity, irregular migration, food shortages and unavailability, human and drug trafficking, and infectious diseases as security threats. In the same manner, indiscriminate use of medicine can also be called a security threat, because it weakens human health and poses dangers to a healthy survival.

While conventionally it is believed that medicines are an important means of addressing health security threats, which mainly emanate from diseases and infections, a closer look reveals that the very use (and abuse) of medicine has the potential to be a security predicament for the future generations. The medicines which are made for saving life and ensuring health security are, in fact, posing a threat because of substandard prescription, indiscriminate use of drugs and lack of awareness about medicine.

Right to medical services is one of the five basic rights of the people, but considering that comes to mind is how well we are implementing that.

In the developing countries, securing the basic needs and rights of the people is always a challenge even though government efforts may not always be lacking. As regards our health rights and issues, there is a lot that both our government and civil society members can do. In this particular case, if professional doctors come forward to help the general people, those at the lower strata of society will surely benefit from it and reduce their reliance on non-prescription medicines. A few days ago, I came across the cases of two professional doctors who offered general medical advice to the people in their localities, one free of cost while the other by setting up a clinic where treatment could be sought for a fee of Tk 5. Many more doctors should come forward to offer such services for the betterment of the general people. After all, the goal of the doctors is to serve humanity.

Moreover, we can also reduce the cost of medical services by increasing awareness about the good and bad practices of medicine-intake. William Osler, often described as the father of modern medicine, once said that one of the first duties of the physician is to educate the masses about not to take medicine. Awareness is a key prerequisite as millions of people in thousands of villages across Bangladesh remain dependent on over-the-counter (OTC) drugs, and a significant number of them keep taking medicines as the first line of defence against a disease or infection.

If we cannot start taking proper steps regarding indiscriminate medicine intake now, we might have to pay a very high price in the future.



the poisonous drugs physicians superstitiously give in order to effect a cure." Now consider the claim of Robert Henderson, "Every drug increases and complicates the patient's condition," or the comment of William Osler, M.D., "The person who takes medicine must recover twice, once from the disease and once from the medicine."

The purpose of this article is not to address any complicated medical science issue or pharmaceutical aspect, rather to draw attention to the indiscriminate use of medicine in Bangladesh and its perils.

The situation in Bangladesh is dangerous because of several reasons. While the government facilities and

(medicines produced by companies of questionable repute) because it is good business. Though the vendors must take certain certification from the government, profit-making surpasses all other purposes. Additionally, taking medicine based on "prescriptions" by elder members in a family is not a rare practice either. At a time when experts are talking about the negative effects of even legally prescribed medicines, the effects of non-prescription medicines can be horrible and far-reaching. Add to that the fact that the effects of a medicine can sometimes pass through generations.

The idea of "human-centric security" emerged as a dominant security approach replacing the traditional

Sarwar J. Minar is Senior Officer, International Programs and Relations, Independent University, Bangladesh (IUB). He can be reached at sarwar.minar@gmail.com

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

letters@thedailystar.net

### Tonu's murderers still untraced: whose fault is it?

The rape and murder of Sohagi Jahan Tonu in Cumilla two years ago sparked outrage across the country, but those responsible for the crime are yet to be traced and brought to justice. It's quite frustrating and even disturbing that the investigating officers have made no progress in this regard even after two years. In fact, Tonu's parents were reportedly intimidated and the investigation process hampered.

In cases like Tanu, or Taqi in Narayanganj, or journalist-duo Sagor and Runi, there's been a perceptible indifference on the part of the authorities to find out the perpetrators. Cases like these make people lose their faith in our law enforcement and criminal justice system. Ashek Sarker Shaahid, Cumilla

### Making creative education method effective

According to a government monitoring report, around 41 percent of high schools do not—or cannot—prepare creative question papers. Similarly, a private survey revealed that nearly 55 percent of primary teachers do not understand the creative system.

The creative system was introduced in primary and high schools so that students are encouraged to hone their critical thinking and reasoning ability. However, when teachers themselves do not understand the system, how can we expect the students to do so?

The system should be re-evaluated, and teachers must go through extensive training for make it effective.

Rabeya Binte Rustom, Rajshahi University