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FILE PHOTO: TITU DAS

The EC must evaluate its own performance



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M SAKHAWAT HUSSAIN

The recently concluded city corporation elections in Barishal and Khulna can be termed one-sided. With the main opposition BNP and other political parties not participating in the polls, there was neither contest among the candidates, nor enthusiasm among the voters to cast their votes. Only five out of the 41 registered political parties took part in these elections. According to the Election Commission, the voter turnout was around 50 percent in Barishal and about 42-45 percent in Khulna.

Although the EC seems to be content with the number of voters coming out to vote, the fact is that, if these elections were held in a free and fair atmosphere and all the major political parties participated in it, even more voters would have gone to the polling centres to cast their votes; it is natural to have 80 percent voter turnout in local elections. When we held the first city corporation election in Barishal – under a caretaker government – we were surprised to see the high voter turnout. I was personally present there. There was knee-deep water at the polling centres because of incessant rain, yet people were standing in long queues to vote. The enthusiasm among the voters was extraordinary, because they knew that they could vote for their candidate of choice. The polling environment was very satisfactory, with no report of clashes, vote-rigging or other irregularities.

However, none of the elections over the last 10 years have been held in a manner that could be termed participatory or relatively fair. A series of bad elections has clearly discouraged the voters to vote, their apathy towards the elections becoming particularly clear after the 2014 and 2018 national elections.

In Barishal, the attacks on the mayoral candidate of Islami Andolan Bangladesh (IAB) and some of his followers, allegedly by the supporters of Awami League, raised questions about the Election Commission’s capability. The EC failed to take immediate action against the attackers despite the fact that judicial magistrates were deployed there. Later, they ordered a lengthy enquiry, which may lead to nowhere. Our previous experiences regarding such investigations make us doubtful about the outcome of this one. Has anything happened to those who were involved in irregularities during the Gaibandha-5 by-polls? Have any

of the officials been punished? Sadly, no. There were also allegations of vote-rigging and other irregularities in the media.

In Khulna, the situation was even more sad. There was a serious lack of interest among the voters. Although the EC said that 42-45 percent votes were cast, media reports stated that the actual number was much smaller than the figures projected by the EC. Even the people of Khulna questioned the voter turnout. Reportedly, there was no competition because there were no candidates other than the one from the ruling party, which was one big reason why voters were disinterested. Even the hardcore supporters

At present, the most important question is: can the EC play a more assertive role in the elections? Well, they have to go through a soul-searching process as the nation waits for the next general election, which is going to be a critical one. The EC is not legally bound to all parties that decide not to participate in the elections. But my opinion is that it has a moral obligation to pursue all parties to convince them to participate in the elections, with the assurance that it would discharge its duties neutrally.

of the ruling party candidate did not show up at the polling centres as the result was obvious.

So, can the popularity of a party be measured by such a small-scale, lacklustre election in a small urban area? The answer is no. The integrity of these elections could not be determined because of the serious allegations that resulted in the IAB rejecting the results and boycotting the elections. The party’s participation in the election had been a relief since the major parties were absent. Although in many advanced countries, local elections are indicators of national elections, the case is not the same here.

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participate in the elections. But my opinion is that it has a moral obligation to pursue all parties to convince them to participate in the elections, with the assurance that it would discharge its duties neutrally. Shrugging off its moral obligation with unpalatable comments will not add to the cause of gaining public trust.

About taking action against violations of electoral norms, violence and irregularities during elections, the EC has all the power, which it should use. During the elections, the EC has to take instant decisions rather than be bureaucratic. For instance, in Barishal, instant action followed by a detailed enquiry after the IAB candidate was attacked could have had a salutary effect, with apportioning the responsibility on the members of law enforcement agencies who were responsible for maintaining law and order during the polling. There were members of police, Bangladesh Ansar and the Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB). What were they doing? There were also executive magistrates and judicial magistrates there,

who were supposed to punish the offenders instantly. But none of that happened in the Barishal city corporation election, or in any other recent elections.

The EC should evaluate its own performance and find out where it has gone wrong, instead of being complacent. If need be, it should talk to the Islami Andolan Bangladesh to relieve their grievances and look into other allegations of irregularities in the city polls. If it cannot take any substantive action against these small-scale incidents, what will it do when the national elections are held in all 300 constituencies, with one million voters voting in a single day? We expect that the EC will do its best as it is empowered under Article 119 of the constitution. It should be noted that the world – those who matter – will be watching how the EC delivers its constitutional obligations.

(As narrated to Naznin Tithi.)

PROJECT ■ SYNDICATE

What the Paris Finance Summit must do

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SÉBASTIEN TREYER and BERTRAND BADRÉ

Lack of investment for sustainable development in the world’s poorest, most vulnerable countries is one of the most pressing global issues today, especially now that many of these countries are in debt distress, or will be soon. The fallout from the Covid-19 pandemic, Russia’s war on Ukraine, and the ongoing climate-driven disasters are preventing many developing economies from achieving lift-off and exacerbating the global economy’s structural asymmetries.

This is the decade when we should be ratcheting up investments in sustainable development. In Sub-Saharan Africa, an additional two million decent jobs must be created each month until 2035, just to keep up with growth in the working-age population. Yet, major powers like the United States, the European Union, and China are paying scant attention to such challenges. Instead, they are focused on their own technological competition, reindustrialisation, decarbonisation, and zero sum

would be set for the proliferation of humanitarian disasters in many parts of the world, ecological breakdown, and China’s rise as the main power behind an alternative bloc of multilateral institutions that exist to serve its own interests. This scenario would ultimately leave everyone worse off, with fragmentation and competition between different rule-setters and institutions introducing zero-sum dynamics and destroying global public goods.

To prevent such outcomes, Western countries must join the effort to transform multilateral financial institutions, even if doing so means ceding some of their own influence to others who have previously been marginalised. Those pursuing systemic reforms must resist the temptation merely to tweak the current arrangements. The entire conversation about development should be reframed to account for neglected issues such as infrastructure and the role of

facing catastrophic climate events – as was done at the height of the pandemic.

The second time horizon spans the next 18 months, through the rest of India’s and then Brazil’s G20 presidencies. Since it has been only six months since the Paris summit was announced, there has not been enough time to negotiate finalised agreements on critical political issues.

Even so, the summit can create an impetus for such deal-making in the months ahead as governments find ways to overcome domestic obstacles to more robust action. For example, a preliminary agreement to improve the efficiency with which multilateral development banks deploy existing capital could open the door for greater capital contributions by donor countries in the future.

The third time horizon covers the next few years, when far-reaching reforms to the global financial system will need to be implemented. To prepare the ground, the summit should explore the options for mobilising different kinds of donors and tapping new funding sources, with an emphasis on creating new international taxation mechanisms.

This would help broaden the debate beyond official development finance. Not only does the current



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FILE PHOTO: REUTERS

strategic manoeuvring, all of which could aggravate conditions in developing countries.

As Barbadian Prime Minister Mia Mottley warns, the Global South, including its emerging economies, remains in critical financial condition, much like Europe after World War II. Back then, the US committed reconstruction funding equal to three percent of the recipient countries’ combined national incomes, because it knew that the investment would pay off both economically and geopolitically. Now, the Western countries that still dominate the Bretton Woods institutions must recognise that they, too, have an interest in effectuating global financial and institutional transformative, not just incremental, reform.

Otherwise, the consequences would be catastrophic. The stage

the private sector and non-public financial flows.

This is what the June 22-23 Paris Summit for a New Global Financing Pact aims to do. But as important as the gathering is, it is also risky. If the only result is a hollow political declaration, the broader reform effort could lose credibility. That is why those in attendance must deliver a concrete blueprint that is ambitious, but also realistic and feasible.

The summit is asking the right questions, and it presents an opportunity for everyone to think imaginatively about novel solutions to today’s unprecedented challenges. The discussion should focus on three time horizons. The first is the day of the gathering, when governments must agree, for example, to a suspension of debt-servicing obligations for countries

financial system still favour carbon-intensive investments over sustainable projects, it also favours pure speculation (usually on arcane financial instruments and real estate) over productive investments in poorer countries.

Recognising how deep these problems run, UN Secretary-General António Guterres recently proposed a comprehensive programme of measures to redirect “unproductive and unrewarding” finance and rebalance structural asymmetries in the global economic system. The Paris summit should help launch this debate so that it delivers tangible results – including public money to support developing countries – in the months and years ahead.

This is the moment to articulate a reform agenda that is ambitious enough to give the Global South real hope for the future.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

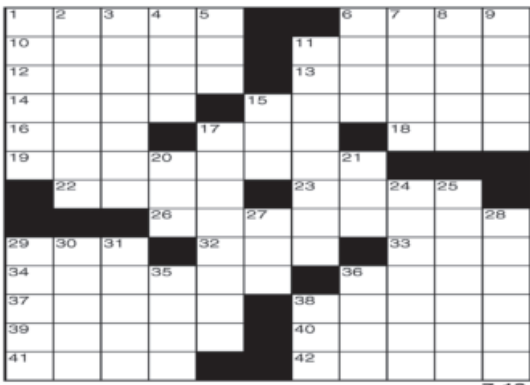
ACROSS

- 1 Saloon drinks
- 6 Schnitzel base
- 10 Sioux shelter
- 11 String quartet member
- 12 Seriously worry
- 13 Sesame Street resident
- 14 Continually
- 15 Punctual
- 16 Stop signal
- 17 Down
- 18 Singer Henley
- 19 IT GIVES YOU THIS
- 22 Formerly
- 23 Squirrel’s cache
- 26 IT GIVES YOU THIS
- 29 Last letter, in

DOWN

- 1 Takes the wheel
- 2 Dismissal
- 3 Joined a mailing list
- 4 Rip
- 5 Match part

- 6 Jacket accompanier
- 7 Spanish hero
- 8 Texas landmark
- 9 Sophia of “Two Women”
- 11 Abridge
- 15 Sturdy wood
- 17 Cat-footed
- 20 TV watchdog
- 21 Brynner of “The King and I”
- 24 Raptors’ home
- 25 Disperse
- 27 Diner dessert
- 28 Messages
- 29 F. Scott’s wife
- 30 Outfit
- 31 Simpleton
- 35 Good pair
- 36 Folded food
- 38 Friend of Frodo



YESTERDAY’S ANSWERS

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