

Govt intervenes in BGMEA election

Leave professional bodies alone

An episode of pulling an important trade and industry representative body on to the ruling party orbit is being openly enacted. Technically it may not seem so but substantively it does.

In terms of its constitution the Bangladesh Garments Manufacturers and Exporters Association is fully within its rights to set its own election dates.

Let alone convenience, it is a matter of principle that cannot be brushed aside. This touches on the fundamental question of whether any authority in the government can change election schedules previously decided upon and announced by the organisation legally authorised to do so.

The tendency towards having fiefdoms in all manner of organisations has been commonplace in ruling party culture. We have seen how the previous AL government was focused on winning leadership panels in different professional bodies like the FBCCI, BMA et al.

By virtue of the BNP-led coalition alliance's convincing victory in the last general election they could easily keep above the control freak. The nation still awaits their putting that electoral triumph to a better use.

Gas crisis

Another case of being caught unawares

ERRATIC and inadequate supply of gas has been a big problem for city dwellers in several areas. Their plight is imaginable as they grapple with severe cold at the moment.

Consumers get much less gas than they need, particularly during daytime. The Titas authorities do not have a satisfactory answer to the thousands of complaints that are being lodged by the sufferers.

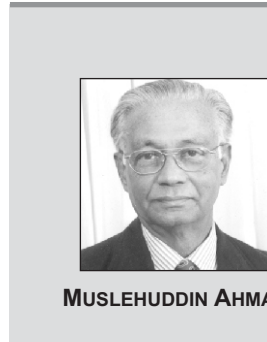
It seems the gas company did nothing to augment the supply during winter expecting that the problem would not snowball like it has.

The gas suppliers have also tried to give a picture of their limitations, and have promised that the problem would soon be solved on a permanent basis. While installation of new pipelines connecting the city with additional sources of gas should go a long way to ensuring a steady supply, we believe that the problem will linger if the suppliers continue to follow conventional rules, instead of working out a need-based strategy.

The gas crisis has also hit power generation and industrial production, which show that when a vital sector performs below the expected level, other important sectors are affected badly. Reports also say that pilferage of gas is taking place on a scale that cannot be dismissed lightly.

The sufferings of the people are, in the ultimate analysis, attributable to poor planning, slow implementation of crucially important projects and the failure to put an end to pilferage and other corrupt practices.

Palestinians to help 'regime change' in Israel



MUSLEHUDDIN AHMAD

If one sets a trap for others, he himself very often falls into that trap. Sharon wanted regime change in Palestinian territories and that induced President Bush to ask for regime change there.

space' to deal with Saddam. If Blair could be persuaded to back out, then Bush may think twice to attack Iraq unilaterally as there appears to be growing opposition in the USA and also within Bush Administration itself.

Since the second half of November 2002, Israel had faced no suicide bombings but Israeli army continued to kill Palestinians in Gaza and West Bank on the pretext that they are listed "terrorists".

The period was around 50. All of them except some so-called listed terrorists were innocent civilians including children. But a few days ago double suicide bombings in Tel Aviv killed 22 Israelis -- most of them were civilians.

The U.S. asked Israel to show some restraint while going for revenge attacks against Palestin-

ian -- the reason being Bush's concern over Arab reactions while he has been preparing for war against Iraq. Sharon did not bother much. His army continued to kill Palestinians and destroy their houses.

Till last week, Sharon appeared set to be Israel's Prime Minister for another term as Likud's poll-rating

African businessman, Cyril Karim, to repay a political contribution made by an American company -- Annex Research. Earlier he reportedly said his political expenses were met by loan taken against the mortgage of land of his ranch in Israel.

Central Elections Committee, a former Justice of Israel's Supreme Court as this was considered as illegal "election propaganda" just days before the General Election of January 28.

This seems to be the best opportunity for the Palestinian radical groups and the Palestinian Authority to take advantage of political reactions in Israel and work towards the change of Likud regime in Israel.

SPOTLIGHT ON MIDDLE EAST

Once Labour Party is in power and start implementing the measures promised by its Leader Amram Mitzna, Israel should face no more violence within and outside the country and Israel and State of Palestine could live side by side in peace and tranquility.

was considerably high because of Sharon's repressive policies against Palestinians. Unfortunately, Israelis fail to understand that it is Sharon who has been responsible for ever increasing violence in the area.

However, in the meantime, the press reports on corruption charges against Prime Minister Sharon during the last election in terms of funds received in an unlawful manner.

instead of a "grandfather". He has been accused of stealing money and other forms of corruption to support and protect his family members.

It is highly unlikely that he would be able to recover the character injuries he suffered due to the corruption allegations. Israelis seem to be very sensitive on such issues.

pronounced publicly its plan, if elected, for direct negotiations with the Palestinian Authority. He earlier said, he would dismantle all Israeli settlements in the occupied territories, withdraw Israeli army to 1967 border and accept East Jerusalem to be the capital of the State of Palestine.

President Arafat has already called

Operation Clean Heart. How can they ever hold their heads high in front of the public if they need to be indemnified for their behaviour to their own people?

On the contrary, there are also genuine questions about how some of the 43 people really died. Serious questions about the role of the police have arisen since those events have occurred.

Then again, can such a 'law' really be expected to protect anybody? This 'law' is only as good as the next parliamentary majority. And injustice has a way of surviving for years and finally catching up with those who perpetrate it.

We urge the prime minister to not to place this ordinance before the parliament and thereby not tarnish Bangladesh's best face - democracy, and save the nation, her own government and the armed forces from living in ignominy.

The PM should withdraw the ordinance

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

We took a while in writing this commentary because we decided to discuss with a cross-section of our readers before penning our views. We talked to jurists, human rights activists and several retired senior army personnel, not to mention eminent civil society members.

The assumed justification was that the armed forces wanted it, the logic being since the army was called to do the 'dirty' work of the civilian force, therefore it must be given special 'protection'. 'We did your bidding, therefore you have to do ours' was the sort of quid pro quo the armed forces were supposed to have asked for.

However, there were others who felt that the 'army-wanted-it' argument was being used as an excuse. The real demand is from the government itself which fears future prosecution. Some cabinet members and ruling party high-ups have pointed out that the government itself could be held responsible for the custodial deaths and other violations of the law as it was the prime minister who had ordered the operation in the first place.

Who wanted the indemnity ordinance is only relevant up to a point. What is far more important is what the indemnity ordinance does to our democracy, how it impacts on

people's future respect for law, and what will be the image of our country as a result. It is also important to understand what the passing of the ordinance reveals about the mindset of the government as to how seriously it takes the constitution and the concept of the rule of law.

In a democracy can an elected government, oath-bound to uphold the constitution, govern by indemnifying 43 deaths in custody, widespread torture, random physical abuse and jailing of nearly 11,000 people without warrant or specific charges?

Let us not have any illusion that if we pass such a law we can still be considered a functional democracy. If some people die and nobody is answerable, if people cannot seek justice for harm caused to them, if each citizen cannot be treated as equal before the law and if deaths, torture and illegal arrests get protection of the law and if the ruling party can use its brute majority in the parliament to pass any law it wants, regardless of the fundamental rights guaranteed in the constitution, then we become nothing more than a mockery of a state under law.

There is a 'sacred covenant' between each citizen and the state. That 'sacred covenant' is the fundamental rights enshrined in our constitution. If those fundamental rights are taken away then the framework of law, which is the bulwark of democracy, within which we live today will have no meaning because it can be taken away tomorrow.

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The indemnity ordinance is the biggest proof - if proof is still necessary - that the Operation Clean Heart contained many actions that were violations of our laws. It also proves that whatever was said as explanations of the custodial deaths were deliberate lies. So the government today stands accused, in addition to having violated established laws, of 'consciously and continuously lying to the people' as regards what were said through the principal information officer (PIO) about the custodial deaths.

From the very outset, several newspapers, including ours, had continuously urged the government to think carefully about the legal aspects of the Operation Clean Heart. We made continuous pleas to make public the PM's executive order that had launched the operation. If it were done, the flaws, if any, in that order would have become public and, through subsequent amendments, the needs for a post-

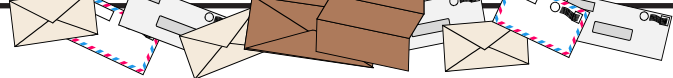
facto indemnity law could have been averted. The callousness of the government is also proven by the fact that nothing was done to stop the custodial deaths as they continued to occur every other day over a period of nearly three months.

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TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR



Letters will only be considered if they carry the writer's full name, address and telephone number (if any). The identity of the writers will be protected. Letters must be limited to 300 words. All letters will be subject to editing.

"Free Saleem Samad"

The article by Afsan Chowdhury "Free Saleem Samad" (January 12) triggered my pains once again. It started bleeding from my old sore the long and inhuman internment of Saleem Samad apparently for no specific charge.

Afsan Chowdhury's article has rightly pointed out almost all the inner stories of Saleem Samad's imprisonment and has attempted to unveil the unfriendly and ideological gap with many present-day high-ups, placed in the government, professional trade unions etc.

As a layman, I find it extremely imprudent to keep Saleem detained even after the release of Channel 4 journalists. I do not really get it why and how one can be set free and the others interned for the same offence.

I also must reiterate that Saleem Samad, in personal and in professional life, is not and was not detrimental to any one, not to speak of the state despite some ideological differences. Even if we keep aside

the political and legal jugglery, human and rights issues must be looked into in sorting out Saleem's case of internment by the appropriate authority. It is possibly always better to admit the reality, obey the rule of law and walk along the path of righteousness even if it is a case with the Government. A long time has elapsed since the game with Saleem had started. But it is never too late to take corrective measures. And I strongly believe that Government will realise this fact truth and set Saleem Samad free unconditionally.

Ataul Ghani Dewan Narinda, Dhaka

ICS and DU

Under ideal circumstances nobody should have any problems regarding the presence of Shibir in DU. It is a free speech issue and we welcome Shibir to provide its input in the student life.

However, current circumstances are anything but ideal. We all know how tolerant Shibir is of other views. It is an organisation armed to the teeth and its targets are left

wing student organisations which are progressive and sans armed cadres.

One might argue on the freedom of expression. All I can say is that providing Shibir with freedom of expression is equivalent of taking that very freedom away from the rest of the student body. It is one trade off we cannot afford. Shibir tends to regulate the social life of other students (ask any student from Chittagong and Rajshahi). It imposes its version of morality, backed up by armed strength. The very advent of Shibir would mean no more Pohela Boishakh celebrations, no more Pohela Falgun. Most importantly, no more Provat Feri on February 21 because it is "un-Islamic" hence should be barred.

Do you want a DU campus like that? Yahya USA

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The letters of Dr Abu Ishmam and Mr Khairul Hasan (January 14) have drawn my attention to an unconstructive and professionally

unethical report printed as a news story in your newspaper regarding a particular student organisation. I don't want to mull over how good or how bad is that particular organisation. I simply want to say that The Daily Star's readership deserve a better manifestation of objectivity and do not expect any report that is even close to academic unfairness.

The Daily Star is one unique type of newspaper that claims the readers of different political and ideological denominations. I may personally differ from its Editor and many staff on many issues and there may exist an ideological polarisation between us. But, even then, I respect the intellectual scholarship of its Editor Mr Mahfuz Anam and the good repute of its reporters. But it does not mean that there should be a political convergence between us; rather we can enjoy our unity in diversity. That such a report about ICS was published in The Daily Star indicates that its Editor and staff are yet to appreciate its valued readership.

My humble request is that let the political differences not find their

expression in your reporting. There are many podiums that can be accurate choices to put forward political hatred.

Mahmud UK

"Some suggestions"

I am encouraged to write after reading Mr. Asif Saleh's letter (January 13). It appears that his idea and effort have worked very effectively with the help of The Daily Star. This effort can be stimulated at the same time for some other important humanitarian needs. We know about many foundations or organisations (though not in details) that are involved in supporting the needy. Namely, rehabilitation centres for mentally or physically disabled children, for whom a wheel chair will mean a new birth. A hundred US dollar note can buy two locally produced wheelchairs.

Many of us do not know where to send money to support the needy. We do not have any centrally orchestrated mechanism to coordinate among different charity organisations already in place. If all

(or chosen ones) these organisations could be interlinked through a broader interface, one can pay for a pair of blankets, a pair of power glasses, an artificial limb or some cash for any purpose, into that particular account. This would attract more resources for those struggling for a meagre survival.

It would be easier for the expatriates to help if the payment mechanism could be electronic for debit and credit cards or direct bank transfer. Finally, it is a tremendous idea and effort. I thank Mr Asif Saleh and The Daily Star for this endeavour. MM Haque Jeddah, K.S.A

Why can't the world learn from the Canadians?

In Canada we know that tolerance, goodwill, compassion and respect for all people is what peace is all about, but in Canada, even though there is a loud cry for peace the world does not hear it. That may be because although most Canadians have very loud hearts, they also have very soft voices.

The Canadians know that tolerance is a two way street that leads to peace in both directions. They know that there is more than one way to live a life (and in fact there are many) and all people have the right to live it their way. In Canada, all Canadians are happy to give that right to all other Canadians. The Canadians actually enjoy tolerating each other because our differences help to make life more interesting and entertaining.

The Canadians wish all people goodwill. Canadians want all people to have homes, jobs, schools, hospitals and futures.

The Canadians have compassion for all those who have suffered and for all those who are suffering. The Canadians have respect for all people and for their human rights.

The Canadians know that tolerance, goodwill, compassion and respect for all people are needed for forgiveness and reconciliation to take place.

The Canadians learned this long ago, and as a result our multicultural society celebrates its diversity and life in Canada is both peaceful and prosperous.

Why can't the world learn from the Canadians? Perhaps we need to speak louder. Canadians have 6 billion neighbours. You are one of them, and we wish you, and all of the other neighbours, Peace. Bob Hicks Ontario, Canada

upon the Palestinians to stop violence before 28<sup>th</sup> January General Election in Israel.

What Palestinian radical groups should do now is to make a firm announcement to the Israeli public that they will bring immediate and total halt to all suicide bombings and attacks against Israelis provided Labour Party is voted to power. This should be a genuine declaration to stop all suicide bombings. These groups should declare publicly that all Israelis can freely move in the streets, malls, buses and all other business places without fear and they may continue to enjoy the same if Labour Party is voted to power. This may have some favourable effect on many Israelis as they are now really concerned about their security and safety.

Labour Party will also use this as a positive development in their election campaign and assure Israelis of their future security, which is now their prime concern.

Once Labour Party is in power and start implementing these measures promised by its Leader Amram Mitzna, Israel should face no more violence within and outside Israel and State of Palestine could live side by side in peace and tranquility. This is what the Quartet and the international community want. With peace between Israel and Palestine, the rest of the problems in the Mid East could gradually be solved on the same political strategy and peace formula -- "land for peace". Such a development may considerably reduce the chances of American war against Iraq.

Muslehuddin Ahmad is a former Secretary and Ambassador and founder president of North South University