POINT ** COUNTERPOINT

The new year: Equations and expectations

ANU MUHAMMAD

E have entered 2006 with the burdens as well as promises of the old year 2005 still hanging over us. In Bangladesh and elsewhere people have tried to feel a new possibility and changes in the new year. When we wish anybody a happy new year, we utter that with sincere optimism. Nevertheless, no new year is absolutely new, the last sunset of a year and a first sunrise of the next cannot be separated, and these are not discontinued. Therefore, we feel, smell and suffer the old when accept the new.

The whole world has tried to take a fresh breath on the first morning of the New Year 2006 but eventually found smell of blood and fire, bombs and drugs, pollution and destruction. We cannot forget last year's human tragedy and inhuman barbarity of many power lords including super mighty US lords in many parts of the world including Iraq; plunder, genocide, deprivation, deception all haunt the world in the New Year.

The year 2005 ended with Hong Kong ministerial of WTO that again showed global hegemony in a vulgar scale. Bangladesh, despite its least developed status, pay duties on their export to the US 15 times more than developed country like France. The OECD countries pay 5 times more in subsidizing their big agro farms than what they offer for the whole 'third' world as so-called foreign

aid, about 1 billion US dollar a day.

WTO does not talk about armaments but that is where most of the resources go. Every year about 900 billion US dollar is spent for armaments and war in the world. It is worth noting that more than 50 percent of this spending on destruction comes from the USA. where people die from Hurricane. lack of health care and also more than a 1000 are being killed in a year from firearms shooting.

Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans

of the USA showed that taking care

of people's lives and security do not

primarily depend on resource but

on the priority and nature of the

According to the UNDP

estimate, only 1 percent of

expenditure on armaments is

needed to ensure safe water for

everybody in the world. What a

cruel world we are living, hundred

times of the amount necessary to

make a world much safer go for

destruction. That happens because

that is a trillion dollar business,

State and institutions.

where people, not profit, stand in the centre.

In Bangladesh, a peripheral country in global capitalist setting, a dazzling skyline along with ugly rampant poverty has developed side by side. Development projects endorsed by the succeeding governments along with hypocrite elite and sponsored by the global lords, e.g., the World Bank and IMF turned the economy from mills to malls, created affluence of the few and poverty of many, polluted air

and water, evicted people from

land, caused havoc to natural

resources, gave birth to 'black'

economy and non-stop violence.

Security measures offered by the

USA, secret agreements with the

USA and many multilateral

agencies in fact increased

insecurity of people and

vulnerability of the economy.

Killing people in 'crossfire' in 'anti-

terrorism' drive continued with

terrorism and bomb blast.

Religious, racial intolerance

increased in every way. While Bush

justifies genocide in the name of

Bangladesh showed that their mission of profit not only goes against the optimal utilization of energy resources, rather it turned the natural gas resources as liability for the people and country. The Economist (December 24 2005-January 6, 2006) showed that similar things had happened in many weak countries around the world. Big blowouts in Magurchara and Tengratila in Bangladesh also showed corporate greed as well as

inability on the one hand, and

government's role as nothing more

than extension of greedy foreign

companies on the other. There are

other similar and worse offers in

the pipeline, if those can take place,

we will find the 2006 much more

Bangladesh with the news of killing

of a garment worker by beating by

officials from factory management

and three poor brown sugar

manufacturers by the police. In a

country like Bangladesh,

premature death and killing of

The year 2005 ended in

vulnerable.

this is insignificant because they are used to see and accept millions of people dying prematurely from hunger and hunger related diseases, curable diseases and problems caused by lack of shelter, not to say about violences.

So many people are being killed in countries like Bangladesh for faulty design of vehicles or garment factory building and nonmonitoring of the authority year after year. The year 2005 witnessed

The year 2006 may become really new if we would be able to see beyond the line set by global and local lords,

hundreds of people drown and die

in the river (February) and again

hundreds of garment workers

killed for building collapse (April).

Former chief economist of the

World Bank and the secretary of US

treasury Lawrence Summers once

estimated that value of lives of

people depends on their earnings.

This type of outrageous worldview

helps ruling elite and global

agencies like the World Bank or

IMF to shut eyes to these

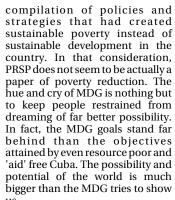
premature deaths, in fact killing, of

Bangladesh has now PRSP, so-

breaking down corporate spectacles, and to strengthen struggles at different levels to have a development vision

behind 'liberty', poverty creation behind poverty reduction, disempowerment behind empowerment; they are gathering to create another world free from corporate hegemony. There lies the possibility of having a new year,

The year 2006 may become really new if we would be able to see beyond the line set by global and local lords, breaking down corporate spectacles, and to strengthen struggles at different levels to have a development vision where people, not profit, stand in the centre.



People around the world are gathering against all these after finding the destruction behind mask of 'development', genocide

Anu Muhammad is Professor, Department of

reforming the caretaker govern-

ment system and electoral laws.

Judging the arena of politics in

the country since the last general

election held in October 2001, I

could not but suggest that the

government should make enough

room for political manoeuvre and

not be handicapped in facing the

Because the political stalemate

main opposition.

representative rule

TAMEAN CEDAY

All health information to keep you up to date Life begins at 40

N FACT, every age is important and every age is beautiful. After 40 in has its own beauty, its own advantages and its own explanation to be admired. Let's say something like this: "I am crossing 40 (or whatever age applies to you). I have survived last 40 years of challenges. I have learned many lessons from all these years. I have much more to learn, so Almighty please let me live another 40 years and help me to age gracefully. *Great Health Tips for over 40:*

* Diet and exercise are not the only means to combat heart diseases. Scientists have found that personal attitude and stress are not less important than those two factors. Try to make good friends. Loneliness cultivates heart diseases. Friendship with relatives and friends not only improves the quality of our lives but is also needed for our survival.

* The human body is made up of 60 to 70 percent water. Your body loses about three quarts of water each day through perspiration, urine and respiration. Waiting until you are thirsty isn't always the best barometer for preventing pre-mature aging. One of the best beauty secrets of our skin and body is to drink eight glasses of water every day.

* Avoid the sun between the hours of 10AM and 3PM, even if wearing sunglasses. Reflected light from sand, water and cement is also harmfu to the skin. There has been lot of researches carried out over the last thirty years on the impact of sun exposure on human body. According to scien tists, our skin would stay relatively smooth unto our eighties -- if it were n't for sun contact, dehydration wrinkles. Even skin cancer is caused by excessive exposure to UV rays, which penetrate our atmosphere every-

* Do not spend a lot of time sitting with the telephone set; get up and move around while you talk. It eases away the tension from creased muscles. Do you know that 3 or 4 phone calls (mobile or land -- doesn't matter) during a serious work can kill a quality 15-20 minutes. You can switch off the mobile or let the answering machine answer during important circumstances. Do not let your strict timetables manage your day Every now and then cut out activities that aren't a personal priority and recover time for relaxation.

* Other than Ramadan month, there is a scientific reason to go on fast. Scientists reported that people can gain remarkable health benefits from occasional fasting. It activates the production of proteins that help exist ing brain cells continue to sustain from oxidation and also encourage the growth of nerve cells. As a result, there is lower risk of developing agerelated brain disorders like stroke, Parkinson's disease or Alzheimer's

* As we get older our bodies need extra attention. Here are the health checks all men and women should do to stay fit in their 40s:

Check your BLOOD PRESSURE as HIGH blood pressure raises your risk of heart disease, strokes and kidney damage. Keep your blood pressure to a healthy level by cutting down on salt, eating at least five portions of fruit and vegetable a day and taking regular exercise.

Check your CHOLESTEROL. To keep your cholesterol low, cut down on saturated (animal) fats, keep your weight in check, be active, and eat lots of fruit and vegetables.

Test for GLAUCOMA. This is an eye disease that can cause blindness You are four times more likely to develop glaucoma after 40- - if a close relative has glaucoma, you need to be more careful.

Test for DIABETES. "The chances of developing non-insulin dependent diabetes over 40 becomes much more common," says Dr Peter Mace assistant medical director at BUPA Wellness. You're more at risk -- it you're overweight or have a sedentary lifestyle, or there is a family history - including high blood pressure. It is always vital to stay active and watch your weight, while eating healthily foods.

Mammography or check your BREASTS: Be breast aware and have a mammogram to avoid breast cancer, especially if you have close family members who had breast cancer in their 40s, or you detect any changes

divine order, establishment of business of arms, business of called poverty reduction strategy various nature draw little divine law becomes a tool of paper to attain MDG or water. It is not therefore surprising attention, the State or elite civil regimentation in Bangladesh too. to see increase of people in poverty society give a damn to these millennium development goal. International oil companies in insignificant incidences. For them Actually, the PRSP is nothing but and deprivation along with

ANM NURUL HAQUE

free and fair election is what millions in Bangladesh are now craving for, with the next general election only a year away and with so many instances of rigged election in the recent past. An election which is free and fair provides the voters with the opportunity to choose persons to fill offices in the legislature. There is a broad consensus as to what kind of elections can be considered free and fair. Jeane Kirkpatrick, scholar and former United States ambassador to the United Nations, has offered this definition: "Democratic elections are not merely symbolic. They are competitive, periodic, inclusive, definitive elections in which the chief decision-makers in a government are selected by citizens who enjoy broad freedom to criticize government, to publish their criticism, and to present alternatives.

Democracy Watch (International) defines fair elections as: Elections in which great care is taken to prevent any explicit or hidden structural bias towards any one candidate, aside from those beneficial biases that naturally result from an electorate that is equally well informed about the various assets and liabilities of each candidate.' This has been more formally stated by Chief Justice Murray Gleeson of the Australian High Court as follows: "The democratic and lawful means of securing change, if change be necessary, is an expression of the will of an informed electorate.'

The crucial factor in conducting a free and fair election in Bangladesh is the credibility of the Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) who is entrusted with this sacred task. But the CEC's credibility has already been undermined in a series of events. The decision of engaging the Gram Sarkar for preparation of fresh voter list has however, been rescinded under severe public criticism. But reacting to a news item published in the press on the appointment of 150 JCD activists and relatives of the BNP leaders as Upazila Election Officers, the CEC said that the whole process of appointment has been done following the rules and regulations. The moral support of the CEC to such an outrageous partisan move, has contributed to lowering of public confidence in him. The CEC is oath bound to be neutral for holding free and fair election and the EC is one such institution that has the onerous responsibility of conducting a credible election. But gradual politicization of the EC has created suspicion and misgiving in the public minds about its ability to hold free and fair national elections.

Justice MA Aziz, immediately after his taking over as the CEC took a controversial initiative to hold a series of dialogues on the voter list with as many as 99 political parties and alliance. The main opposition Awami League rejected the invitation of the CEC to participate in the dialogue and also questioned the sincerity of the CEC's initiative. But the initiative of the CEC produced no result, leaving serious disagreement between the EC and the political parties over the voter list. Before her departure for Saudi Arabia on January 4, Sheikh

Hasina accused the CEC and his Secretary of hatching a conspiracy to drop Awami League supporters and minority people from the voter list being prepared by the cadres of BNP and Shibir. She alleged that Tk 164 crore would be misappropriated in the name of preparing a fresh voter roll. Awami League leader Abdur

neutral election is not possible

A general election has a greater significance in our parliamentary form of democracy, where political affiliation pervades all spheres of life. In the prevailing political culture, it is next to impossible for somebody to secure any business contract or similar such facilities without being a part of the ruling coterie. The cohesion of easy got

contributed to rigging of elections

which happened so often in the

Prospect for fair election in Bangladesh

them, 80 are activists of Dhaka University unit of JCD and others are of Chittagong, Rajshahi, Islamic, and Shahjalal University.

The EC has been passing through a virtual deadlock for more than five months due to a war of nerves between the CEC and the two other commissioners on the issue of voter list preparaparties. The mainstream opposition parties are now contemplating to boycott the election, as according to them, the government is set to engineer election results.

In fact, the BNP-led ruling alliance and the main opposition Awami League and its allies are poles apart on the issue of

that has been prevailing in the country for some years, now may Bangladesh, a country already plunged into enormous economic, militancy and political problems, is now likely to explode into violent collision with the next general election drawing face the challenge of holding next parliamentary election, free and fair with participation of all political parties. The nearer, which will inevitably impact mainstream opposition parties are now contemplating to boycott the election, as according to them, the government on the democracy. The nation would not like to face another volais set to engineer election results. Judging the arena of politics in the country since the last general election held in tile situation similar to the one it October 2001, I could not but suggest that the government should make enough room for political manoeuvre and not faced on February 15, 1996.

ANM Nurul Haque is a banker with your breast, get them checked out quickly. tion. CEC's unilateral move to **Bhutan and Maldives moving towards**



ZAGLUL AHMED CHOWDHURY

F late, there has been a good news from the tiny Himalayan kingdom of Bhutan, where King Jigme Wangchuk has announced that he would abdicate in favour of his son and, more importantly, will hold elections for parliament in the year 2008. Indeed, this has been a very refreshing message from the small but picturesque country in the last month of the last year. The King has been showing encouraging signs of loosening his absolute control over the governance of the nation for sometime past and now he has come out with a more comprehensive and broader vision of involving people in the running of the country. This is all the more admirable because this has come from his own initiative rather than under pressures he has buckled.

True, people in every nation are likely to see their involvement in the affairs of their country, which is the essence of democratic rule. The people of Bhutan too are understandably keen to watch such a development, but here is a popular monarch who, so far, as such, has not been the subject of ire of his people. The King has already brought some minor reforms and has gone for devolution of power at lower level. Now he has gone for much bigger step in the right direction. If his scheme of things are implemented within the time frame with all seriousness and sincerity, which one can hope will be done, then democratic rule in south Asia will move a step further even though it is unfortunate that in some countries of the region such governance has suffered setbacks.

Developments in line to introduce representative government in another small nation in the south Asian region is also quite positive. This Indian Ocean island state of Maldives is also

coming closer to slowly replacing the one-party governance. President Mamun Abdul Gayoom, who has been at the helm for long, has made it clear that his nation is moving towards democratic reforms. However, he has to succumb to the wishes of the prodemocratic movement in the country demanding functioning of political parties. The parliament has approved existence of political parties for the first time in this Îndian Ocean archipelago in a move that would help end long autocratic

returned to the country after selfexile for 18-months, said they would not relent until Maldives introduces multi-party democracy. At least three parties have applied for registration including the MDP and president Gavoom's Maldivian People's Party after the parliament opened ways for multi-party political

Civil societies in the South Asian region did not turn a blind eye to the developments in one of its smallest nations because the issue

MATTERS AROUND US

Bangladesh, India and Sri Lanka are practicing democracy while Nepal has unfortunately slipped back to effective monarchy when elected prime minister was dismissed last February and the King seized all powers. The encouraging signs that are being received from Bhutan and Maldives about democracy are a message to the King of Nepal on the need for restoring democracy without taking much time.

rule and pave the way for multiparty democracy. Indeed there is something to cheer about since this South Asian nation is intermittently facing pro-democracy agitation and any step forward towards changing the pattern of governance is

definitely deserves kudos. The "Majlis" is made up by independent members, but it has decided to allow registration of political parties that would facilitate party oriented politics, an issue that caused unrest in the country early last year. President Gayoom, who has been in power since 1978 and is Asia's longest serving ruler, earlier promised political reforms, but the prodemocracy activists were skeptical about his intentions. The Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP), which operates from Sri Lanka, says that it will carefully monitor the progress towards democratisation of the country. It's leader Mohammad Nasheed was among the four activists arrested a few months ago when government said they were taken into custody for fear of inciting unrest and were

inextricably linked with the unrest in the Maldives. It is experiencing pro-democracy movement for some time past and a state of emergency was also declared a year ago to quell the unrest. This was not for the first time during the rule of president Mamoon Abdul Gayoom that the small but attractive tourists land was convulsed by demands of democratic rule. The undemocratic pattern of governance was continuing for long without reforms towards turning it into representative character. The country of only three lakh people is otherwise generally quiet and the ascendancy of president Gayoom is quite strong without any sign of slackening his authority. He is not known for any iron-fist kind of rule or as a tough dictator. In fact, he has a sober and gentle image abroad which is not without any

of representative authority is

President Gayoom, regardless of the size of his nation, is not unknown in the international arena and he has particularly played an active role in the growth and development of the sevennation South Asian Association (SAARC) which has earned for him admiration in the region. He is the only head of state in the SAARC who has attended all the summits being a founder-leader of the regional forum. The King of Bhutan is the other such leader who is still at the helm since the SAARC was launched in 1985, but he has not taken part in all the SAARC heads of government conferences. While Gayoom is active in the regional and international arena, the Bhutanese King is somewhat reclusive. However, he is generally praised in and outside his country as a pro-people monarch.

South Asia is largely a democratic region as most of the countries here are practicing representative government for a long time. The case of Pakistan is little different since it is yet to witness return of full democracy after an elected government was overthrown by the military in 1999. A kind of democratic rule is there following parliamentary elections and an elected prime minister is the head of government, but the real power is rested with the president, who remains in active service of the army as its head. Pakistan was stripped of its membership of the Commonwealth following the removal of the elected government, but it was restored as the process of return of democracy highlighted by the parliamentary elections was taken into account. This development notwithstanding, the country is vet to revert to full representative authority.

Bangladesh, India and Sri Lanka are practicing democracy while Nepal has unfortunately slipped back to effective monarchy when elected prime minister was dismissed last February and the King seized all powers. An unrelenting movement is continuing there for restoration of representative rule as the politicians are keeping the pot poiling. The encouraging signs that are being received from Bhutan and Maldives about democracy are a message to the King of Nepal on the need for restoring democracy without taking much time.

Zaglul Ahmed Chowdhury is Foreign Editor of

The European Union (EU) past. Unfortunately, the rigging of envoys in Dhaka have already elections in Bangladesh is still pervasive. It is only the indomitatermed the next parliamentary election crucial for Bangladesh's ble spirit of the people that has prevented the avalanche of rigged democracy. The government elections from engulfing the declined to permit the Tuesday Group, a group of foreign diplo-When the major political parties including the ruling BNP and the main opposition Awami League started fuelling their election machineries to become

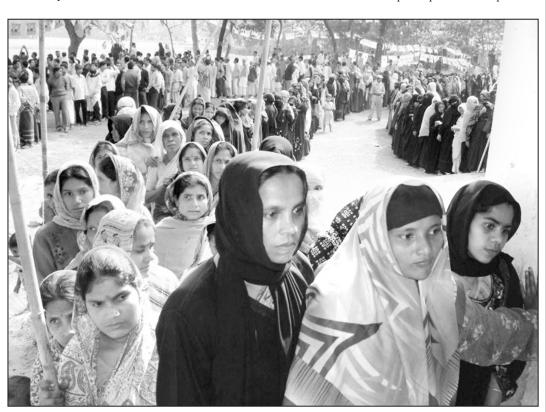
Razzak also said on January 5 that money with political power has

be handicapped in facing the main opposition.

mats in Bangladesh, to arrange a conference on International Electoral Best Practices, saying that such move would amount to interference in the internal affairs of the country. sure to win the next national election scheduled for early 2007, Disappointed by the government's "no" to their plan for the ill-motivated action of the government appointing 150 JCD holding an international conference, the Tuesday Group postactivists and relatives of the BNP poned its conference that was leaders has created a crisis for scheduled to be held in holding a free and fair election November. The group compriswith participation of all political parties. The Awami League ing the ambassadors and high President Sheikh Hasina already commissioners stationed in Bangladesh from Australia, said that the BNP-led alliance Canada, Denmark, France, government has taken all out Germany, Italy, Japan, the preparation for election engineering: "The government by Netherlands, Norway, Republic of Korea, Sweden, Switzerland, appointing the Jativatabadi the United States of America, the Chhartra Dal (JCD) leaders and United Kingdom, and the activists as Upazila Election European Commission, and the Officers has finalized the blueresident coordinator of the print to capture the results of the United Nations, has long been next general election." The alleged appointment of JCD hoping to hold the international conference in Dhaka. But the activists to about 150 posts of government said it did not recog-Upazila Election Officers (UEOs) out of 300, has raised the quesnize any group called the Tuesday Group and warned the tion of gross violation of recruitforeign diplomats not to proceed ment process in the Public with their plan. Service Commission (PSC). Of

prepare a fresh voter list from January1 has already been met with a High Court order. The High Court bench of the Supreme Court on January 4 ordered the EC to update the existing voter list with necessary additions and omission. The court disposed of two writ petitions challenging the CEC's unilateral decision to prepare a fresh voter list. According to media reports, the EC Secretariat has enthusiastically been continuing their works, ignoring High Court directives to revise the existing roll. Besides, the CEC did not consult the other two election commissioners on the developments following the High Court directives. In fact, the CEC has messed up every thing once again after coming up with a ray of hope following the High Court verdict. The controversial role of the CEC and the obvious absence of openness in the workings of the EC have raised some grave questions in the public mind about its sincerity. The CEC holding the constitutional responsibility, has also failed in demonstrating enough guts and respect to democratic norms for holding a free and fair

Bangladesh, a country already plunged into enormous economic, militancy and political problems, is now likely to face the challenge of holding next parliamentary election, free and fair with participation of all political



Exercising adult franchise