Speaker Akhter Hamid Siddique

chairing the sittings in the absence

of the Speaker Jamiruddin Sircar,

who is abroad for medical treat-

ment. This is a great opportunity for

him to prove his neutrality in the

conduct of the business of the

house. He is on record to assure

the AL lawmakers that they will be

able to take part in discussion as

It is to be seen how the govern-

ment responds to the AL reform

proposals. Since the government

has already acknowledged the

need for reforming the EC to

ensure holding of free and fair

elections, the reform proposal on

the EC should not pose any big

government has not as yet agreed

to make any change in the existing

constitutional provision on the

formation of the CTG. The Prime

Minister has however urged the AL

to place the proposals in the house

as per the ROP that the parliament

framed and adopted during the AL

Affairs Minister Moudud told news-

men last week that the government

would consider the opposition

proposals if they placed those in

the house under the ROP of parlia-

ment. The AL is not expected to by-

pass the ROP made during the AL

rule for placing proposals in the

What is needed on the part of the

government and the main opposi-

tion is to enter into the discussion

with an open mind and, as sug-

gested by the February 7 editorial

of The Daily Star, "to pursue negoti-

ation with the interests of the nation

as a whole upper-most in mind and

with an aim to reach accord and

spare the country unnecessary civil

Law, Justice and Parliamentary

As for the CTG reform, the

much as they want.

problem.

rule in 1974

nouse

strife."



LATE S. M. AL

DHAKA SUNDAY FEBRUARY 12, 2006

Cartoons of holy Prophet

Muslims must protest, but not violently

E condemn in unequivocal terms the cartoons of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) that a Danish newspaper published, and some other newspapers in Europe reprinted. This is disgraceful and despicable journalism at its worst. We firmly believe that nobody has the right to mock the prophet of any great religion.

We thought that the paper would realise its mistake and come up with an unconditional apology. But nothing of the sort has happened so far, rather it is still trying to defend itself on the pretext of press freedom. Unfortunately, it has also found some advocates of its attempt to undermine Islam and its prophet in a most objectionable manner. We feel that the whole exercise aims at provoking Muslims into violent action. What other motive could there be behind humiliating the founder of a major religion with more than a billion followers today?

The newspaper has failed to differentiate between press freedom and indecent activities that hurt others. The plea that the founders of other religions have also been ridiculed by some elements in the developed world is not relevant here, because the whole thing revolves around the level of sensitivity that the aggrieved have towards the issue. The injudicious act of maligning a prophet, whose greatness has never been questioned even by western scholars and whose position in world history was determined long ago as a liberator of the oppressed, should be condemned by all. Muslims as a matter of belief respect the prophets of other religions and so there is no question of denigrating the prophets.

The cartoons have regrettably been reprinted by the press of some other European countries as well, which has further compounded the enormity of the highly irresponsible and boorish act. They have hurt the feelings of millions of Muslims across the globe, and that's reason enough for the newspapers concerned to apologise and refrain from such malicious and unwarranted activities in future.

More irregularity at the EC

Latest in litany of mis-steps

HE Election Commission seems determined to keep itself embroiled in controversy. The latest irregularity to have been reported is that of the EC taking no steps to demarcate the parliamentary constituencies in advance of the upcoming elections.

According to the law of the land, delimitation of constituencies needs to be done on completion of each population census, so that the demarcation of constituencies correctly reflects the changes in population since the last census. Indeed, this seems elementary.

However, in the present case, the EC has made no move to demarcate the constituencies in line with the latest population survey that took place in 2001. Instead, the election looks set to go ahead with the demarcations that were put in place eleven years ago and today are out of date and may not accurately reflect the current demographic reality.

Thus, once again, the EC is acting in a manner that is bound to cause controversy and that threatens the credibility of the upcoming elections. This would not be such a significant development if it were not merely the latest in a long line of mist-steps on the part of the EC that create the impression that the election process is being conducted neither openly nor even-handedly.



M ABDUL LATIF MONDAL

HE Awami League (AL) lawmakers have at long last returned to parliament. AL president and leader of the opposition Sheikh Hasina announced the decision to join parliament at the post-long march grand rally of the AL-led 14-party opposition combine held at the Paltan Maidan of the capital on February 5 to place the proposals for reforms in the caretaker system of government (CTG) and the Election Commission (EC).

It may be mentioned that the continuous boycott of the sessions of the current parliament by the AL lawmakers started on January 31 last year following the refusal of the business advisory committee to hold discussion on the killing of former finance minister Shah AMS Kibria in a grenade attack. adiourning the normal business of the session

While announcing the decision to join parliament, the AL chief held out a threat that if the reform proposals were not accepted in full by he government, the AL lawmakers would resign from parliament en masse. The reports in the media last week however suggested that the AL might give the government a time limit to implement the reform proposals.

The belated decision of the AL to ioin parliament has been welcomed at home and abroad. The people, the media and the ruling BNP have BARE FACTS

The opportunity must not be missed

The AL decision to return to parliament has revived the hope that parliament can be the right place for discussing and resolving the major constitutional and national issues. The prime task should be to create a congenial atmosphere for discussion and debate in the house. This will also be a test case for the Deputy Speaker Akhter Hamid Siddique, chairing the sittings in the absence of the Speaker Jamiruddin Sircar, who is abroad.

welcomed the AL decision to join parliament. Welcoming the AL's decision to join parliament, the Prime Minister and chairperson of the BNP Begum Khaleda Zia urged them to place their demands in the house as per rules of procedure (ROP) of parliament.

The EU, the US and the UK welcomed the AL decision to join parliament and expressed hope that the AL lawmakers would play their role in parliament for the sake of democracy and people.

In its editorial of February 7, The Daily Star applauded the AL decision to return to parliament. Another daily, New Age, in its editorial on February 7 wrote that the decision by the AL to return to parliament was certainly the best piece of news the country had come by in a long time. Another daily, The Bangladesh Observer, in its editorial on February 7 termed the AL decision to join parliament after a long boycott as a positive move. Now the question is: why should

the AL continue to join the sessions of the present parliament till the expiry of its life in the middle of this year even if its reform proposals are not accepted by the government, wholly or partially?

First, the AL is a strong proponent of parliamentary system of government which means the rule the party/alliance commanding the support of the majority members of parliament for the period stipulated in the constitution. It is a fact that for the successful func-

tioning of a parliamentary democracy, the political parties, particularly the ruling party or the ruling leadership shall, among others, respect the opinion of the public and the opposition, and resolve all political disputes with the spirit of democracy. But such a happy situation has not as yet prevailed in Bangladesh. By joining the parliament sessions, the AL may prove that it has respect for the diktat of the majority rule as enunciated in the constitution

Second, the AL chief has announced that it would join parliament to place the proposals for reforming the CTG and the EC. The alliance government has already acknowledged the need for reforming the EC in order to ensure holding of free and fair elections. So, if the house accepts the salient points for reforming the EC, which include: (a) appointment of the Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) and the Election Commissioners (ECs) in consultation with all the active political parties: (b) empowering the FC to conduct the elections in a free and fair manner and in an independent atmosphere; (c) forming an independent secretariat for the EC to make the commission an independent institution, free from the control of the executive branch of the government: it will mean not only a big achievement for the ALled opposition combine, but an invaluable service to free a vital national institution from the clutches of the ruling alliance as

well as any party/alliance that will

POST BREAKFAST

It is generally agreed by experts, both inside and outside the IAEA, that Iran is at

least six to ten years away from any capacity or structure that can enable them to

build a nuclear bomb. This, they feel, is a long buffer safety period. Accordingly, they

consider that Iran should be permitted a limited uranium enrichment programme

under strict safeguard by the IAEA. They suggest that this alternative is a better

come to power in future Third, the AL is a pro-people party and has its roots among the common people. The AL should continue to participate in parliament sessions to speak for the alleviation of the sufferings of the common people due to continuous price spiral of essentials. The pointto-point inflation rate hit a new 8year high of 7.95 percent in November, which declined by 0.88 percentage point and stood at 7.07 percent in December. The poor, constituting about 50 percent of the total population in the country, are the worst sufferers of the inflation rate hike, as they have little ability to adjust with the increased prices of commodities

Fourth, the AL lawmakers should tell the people through the house how their fundamental right to assemble and participate in public meetings and processions is being violated by the alliance government through "blanket arrests." They may also speak about the extrajudicial killings following the deployment of rapid action battalion (Rab). Amnesty International, the EU and the US have already expressed concern over the extraiudicial killings. The Al Jawmakers must vehemently protest the passage of the tele-tapping bill which will invade the privacy of the common man and make phone conversation admissible evidence in courts of law.

Fifth, there are certain sectors of the economy that are known as "engines of growth." Power is such a sector. Professor Muhammad

Yunus in his speech on February 4 at the 15th anniversary of The Daily Star thus rightly stressed the need for providing reliable electricity all over the country. But the past four years of the alliance government marked the establishment of only an 80 MW power plant when the demands for power shot up by 1500 MW or so. This has led to a severe crisis for electricity posing a serious threat to the irrigation dependent boro cultivation, which is the second main rice crop in the country. The AL lawmakers may avail themselves of the opportunity to tell it to the people through the house.

Sixth, the AL lawmakers may tell the people through house how corruption has been eating into the vitals of the economy. They may tell the people how the country occupied the number one position in the corruption perception index (CPI) of the Transparency International during all the past four years of the BNP-led alliance government and how this has tarnished the image of the nation

Seventh, according to some political observers, return to parliament may create a scope for the AL to enlist support of members from other parties, including the disgruntled members of the ruling BNP, to their 23-point program

Last but not the least, the year 2006 is the election year. By attending the on-going and the next few sessions of this parliament, the AL lawmakers may seize the opportunity of propagating the failures of the government both inside parliament and outside.

The AL decision to return to parliament has revived the hope that parliament can be the right place for discussing and resolving the major constitutional and national issues. The prime task should be to create a congenial atmosphere for discussion and debate in the house. This will also

The opportunity must not be nissed

M. Abdul Latif Mondal is a former Secretary to the be a test case for the Deputy aovernment

Confrontation with Iran over nuclear capability



MUHAMMAD ZAMIR

East. It obviously represented Arab HE past few days have concerns over Israel's alleged witnessed not only Muslim nuclear weapons capacity. This protests against deplorable hitch was subsequently overcome cartoons denigrating Prophet with a face-saving formula by Muhammad (pbuh) but also Iran's introducing the phrase "weapons of referral to the United Nations mass destruction" instead of just Security Council by the Board of nuclear arms. The EU 3 came up Governors of the International with the proposal "recognising that Atomic Energy Agency. Both events grabbed headlines, genera solution to the Iranian nuclear ssue would contribute to the goal ated controversy and became the subject of international debate. of a Middle East free of all weapons of mass destruction and their For nearly three decades, the United States has had few good means of delivery." South Asia, as well as countries things to say of Iran. Its nationalism neighbouring Iran, have been has been considered as a potential threat, and on more than one following recent developments in occasion, the present US administhe region with great anxiety. tration has described it as a mem-Afghanistan, now a memberber of "the axis of evil." There is designate of Saarc continues to general agreement that it is this remain unstable. Iraq, despite an election, is also a source of tension vein of thought which has persuaded the United States to target and terrorism. Consequently, the Iran on charges of intention to uncertainty and crisis atmosphere produce nuclear weapons. One in Iran has made the situation only must also admit that recent inflamthat much more sensitive.

weapons-free zone in the Middle clearly satisfied with the referral of Iran to the UN Security Council. After the IAEA vote, President Bush has nevertheless indicated that referral does not mean that scope for diplomatic negotiations had ended. At the same time his senior officials have hinted that a possibility of sanctions or even military options existed against Iran if Tehran did not do enough to ease fears that it is going to develop

constructive engagement than raising the ante through the Security Council.

the latest developments in Iran. rather than making a formal referral. They did so to avoid the Council being empowered to take any sort of action that would automatically set-off a chain reaction including sanctions or even military action as provided under the UN Charter.

Iran, on its own also tried to soften international opinion before the IAEA meeting by promising to allow UN nuclear inspectors to visit

security question is never addressed. Britain, France and Germany -- the EU 3, group which sought to negotiate a diplomatic solution, have also not been able to offer any firm reassurance that the United States is not bent on overthrowing the present Iranian gov-

ernina structure. The Iranians are also apprehensive of US military encirclement and covert support of the United States for the disaffected ethnic and religious minorities (the Khuzestani Arabs, the Baluch and the Azeris). Tension has grown in Tehran over the establishment of permanent US military bases in raq, Afghanistan and Central Asia in addition to existing military nstallations in the Middle East and the Persian Gulf. Iranian strategic analysts also point out that 18,000 US troops are already in unlikely to work in the case of Iran. We must not forget that Iran, in a manner of speaking has been living with one form or the other of sanctions for the last twenty-five years. There is also another important element. Iran currently is the world's second largest oil exporter,

also knows that sanctions are

with tens of billions of US dollars in surplus cash. Economic sanctions that might hit Iranian oil production also seem very unlikely in present market conditions. China and Russia despite support for containment of Iran's nuclear ambition are eventually expected to oppose such sanctions because of their commercial and energy ties to Tehran. The Iranian regime is counting on this.

United States has to understand that it cannot solve the Iranian nuclear problem by threatening military strikes. Iran is not Iraq. Desperation could also provok

First it was the question of the voter roll, then it was the question of neutrality of the enumerators and whether all voters were being included in the new list, then it was a question of the political affiliation of the two new election commissioners appointed to give the CEC a majority. Now comes this latest revelation.

There is nothing more important than that the upcoming elections be free and fair and above even the shadow of suspicion. Unfortunately, the actions of the commission have created controversy and led to speculation that the deck is being stacked.

The CEC should have understood the need, not just for the thing to be above board, but for the need to avoid even the appearance of impropriety or irregularity. He has manifestly failed to do this, and his every action does nothing except lend credence to those who suspect his motives and question his neutrality.

The CEC should be more sensitive to the extra efforts he will need to make to convince skeptics of his neutrality, and as a result he should ensure that he not continue to make irregular and questionable decisions. The credibility of the election commission is at stake.

On the one hand. Iran has conmatory statements by the Iranian leadership have similarly not tinued to maintain its right to develop peaceful use of nuclear Approval of the resolution (by 27 technology. On the other hand we to 3) on Iran (that it should be have claims that the Iranian nuclear referred to the UNSC) during the activities are less than transparent extra-ordinary meeting of the IAEA and that its enrichment program is in Vienna on February 4 was a dangerous.

reflection of the strategic trend of The United States has also United States foreign policy. chipped in with the suggestion that Contrary to popular wisdom. Iran. prospect of a nuclear Iran espethrough this step, has been pushed cially after the debatable statements of its leadership, was a The vote in the IAEA had been potential source of destabilisation delayed by a day because of in the arena of international peace Egypt's insistence that a clause be and security

added in the resolution referring to It would appear that the United the need to have a nuclear-States while toying with options is

nuclear weapons The British government has

been very careful. It has deliberately appeared to be conciliatory, but at the same time made it clear that its view coincided with that of the United States. Initially, Prime Minister Blair's spokesman described Tehran's call for fresh talks as "vacuous." Later, in Davos, British Foreign Secretary Jack Straw appeared more conciliatory. He asserted that the West wanted diplomacy "to a secure a bargain that does not involve humiliation of either side" and allowed Iran to "preserve a sense of national dignity." I do not know how this

approach is going to work after the latest vote in the IAEA. What has happened in Vienna on February 4 was expected. US Under Secretary for Political Affairs Nicholas Burns had indicated to the AFP on January 28 that there was going to be a vote in the IAEA and that Iran would be referred to the **UN Security Council** Venezuela voted against the

resolution. Contrary to expectations of Iran, Russia and China did not do so. Russia apparently pressed hard for the IAEA only informing the Security Council of

the former Lavizan military site in Tehran. Some saw this as a key concession, but obviously this was not enough.

Today, after the IAEA meeting, one needs to seriously examine why Iran is pursuing its current strategy and how it associates this with its security. A realistic appreciation is required of the existing situation

Iran, it is guite clear, feels insecure. It has nuclear-armed states to the east (Pakistan and India), north (Russia) and west (Israel). It has already suffered a devastating eight-year war with Irag (not of its own choosing) that cost nearly half million lives. Above all, as Quentin Peel put it in his recent article in the Financial Times, Iran feels threatened by the United States. In this context he has quoted an observation currently doing the rounds in Tehran: What is the only country in the world, apart from Canada, that has the US on every border? Iran, comes the wry reply.

The scenario is that much more difficult given the fact that Washington refuses to talk to Tehran. Consequently, this vital

being set up in Herat for 10.000 additional troops. They have also underlined that there is US pressure on Pakistan for the use of a Pakistani air base at Khuzdar in Baluchistan, just over Iran's eastern border. Recent threats from the Israeli defense Minister Shaul Mofaz, suggesting that Israel was preparing for military action to stop Iran's nuclear program have also

Afghanistan and another base is

not helped. Another facet has to be understood. Shirin Ebadi, the Iranian pro-West democracy activist who won the Nobel Peace Prize in 2003 has pointed out an important factor. She has commented that "while a vast majority of Iranians despise the hardliners and wish for their downfall, they support the nuclear program." It appears that acquiring nuclear capability has become a cause of national pride. She has added, significantly: "No Iranian government, regardless of its ideology or democratic credentials, would dare to stop the program." It is this last compulsion that has

probably become the driving force behind Iran's defiance. It is aware that referral to the UN Security Council might eventually lead to

EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR

cream despite being a boy, then he

buys a "man" special fairness

cream. After using it he becomes

"fair and handsome"(?).

Apparently the widely accepted

perception of "Dark handsome" is

going to have a battle with "Fair

handsome", it's getting a bit ridicu-

We need to change our ideas

and perception; otherwise we won't

find any room in the upcoming era.

Men are going to Mars now, and

we'll keep thinking which cream

can turn a dark girl fare overnight.

lous now

Iran to leave the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and its Additional Protocol. Such a decision could lead to sailing on uncharted waters. It is generally agreed by experts, both inside and outside the IAEA, that Iran is at least six to ten years away from any capacity or structure that can enable them to build a nuclear bomb. This, they feel, is a

long buffer safety period. Accordingly, they consider that Iran should be permitted a limited uranium enrichment programme under strict safeguard by the IAEA. They suggest that this alternative is a better constructive engagement than raising the ante through the Security Council. One would tend to agree with this trend of thought. This approach need not be construed as appeasement. It might be the best safeguard against Iran going nuclear and pursuing dangerous military adventures. What is required is cooling of the situation. Other measures will only increase uncertainty further and affect the futures in the oil market.

Muhammad Zamir is a former Secretary and imposition of sanctions. However, it

TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE

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.

Facing reality in a nuclear world

Mr. Farid Zakaria recognised the ineffectiveness of American approach to Iran nuclear issue then recommended to switch course: construct an (Arab) alliance to contain Iran (Time to face reality in Iran, DS Feb5, '06). If there is anything new in this approach, we fail to see what it is. Building alliance is part of what America is already doing--in Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Jordan, Iraq-either at the cost of democracy or Arab lives. Mr. Zakaria also didn't say where America would go from there.

Let's get the cause and effect right: nukes proliferate nukes. Pakistan acquired it because India did. India because of China.. The link goes back to an America who frantically built the bomb because

they thought Germany was making from getting nukes. At the same it. Iran wants the bomb not to upset time, article VI calls for nuclear the balance, but because the balnations to reduce and liquidate their ance is already upset, and they stockpile. Iran has abided by the have learned the lesson from Iraq. NPT obligations so far. Mr. Zakaria,

because they hold most in the pile

of 27,000 warheads, and because

they started it all. That will take the

incentive away from Iran to get a

weapon that is so hard to use with-

out harming themselves. If they

play fast and lose, America will get a

willing UN led coalition ready to

approach; it is just the other side of

the NPT bargain. Article IV of the

treaty prevents non-nuclear nations

There is nothing new in this

March into Tehran.

That brings us to the real deternow it is America's turn. rent course Mr. Zakaria ignored Ashish Ahsan America, Israel, and other nuclear Uttara, Dhaka states should put the dominos back

in place by liquidating their nukes. Valentine's Day America needs to take the lead

helped.

to the wall

February 14 is observed all over the world as Valentine's Day. On this day the youths express their emotions, feelings of love. The way of expressing love is gradually changing.

And so are the trends in our society. In the name of progressive thinking, the boys and girls are doing many things that go against our social norms. On the other hand, a fanatic group is trying to resist each and every change in society

We must find the mid-course to avoid untoward incidents. The youths should behave decently, while the bombers and killers have to be resisted at any cost. Happy Valentine's Day to all! MAH Nazim, DU

Is it fair?

I think the fairness cream ads are going too far. Sometimes these ads are really harsh to watch. With the slogan "Tok er melanin dur kore" some people are making joke of some poor female customers. These ads always try to show that girls who don't have fair complexion, don't have a bright future. They're neither eligible for good jobs nor for good marriage.

I've seen an ad showing a girl wanting to get employed as an airhostess, but she's afraid

because of her dark complexion. It seems that there is only one job for girls and that is airhostess. Excuse me, isn't it kind of weird? No hard feelings for the certain job but girls are doing jobs everywhere nowadays.

Girls are teachers, administrators, doctors, entrepreneurs, engineers, and what not? And it's not that dark girls can't be airhostess. It's just that with the required educational background she needs to be well dressed, neat and clean, efficient and communicative.

She needs to be good looking and smart, and there is no such notion in this world that black girls can't be good looking and smart!

Another ad shows a frustrated girl can't get married as whoever sees her, refuses to marry Suddenly, someone like an ange tells her to use that cream and see

what happens. The girl starts using and gets fair and then she receives wedding proposal one after another. Don't you find it

philosophical lectures like "Inner beauty" to prove the fairness prodwant to say that it's totally ridiculous thinking that people who have bright complexion are beautiful and attractive, and black girls are not good to look at. I myself know too many dark women who are not only beautiful; they are smart, scintillating, charming, attractive, successfully in their workplaces.

Another ad on satellite shows a ridiculous thing. After bugging the females the ad makers are not leaving the men alone either.

Cantara Wali Ruhi Dhaka University

On e-mail

Enemy of Islam

America is indeed an enemy of Islam. It is torturing Muslims in different places in the world.

But America's success in Iraq is a disgrace. There are Muslims who are collaborating with America. It's a problem of our clergy. America fooled Sunnis to fight Soviets in Afghanistan. And this time around it has fooled the Shiites and Kurds to welcome its occupation of Iraq. It's ironical that it can so easily overcome the Muslim clergy. If Muslims do not collaborate. America will have to leave Irag with wooden spoons. Moon Nizami

An ad shows a " concerned" boy wants to be fair handsome and with this hope he enters the girls' hostel and tries to steal a fairness cream, but his attempts fails as the girls

humiliating?

No, I won't stand those so called catch him. His friend reproaches him as he's using girl's fairness

beauty of a human being is the real ucts or those ads deceptive. I just dignified and they are working