

Dhaka University: Living Too Long on Old Glories

Neglected North-South Dialogue

At a time when nations keep talking to one another on the changing world situation, working out their individual or collective positions in the new post-Cold War era, one missing element is the North-South consultation, one that brings the Group-15, representing the developing world, in a direct exchange of ideas with the Group-7 which speaks for the industrialised West and Japan.

A somewhat little known Group-15 is the summit level body that represents the South-South co-operation, set up in Kuala Lumpur in the late eighties, under the chairmanship of former Tanzanian president Julius Nyerere. In recent months, it has held several meetings at the level of officials of the 15 countries and discussed problems of the Third World.

What makes news this time is the preparation of a Summit meeting of the G-15, to be held some time this year, with Senegal playing the host, together with India, the host for the next year's summit and Venezuela which played host to the meeting last year. The three countries form a kind of a 'troika' which manages the administration of the G-15 activities in-between the summits.

The proposed summit this year should reflect the sense of urgency the Group feels about the position of the Third World in the changing world, about the danger the developing countries being marginalised on the international scene. These issues are likely to be discussed in a position paper being prepared now under the guidance of the Foreign Minister of Senegal, Djibo Ka. The paper will be sent to governments of developing countries, before it is discussed at the summit and released to the public.

Foreign Minister Ka has already indicated that the position paper would call for a renewal of dialogue between G-15 and G-7, covering the major issues which divide the North from the South, ranging from the debt issue and the Uruguay Round to trade and the future of UNCTAD.

The sense of urgency with which the Group has started looking at the need for North-South dialogue, hopefully leading to a serious negotiation, is perfectly understandable. It is, in fact, long overdue. With the industrialised nations becoming increasingly preoccupied with their own internal economic situations, in some cases overshadowed by lingering recession, election campaigns in a few of them, like Britain and the United States, and finally with the political and economic problems in east European countries and the former Soviet Union, the case for the North-South dialogue has virtually gone by default. There are also strong feelings that the emergence of what is now seen as an unipolar world, with one superpower dominating the international scene, has not been to the advantage of the Third World — so far. It is also felt that international aid agencies and leading donor nations have been taking advantage of the situation by imposing conditionalities on developing countries, which are harsh and often impossible when it comes to implementation.

No one would suggest that the differences between G-15 and G-7 reflect black-and-white situation. What is important, the issues should be clarified within the Group-15 so that members concerned can agree on a common approach. Once such an approach has emerged, strong efforts should be made to persuade the industrialised nations to accept the need for a serious talk with the developing world, as represented by Group-15. However difficult — or promising — the world situation may be, we should not be left out in the cold.

There Must be a Limit

Canada — notwithstanding its vast size and resources — unlike its more illustrious neighbour the US, is accustomed to projecting a low profile in the world affairs. Canadian aid, ice hockey and English-French rivalry are some of the subjects that make for us news about that country. When Pierre Elliott Trudeau became prime minister, his beautiful, vivacious young wife drew media attention more than her husband did. That marriage has fallen apart and the Trudeaus no more figure in our imagination.

Incumbent prime minister Brian Mulroney has not departed from the course Canada has been quietly charting. But in a rare fit of rage he wanted to shoot or strangle a man responsible for inventing and publishing a mock advertisement. The prime minister, moreover, went on the record in, of all things, a television interview with the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation. Why? *Frank Magazine* that follows Britain's *Private Eye* has put up that mock ad for a contest on what is euphemistically called deflowering of Mulroney's 17-year-old lovely daughter Caroline.

Carried on the cover of the magazine, the advertisement's mock nature — served as a sexual titillation, if no outright provocation for ripping apart the girl. We simply find it in bad taste. And that the Canadian prime minister could not keep cool but in a marked departure from a premier's poise made his aggressive feeling known shows, even in Western liberal societies, there is a limit to pushing with sleazy matters around someone.

The key question that needs to be answered here is: how to strike a balance between an individual's right to privacy and the all-pervading media's right to information and entertainment. Sometimes the boundary may be crossed but not at the cost of decency. Western journalistic hypes today remorselessly undermine some of the human dignities and decencies both men and women love to fiercely preserve. In this country too obscenity and prurience are passed much too in excess in the name of sexual liberty by some magazines.

As for the Caroline case, a spokesman for *Frank Magazine* has tried to take some of the heat off by saying that the purpose was to satirise Mulroney for propping up his falling popularity by using his attractive daughter. To use wife or daughter by heads of state in election campaign is nothing unusual, nor is the practice illegal. But the use of the play to maintain or raise public image also looks quite awkward. Still not unlawful. But the magazine's attempt to satirise it the way it did is simply outlandish. One understands Mulroney's rage.

We have sick industries. Are we beginning to have "sick" Universities as well? Who can tell. For we still have not developed the mentality of holding our Universities accountable for the public money that is dished out to them. If the Universities fail to perform, let them, and not the public, pay for that luxury. Otherwise, what is the difference between subsidising a sick industry and funding Universities that are chronically under-achievers? I am not equating quest for knowledge to rise in productivity. I am simply talking about some sort of accountability for whatever we are doing.

The Dhaka University (DU) takes five to six years to complete a three years honours course, shuts up frequently because it cannot control its student body, is unable to hold exams in time, is unsure of the quality of education that it imparts and cannot guarantee the safety of the students who are accommodated in its hostels. It is a place where one's capacity for evading bullets is tested more often, than one's capacity to absorb new knowledge or to be creative. In fact the DU stinks in almost every score that a University may be held accountable for.

Yet 44,000 of our best and brightest students from all over the country are vying for 3,692 places for the course that is expected to start this summer and finish only God knows when. It is perhaps a tribute to the reputation that the University once enjoyed as the "Oxford of the East". More appropriately perhaps it's a result of the desperation of the students. Where else will they go?

Much of Dhaka University's recent glory comes not from its academic achievements but from the contribution its students and teachers made to bringing down the autocratic regime. However laudable this may be, it is far from what the DU should actually be receiving laurels for.

Two questions immediately come to mind. The DU will only absorb 8 per cent of those applying. What will happen to the rest? Some of them will go to good colleges, others to not-so-good colleges, and many others will just have to either give up their dream of higher studies or give private examinations to obtain their degrees. All of it amounts to a huge waste of potential human resource for which it is the nation that is the ultimate loser. It is too expensive for us to allow this potential resource to dissipate. For a country of 120 million and for an education system that produces hundreds of thousands of higher secondary graduates, we must have more Universities. But do we want more of these violence prone under-achieving institutions that go by the name of Universities? The idea of profession based education, like polytechnics and similar bodies have been broached decades ago. We still don't know why they have not proved to be a success, particularly for an economy that desperately needs mid-level technical people. It is time we take a close look into the polytechnics and facilities for technical education and see how, instead of producing thousands of educated unemployed, we can have highly sought after technical people for our industries. We must devise ways to harness this educated section and provide avenues for them to flower into their respective fields. This needs urgent attention for it is

the educated unemployed whose frustrations very often lead to crimes of the type that is becoming so prevalent in the metropolitan centres of the country these days.

However, a more immediate question needs to be addressed to the DU itself. What will it do with those 3,692 students whom it will accept after subjecting them to all sorts of tests and screening? What sort of education is really provided in the DU? The most damning answer to this question comes from a casual study of where do the DU

society needs. In the industrialised west and in developing countries of Asia like Thailand, Malaysia and Indonesia — not to mention Singapore, Taiwan and South Korea — the Universities keep a close liaison with the government and the private sector, keeping a special tab on the needs of the industrial, banking, trade and commercial houses—to be able to respond to their changing needs. Thus new faculties are opened whenever there is the need for expertise in newer areas. The Universities not only supply the rising intellectual needs of

respective fields. Take the concrete example of The Daily Star. Having crossed our first year we would like to venture into newer areas and serve our readers in more effective ways.

Normally the first place that we should have turned to for advice is the journalism department of the DU. We should have been able to give them a catalogue of our problems or 'wish list' for improvement and asked them for advice, for a fee — meaning hired them as consultants to solve our problems. Without meaning to be offensive we will not do so simply because we are not aware what up-to-date research the journalism faculty has completed in the recent past that deals with the problems of reporting, sub-editing, lay-out, make-up etc. of newspapers in Bangladesh, or more precisely, in Dhaka city.

Along with the relevance of education, there is the question of cost of education. In a recent interview to The Daily Star the Vice Chancellor of DU said that tuition fees of the University has not been raised for the past several decades. Raising DU fees goes against our egalitarian sentiment.

However over the years we couldn't have failed to learn that cheap education leads to the cheapening of education. With the ultimate result that the overall standard of education came tumbling down. Unpalatable as it may sound,

the truth of the matter is that we tend to neglect whatever comes cheap. We are aware that raising DU fees would create political ripples all over, yet the issue has to be addressed that those who want to pursue higher education must bear some burden of its cost.

The oft repeated question of campus violence is another important reason — according to some teachers, the most important reason — why the educational standards have deteriorated so acutely. It is the single most important reason for session delays, class stoppage and the overall lack of discipline. The hostels are in the grip of the armed cadres of the major political parties. It is they who decide who will get the seat, regardless to whom the DU authorities might have allocated it to. Here the DU authorities have not received the sincere support of either the ruling or the opposition party. Without their help, campus cannot be cleansed of violence, pending which the DU cannot be expected to function properly.

All said and done, the DU with justification — only if in a comparative sense — continues to be regarded as the most prestigious of our Universities. Much of its recent glory does not come from its academic achievements but from the contribution that its students and teachers have made to bring down the autocratic regime. The DU students can always be counted to come to the aid of the people in the struggle to establish democracy. However laudable this may be, it is far from what the DU should actually be receiving laurels for.

The Third View by Mahfuz Anam

graduates go? The exceptionally bright ones — who are bright in spite of the DU, and not because of it — go abroad. But those who stay behind take whatever jobs that they can find. Thus an M Sc in physics works as a bank clerk, a biologist as ticket collector in the railways, an M A in English as an accountant's assistant. And all of them at a pay far lower than their qualification — at least on paper — would justify. All of it may not be the University's fault. It is perhaps due to the scarcity of jobs. Yet a stronger case can be made for the argument that there is no relationship between the type of graduates that the DU churns out each year — or is it every few years — and the qualified personnel that the

economy but in many cases having been instrumental in predicting that need actually become leaders in fields where the industry or business follow. Enormous possibilities exist in Bangladesh for forging such a relationship. For, on the one hand, our scientists are starved of capital to fund experiments and on the other our entrepreneurs are starved of new ideas to invest in.

For this to happen we must have an intellectual community that is concerned with the immediate and long term problem of the country and is providing practical solution for them. We must know what are their areas of expertise, what work they are now doing and how effective they are in their

Communism Alive and Well in the Land of Buddha

by Daya Kishan Thussu

Communists have been in power in West Bengal, India, for 15 years. They also wield considerable political clout in Kerala. The CPM, the stronger of the two mainstream communist parties, agreed at its recent congress to continue on the path of Marxism-Leninism. Irrespective of changes in global communism, the Indian comrades seem ready to check the onslaught of the right.

THE world's first Marxist state, the Soviet Union, has pronounced communism dead, but communists in India, the land of Buddha and Gandhi, still proclaim their Marxist faith. Statues of Lenin continue to adorn the streets of Calcutta, capital of West Bengal, the only Indian state ruled by the Communist Party of India (Marxist), the CPM.

At the 14th Party Congress of the CPM — the world's second largest communist party after the Communist Party of China (CPC) — held in Madras in January, the main resolution emphasised the party's continuing adherence to Marxism-Leninism.

Cardboard cutouts of a smiling Joseph Stalin greeted the delegates and, despite vocal opposition from some younger members, the party agreed to follow the creed of Marxism. However, they insisted that they had an indigenous model of socialist development.

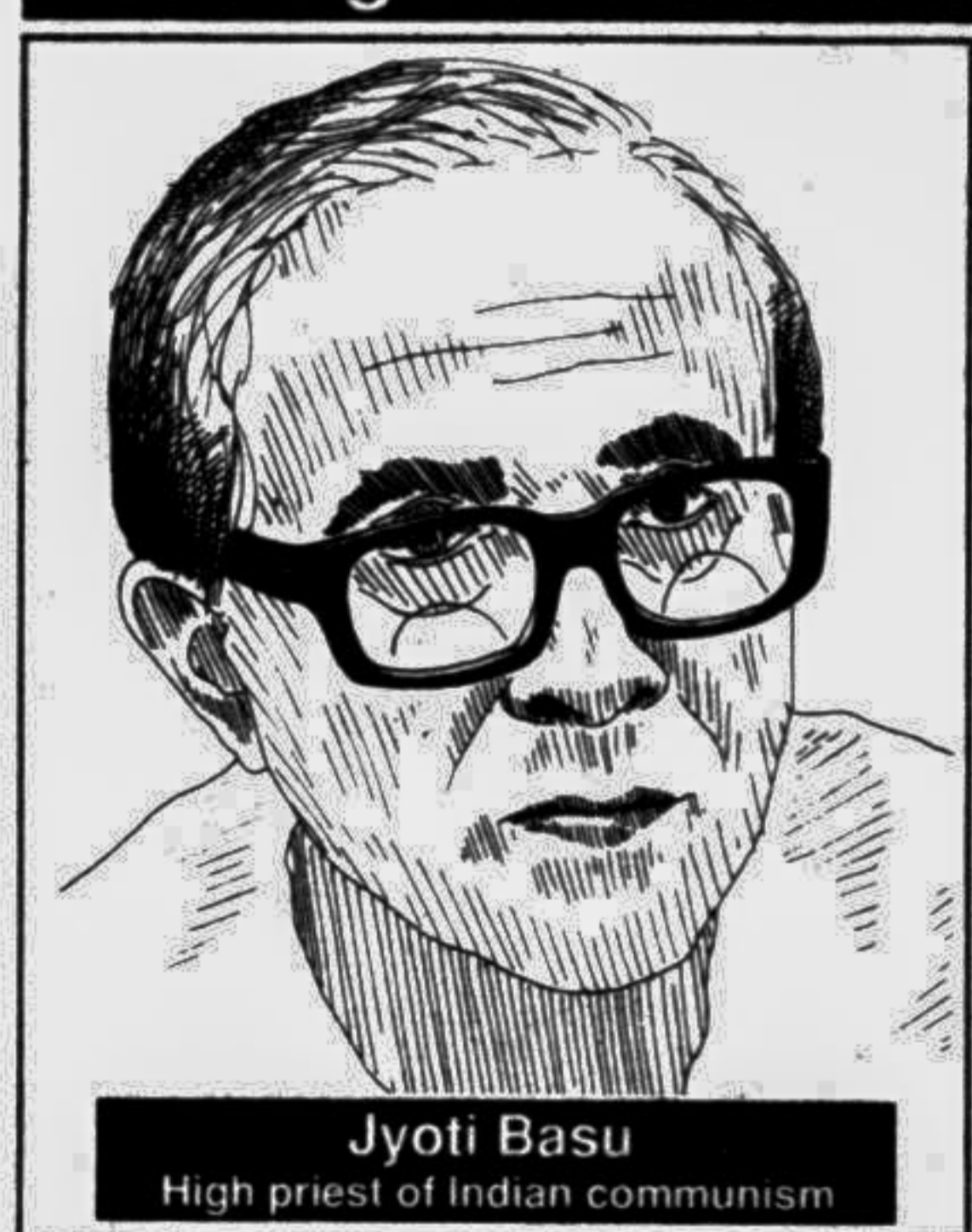
The new General Secretary, Harkishen Singh Surjeet, who took over from E.M.S. Namboodiripad, reportedly said: "Both the CPSU and the CPC were opposed to us — one supporting the CPI, the other the Naxalites. We have defied them and survived. Why should we be affected?"

This was the first Congress after the collapse of communism in the Soviet Union and the party met against the background of losing power in last year's election in Kerala, its southern stronghold, and a loss of seats in the national parliament.

With the discrediting of communism in Europe, the CPM is having to review its role in Indian politics. The communist movement in India is one of the oldest in Asia, with roots going back to the Twenties. It was an Indian communist, Manavendra Nath Roy, who made Lenin rethink his thesis on the question of anti-colonial struggle.

From its inception in 1925, the Communist Party of India pursued an internationalist policy, often in contradiction to national aspirations. For ex-

Leading from the Left



Jyoti Basu
High priest of Indian communism

ample, it did not support the mainstream Congress Party's 1942 Quit India Movement.

It argued, under Moscow's influence, that independence could wait and stopping Nazism was the priority. This attitude lost it many supporters among the nationalists.

However, in its anti-colonial phase it provided the much-needed radical element to the predominantly non-violent struggle against British rule.

The conservative nature of Indian society, where religion plays a significant role, also made the growth of god-less communism difficult. Most of all, it was the all-pervasive nature of the Gandhian movement which cut the rural sup-

port of the communists. Nevertheless, India was the first country where a democratically elected Marxist government came to power, in Kerala state in 1957.

This rang danger bells for the Congress Party of Jawaharlal Nehru. He adopted a socialist pattern of development modelled after the Soviet system of state planning. This robbed the communists of much of their ideological shine.

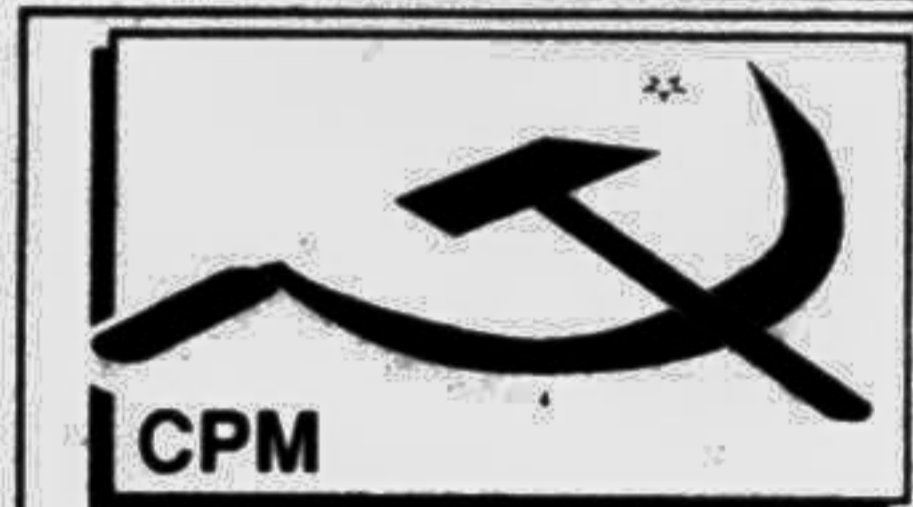
Since then communists have not been able to make much of a dent in national politics, dominated for over 30 years by the Congress Party.

The professed internationalism once again surfaced in

1962 when China invaded India. The communists, ignoring national humiliation, did not criticise Beijing.

This led to a split in the communist movement, coinciding with the Sino-Soviet schism of early Sixties. In 1964 the communist movement was divided into two main parties, the pro-Beijing Communist Party of India (Marxist) (CPI-M) and the Moscow-oriented Communist Party of India (CPI).

In later years the CPI tried to distance itself from Beijing as China looked increasingly towards the more radical groupings, including the Maoist Naxalites. Many analysts believe that



- 1925 Communist Party of India (CPI) formed
- 1957 CPI wins election in Kerala
- 1964 Communists split into pro-Moscow CPI and pro-Beijing Communist Party of India (Marxist), CPM
- 1968-72 Maoist Naxalites oppose parliamentary politics, resort to violence
- 1987-91 CPM-led Left Democratic Front rules Kerala
- 1977- CPM-led Front in power in West Bengal under Basu

the limited success of communism in India was because it was a Western idea. They argue that the class-based analysis of India's complex social structure which had evolved differently from the industrial societies, was not adequate.

Nevertheless, the communist governments have their share of achievements, despite having to face discrimination from New Delhi over central funds.

For the last 15 years the CPM-led Left Front has been ruling West Bengal under the astute leadership of Jyoti Basu, and its record in office has been especially impressive in the countryside.

In Rural Bengal cooperatives have helped improve small-scale industries and land reforms have been successful.

Moreover, under communist rule sectarian violence has been almost unknown in the state — and this at a time when other parts of India have witnessed caste and religious conflict.

In recognition of these successes, last June the party was swept to power again, for the fourth time running, for another five years.

In Kerala, too, under the CPM-led Left Democratic Front, which ruled from 1987 until last June, the state managed to become the first in India to announce full literacy. Kerala has also made impressive strides in the field of health-care and women's rights.

The communists see a new role for themselves as India increasingly turns to the Right. They are in the frontline against the growing threat from the Hindu-revivalist Bharatiya Janata Party — the largest opposition party in the parliament — many of whose

politics could undermine the secular fabric of Indian society.

On the economic front the communists have much to worry about. Under the IMF-imposed Structural Adjustment Programme the Indian economy is being increasingly liberalised, and state subsidies and jobs are being cut. This could lead to serious industrial unrest. With their strong trade union links, the communists will find a role in fighting for the rights of people on the receiving end of the economic reforms.

At the Madras Congress the CPM decided to oppose the minority Congress government of PV Narasimha Rao for having "mortgaged the economic sovereignty of the country to the IMF and the World Bank." The party has 35 members in the lower house of Parliament and their support is important for the government.

In foreign policy, too, the communists could cooperate with left-wingers inside the Congress to lobby against closer ties with the United States.

Having lost its valued ally in Moscow, India is keen to mend fences with Washington. This was recently illustrated by the establishment of full diplomatic relations with Israel, assuaging the powerful pro-Israel lobby in the US.

The collapse of European communism has forced the India left-wing parties to rethink their strategies in a more Indian context. The need to Indianise their ideological framework has never been greater.

In a country where half the population is illiterate and underfed, there is ample scope for a party that professes to fight for equality. The remarkable plurality of the Indian political system will ensure that communism will survive in India, irrespective of the changes in global communism.

— GEMINI NEWS
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To the Editor...

Letters for publication in these columns should be addressed to the Editor and legibly written or typed with double space. For reasons of space, short letters are preferred, and all are subject to editing and cuts. Pseudonyms are accepted. However, all communications must bear the writer's real name, signature and address.

Smuggling vis-a-vis local products

Sir, Of late, lot of hulla baloo has been raised against smuggling and its effect on our economy and industry. Our Prime Minister has appealed to the people to boycott foreign goods and to 'be national and buy national'.

In this respect some have even accused our people of having a tendency of preferring foreign goods at a higher price than goods of 'same quality or better' made in the country. In a television programme on anti-smuggling drive broadcast recently our

Home Minister, to cite an example, mentioned about our 'Zamdani' sari and stated that these saris are even appreciated abroad and have a good demand. But the point Home Minister missed is that our common people cannot afford to buy 'Zamdani' saris for their day to day use and as such look for cheaper substitutes and that's why there is a good demand for standard quality Indian saris in our market.

The accusation that we have a tendency of buying foreign made products at a higher price in spite of the availability of same type of standard products made in the country is not

at all true and this is an aspersion on the 'patriotism' of our people. This will be evident from the cosmetic and toiletry products manufactured in the country which are faring well against foreign made products of the same type available in the market. That our people have more faith on foreign made goods is that they believe that government of those countries have enough control over the quality of the products manufactured there whereas this confidence is lacking as far as goods manufactured in our country are concerned, knowing well the greed of our business and industry people and the absence of an efficient government machinery to enforce quality control.

I am confident that our people will prefer good quality products made in the country over products of similar nature manufactured abroad. Therefore, to effectively check

smuggling what the government has to do is to ensure increased availability of quality essential products commodities manufactured in the country by enforcing strict quality control putting a check on the unbridled greed of our businessmen and industrialists. Otherwise, by mere rhetoric of 'be national and buy national', the commonmen cannot be made to pay through their noses and buy sub-standard products at high price for long just because these are manufactured in the country.

S A Moazzam
Dhaka

Load-shedding in Pabna

Sir, Now-a-days load shedding is a common feature of day-to-day life in Pabna. Everyday there will be no electricity at least for two or three times in the town. Moreover, the voltage is much lower than

the normal standard. So it is surely a curse for the citizens of the town.

Particularly when there is no electricity at the evening, the students suffer so badly, specially the SSC candidates, whose examination will begin from 22nd of April.

We are requesting the proper authority concerned to solve this problem as soon as possible.

Mirza Mamun Sadat and
Ashfaqur Rahman Sujan
Dilapur, Pabna.

Punctuality

Sir, May I use the hospitality of your column to draw the attention of the readers to our habit of flouting punctuality which has now become our national characteristic.

Attending a function or a meeting at the prescribed time is rare now-a-days. Specially if I know that others would have to wait for me, I

become more careless about their convenience or inconvenience: Arriving ahead of others reduces ones importance! Even the organizers of functions are resigned to the idea that if the time is fixed at 4 pm guests would start gathering at 5 pm. I have found on several occasions that the hosts were not ready to receive guests at the announced time of commencement. Of course, there are always genuine reasons for their unpreparedness.

I had the opportunity to attend recently some functions where the hon'ble chief guest as well as special guests officials in most cases were found to arrive late. And they are normally too preoccupied to notice their late arrival! Our present parliament, being truly representative, also reflected this national habit in its recently concluded session.

M A Haq
West Rajabazar, Dhaka