

# DOWN TO EARTH Disadvantaged Child and Shrinking Open Spaces

By A S M Nurunnabi

In a development country, urban population tends to increase with ease due to rapid rural-urban migration. There half of the population is estimated to live in absolute poverty. Consequently, the disadvantaged child in the city is the outcome of the existing material poverty. The situation poses a growing challenge, full implications of which are yet to be realised by the professionals and politicians.

By the disadvantaged children we also mean the street children, in other words, the rootless and the wretched ones. The latter alone run into a huge number. According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), there are 100 million street children in the world, of whom 20 million are in developed countries, 40 million in Latin America, 25 to 30 million in Asia and nearly 10 million in Africa. In this city, they form a miserable part of the poor and take recourse to various means to earn a living for survival. They do not seem to have the least of social security.

Associated with the plight of the disadvantaged children is the problem of child labour. Official statistics suggest that 25 per cent of families of Bangladesh are dominated by mothers who have no alternative but to depend on whatever earnings their working children manage.

Some of the suggestions made for solution of the problems of disadvantaged children are noted below:

The interests of the disadvantaged child in relation to its physical environment involve adequate shelter; basic sanitation

and facilities for recreation like playground. But once they settle in slums with their parents or guardians, the disadvantaged children struggle to survive without access to civic amenities expected in towns and as many of them are squatters, they find they are not entitled to any either.

It is felt that increased public investment is called for if there are to be changes which may improve the condition of the disadvantaged child and improve his or her chance in life. To bring this about, planning may be taken up with a closer focus on the needs of children for growth and development. This might be better achieved if more stress is placed on promoting small and medium-sized, rural townships throughout the country which would be able to provide a much better environment for children to grow and develop.

In this context, it may be underscored that the child, perhaps more than his or her parents, need household security of tenure so as to retain his or her identity and social network within the neighbourhood. It is, therefore, suggested that slum residents are not shifted at will but slum conditions be improved in all its physical, economic and social aspects. Where shifting the slums becomes essential in public interest, adequate alternative arrangements may be made for relocation and rehabilitation with a minimum of disruption to the life of the inhabitants especially the disadvantaged children.

There is also scope for the NGOs to play an effective role

for rehabilitation of underprivileged children if they take suitable projects along with many of its projects on health, education, environment, self-employment, etc.

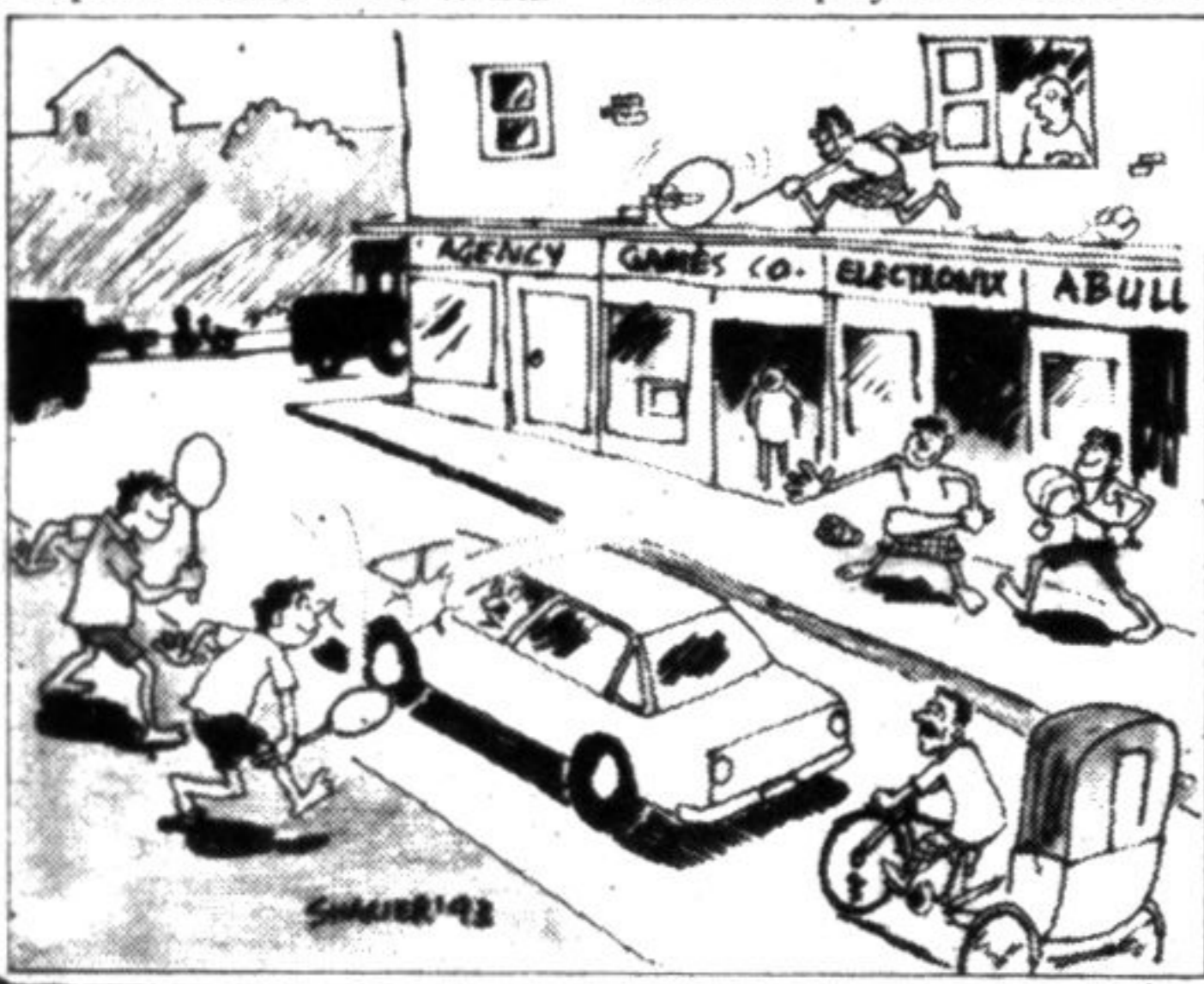
In planning for a modern city, provisions are made for the recreational facilities or at least for large open spaces for its citizens. For the Dhaka city, such provisions may exist on paper but they are sadly lacking in reality. In the context of our social ethos, the needs of the majority of the city's inhabitants are simple. They consist in some open spaces or parks for taking a breath of fresh air or some open spots where children can play and have fun. These simple needs are not met in the city where many other basic amenities have been forgotten in the frenzy for rapid growth.

Dhaka city once prided on its large open spaces, particularly in the Ramna area. In summer, its numerous *krishnachura* trees were in bloom, the entire area was filled with a riot of colour, as if on fire. With most of these trees now gone — victims of urban development — the vacant landscape exites nostalgic memories in old timers. In winter also, the verdant area used to acquire a singular appeal as a mild nip in the air merged with bright sunshine.

The old part of the city also was not without its open spaces. Though they were few in number, they seemed to meet the needs of that time, considering the low density of population in the past.

Now most of the city's important open spaces are either no longer available or avoided on account of the presence of anti-social elements.

What should be done about the existing situation? Since there may be limited scope for improvement within the existing city limits, some people think that it is important to ensure adoption of appropriate measures to keep the existing open spaces free from encroachments. There is also a greater need for vigilance so that atmosphere in these areas is not vitiated through the presence of anti-social elements. This may be possible if the law-enforcing agencies, the city corporation and RAJUK are serious in their endeavours in their respective areas.



## Step Back, Please

From Page 1 Col 3

should speak? Resignation, or its threat, is an acceptable and traditional democratic weapon. But it is an exceptional weapon — and like everything exceptional — should be used with extreme caution and only, I repeat, only, when all other ways of reaching an acceptable (as against ideal) solution is absent. Political observers are far from convinced that Sheikh Hasina had no other option to handle the situation — including a limited walkout, partial boycott of this session, going to the public through the media with her case, or holding a mass campaign on the issue. Let us assume that the Speaker is wrong and that Sheikh Hasina is right. Would that justify putting at risk the whole parliamentary process?

A point needs to be made here. If Sheikh Hasina would have controlled her habit of quick retort, and said to the waiting journalists at Zia that she would discuss everything inside Parliament, then today only the PM's controversial comments would have been in public focus. The Opposition would have had a clear stage to prove their charge against the Leader of the House.

Instead, the Opposition Leader is now the subject of a counter privilege motion, as a result of which, it is about to start on a course of action fraught with danger, not only to itself, but to the democratic process as a whole.

Could the Speaker have done something else? Was he a bit over anxious to play 'even-handed'? In deciding the motion of the Opposition, the Speaker convened a meeting of the Business Advisory Committee. Why didn't he do the same in deciding the motion of the Treasury bench? For, if he did, he could perhaps have better gauged the mood of the MPs and suggested a totally different course — like both sides going

for explanatory speeches by their respective leaders, instead of the present format. That was a serious mistake, resulting in the present impasse.

The PM, whose comments lie at the root of the present crisis, needn't have said, what she did. What possible political gain could she have derived from this comment? Over the past nearly three years, she has said literally every sort of negative thing about the Opposition as there could be. This paper, in its editorial on 22 November, entitled 'Give Parliament a chance', suggested that both the PM and the Leader of the Opposition, should say that they did not mean to use the words that they did, and that they take back what they said. Just imagine, two small sentences from the two of them, could have put the present Parliament in a totally different situation. But then, admitting one's own fault (are we not human, after all) is not in our immature and narrow-minded political culture. Instead, we are faced with a totally unnecessary situation of tension, acrimony and mutual distrust.

So, what is the way out? We would like to reiterate the suggestion contained in our editorial. Only Begum Zia and Sheikh Hasina can solve their crisis. They should put their egos aside, and keeping the interest of Parliament, of democracy and of representative government, foremost in their minds. Both the leaders should take a step back. They should withdraw their remarks, — even if, for one, it was a public speech, and for the other, a reaction to that — and allow, at least for once, the institution of Parliament, to appear bigger than themselves. Such an act would only strengthen their democratic credentials.

Do not let the feeling of disillusionment, as I warned at the outset, turn into one of disgust.

Editor: Mahfuz Anam

Published by Medlaworld Ltd., 52, Motijheel C/A, Dhaka-1000 and printed at City Publishing House Ltd., 90 Kairail, Dhaka-1000. Editorial, News & Commercial Offices: House No. 11, Road No. 3, Dhanmanti R/A, Dhaka-1205. PABX: 500092-4. Advertisement: 500091 (Direct). Fax No: 88-02-863035. GPO Box No: 3257. Cable: DAILYSTAR DHAKA.



A milad at The Daily Star office premises yesterday on the occasion of the chehnum of its late founder-editor S M ALI was rounded-off with a munajat seeking divine peace for the departed soul. — Star photo

## Seminar on impact of Farakka held in London

# 'Solve Ganges problem thru' regional dialogues'

The adverse impact on Bangladesh economy and ecology due to unilateral withdrawal of water by India at the Farakka Barrage was highlighted at a seminar held at London University on Thursday last, according to a report received in Dhaka yesterday, reports BSS.

A number of distinguished academics, intellectuals, businessmen, lawyers, journalists and environmentalists participated in the seminar in which key-note paper was presented by Prof M Shahjahan, Vice-Chancellor of the BUET, Dhaka.

The seminar was arranged by the South-North Centre for Environmental Policy, the Geopolitics and International Boundaries Research Centre and the Centre for South Asian Studies (SOAS) and Farakka Action Committee, UK led by Kamruddin and Mohidur Rahman.

Prof Graham Chapman of Geography, Department of SOAS conducted the seminar. Dividing the Ganges, Farakka Barrage and its impact on Bangladesh, after presentation of key-note paper by Prof Shahjahan on the Adverse Impact of the Farakka Barrage on Bangladesh. Prof Graham Chapman summed up the situation.

The participants including Prof Amitabh Mukherjee, of India, Prof Tony Allen and Prof W Bangas and Ms Zena Das, executive vice-president of Commonwealth Human Habitation and Environment, referred to the environmental problems facing Bangladesh due to construction of the Farakka Barrage and unilateral withdrawal of water by India.

Prof Graham Chapman underlined different aspects of economy, environmental, siltation, floods, salinity intrusion and desertification due to diversion of the Ganges water at Farakka during lean period.

On behalf of the participants Prof Chapman, a distinguished authority on geography and ecology recommended that there should be regional cooperation between three riparian countries of the Ganges to solve the problem.

Chapman suggested that the

upper-riparian Nepal and India and the lower riparian Bangladesh should cooperate in a spirit of good neighbourliness through peaceful dialogue to properly utilise the water resources of the Ganges.

He said Bangladesh has been confronting floods, droughts, erosion, sedimentation, ground water depletion, intrusion of salinity besides problems of navigation, health, sanitation, drinking water and pollution due to diversion of the Ganges water by India.

Prof Chapman underlined the urgency of the problem and called for its quick solution for the welfare of the people of the region.

Prof Shahjahan answered a number of questions from the audience and shared his concern for a quick solution of the problem it was too late.

In his paper Prof Shahjahan with the help of charts and diagrams and data dwelt on the technical, social, economic and environmental and morphological aspect of the issue. "Farakka does not only control the river Ganges but also controls the lives and destiny of 40 million people and 40 per cent areas of Bangladesh," Prof Shahjahan said.

Highlighting the socio-economic importance of the Ganges to the people of Nepal, North India and Bangladesh, Prof Shahjahan said all these nations are developing as agrarian countries where ever increasing population has been putting pressure on the limited available resources.

He pointed out that the river Ganges like all other international rivers such as the Nile, Rhine, Mekong are the heritage of mankind. Tracing the history of the river for thousands of years, Prof Shahjahan said any interference in its flow resulted in a long-term impact on other aspects of lives of the people who depend on it for their survival.

Prof Shahjahan said the Ganges water dispute resulted from the construction of a barrage at Farakka by Indian with the co-riparian countries like Bangladesh and Nepal, and without

considering the environmental impacts. Now it is clearly visible that there is a drastic change in the environment of Bangladesh. The adverse impacts have caused widespread salinity, desertification of much of the region, affected navigability of the rivers, caused destruction of pisciculture and the Sundarbans, the largest mangrove forest in the world and posed overall threat to industries, agriculture and the eco-system, he said.

He further said environmentally the damage done by the barrage can be considered as the worst by man made unilateral intervention of natural flows of an international river. The economic or environmental survival is most critical for Bangladesh among other very critical needs. Due to the depletion of the lean season flow the largest irrigation project of Bangladesh, the Ganges-Kobadak(GK) Project covering 142,000 hectares of command area has been threatened, he added.

He said after the Ganges flow commissioning of the Farakka Barrage, the flow of the Ganges during the lean months has come down seriously in April this year. The Ganges discharge reached a record low of 8,000 cusecs. The Gorai flow which was 10-12 per cent of Ganges discharge during January-March period, has reduced to about one per cent during the same period after Farakka was commissioned the reduction of flow in Gorai has many adverse environmental effects on tide, saline intrusion, soil and agriculture, environment, economy, forestry, fishery, navigation and irrigation, he said.

He pointed out that the Ganges shows tendency to aggradation due to siltation and water quality, degradation because of pollutants and toxic wastes carried by the Ganges to lower riparian Bangladesh from numerous industries, such as chemical, tanneries, paper, fertilizer, thermal power stations and distilleries, from the Indian side. Shahjahan noted in his paper.

## Businessmen alarmed

From Page 1 Col 7

(MCCI), while talking to The Daily Star, said if the crisis in the political arena continues it would shake the confidence of the investors.

"Entrepreneurs, especially the foreign investors, will think twice if the situation leads to a turmoil," Rahman observed.

"To avert any negative impact of the political debate on our economy, the issues coming up in Parliament should be resolved in a parliamentary manner," he felt.

Describing the situation as most undesirable, Rahman said either side should have the courage and the conscience to sort out things before they get out of hand.

A T M Wazullah, president of the Dhaka Chamber of Commerce and Industry (DCCI), expressing his feelings, said: As an entrepreneur, I feel concerned.

"This will again push back the country into stagnation," he said and added that the politicians should put the national interest above party interests.

A private sector banker giving his reactions on condition of anonymity, said Parliament should engage itself in more 'useful debates' like the investment position, unemployment, inflation rate, housing situation, and rise of prices, etc.

He felt that instead of the mud-slinging, meaningful discussions on economic issues — vital for the very survival of the country — should be taken up.

He observed that the government side should now take a 'generous and bold' step to solve the crisis.

## Hasina

From Page 1 Col 4

Gupta, Rokonzaman Khan, Prof Shamsul Huda Harun, Dr Khandker Bazul Haq, Prof Syed Ahmed Hossain, Dr Rangalal Sen, Dr Imamul Haq, Dr Harun or Rashid, Dr Tofael Ahmed Chowdhury, Dr Arefin Siddique, Dr Rajiv Humayun, Dr Muntasir Mamun, Prof Mashuzzaman, Prof Hossain Mansur, Dr Dalem Chandra Barman, Dr SA Malek, architect Rabiul Hossain, Belal Ghowdhury, Rafiq Azad, Jawadul Karim and Badal Rahman were present on the occasion.

Referring to the Speaker's ruling allowing a debate on the Works Minister's privilege motion against her, Hasina termed the Speaker's decision contrary to the Rules of Procedure. "The Speaker wants that we should accept his decision, whether it is right or wrong."

Accusing the ruling BNP for the present crisis, she said, "It is not possible for us to protect the interests of the people by making Parliament ineffective and abandoning the norms of democracy and justice."

"Under no circumstance can the Awami League be an associate of neo-autocracy — the BNP."

Referring to the activities of the present Parliament, Hasina said neither the judiciary has been separated from the executive nor the infamous Indemnity Ordinance scrapped in the last two and a half years.

Even the Opposition's move in Parliament to reduce the prices of agri-inputs, ensure fair prices of farm products, stop retrenchment of workers, set up primary schools in each village and ban liquor and gambling was rejected by the BNP, she said.

# The Midnight File

## Another Hamas leader killed

JERUSALEM, Nov 26: Israeli security forces here today shot dead a prominent member of the Islamic Resistance Movement Hamas armed wing, two days after killing the group's leader, Palestinian source said. Khaled Mustapha Zir, 25, was shot dead when border guards raided the home where he was holed up in Jerusalem's Palestinian quarter of Sour Baber, they said. Zir was a leader of the Ezzeddin al-Qassam, reports AFP.

## Iraq accepts monitoring of its N-arms

UNITED NATIONS, Nov 26: Iraq has accepted the long-term monitoring of its weapons of mass destruction, according to Iraqi Foreign Affairs Minister Mohammed Said-al-Sahaf. In a letter addressed to the UN Security Council, the minister said he hoped the move would lead to the immediate lifting of oil and arms embargo imposed against Baghdad in 1990, reports AFP.

## JS: No headway

From Page 1 Col 4

Meanwhile, Communications Minister Oll Ahmed yesterday joined the BNP team trying to break the stalemate.

The AL leader, including Deputy Leader of the Opposition Abdus Samad Azad, refused to accept the ruling party-sponsored formula and insisted that the Speaker must withdraw his ruling before any formal negotiation takes place.

However, according to an influential leader of the ruling party, the BNP trouble-shooters yesterday achieved some success in breaking the ice. For the first time since the crisis began, some of them met face to face with several AL leaders — an improvement over the telephonic talks of the previous two days.

Sources close to the BNP negotiators told The Daily Star last night that the AL leaders with whom they had spoken were in favour of scrutinising the ruling party proposal.

However, AL leaders, when contacted last night, denied any such charge in the party's stance.

A senior AL leader, quoting his party chief Sheikh Hasina told this correspondent that the

## Committee

From Page 1 Col 5

tage industries for the benefit of the unemployed youths.

A proposal for fresh impetus to expand cottage industries was reviewed at an inter-ministerial meeting held recently and later placed before the cabinet meeting for approval.

The cabinet decided to form a central coordinating committee for the purpose, which will be followed by the formation of more such committees at the district and thana levels.

For the planned expansion of cottage industries, the unemployed youths might be provided training and bank loans on easy terms and conditions, the sources said. They mentioned that similar coordination committees were formed earlier at different levels but failed to deliver the desired results.

The policy-makers also endorsed the idea of coordinating the activities centrally. The central coordinating committee will be authorised to decide about the composition of other committees at the lower levels.

## Computer show

From Page 1 Col 4

sources. Besides normal computing, Canofile can give print-outs of the stored data. A new Canofile will cost slightly more than Tk 8 lakh, the company executives said.

The Optical Mark Reader (OMR), which has been installed in the four SSC and HSC education boards of the country to examine and mark the answer scripts of the SSC examinees, was another major attraction.

DATEC Ltd and IBM are marketing the products. The fastest line printer — OTC Euroline 400 — is being exhibited by Sigma Ltd. Company sources claimed that this system was the first of its kind in Bangladesh.

A number of companies are displaying Bengali laptops and colour scanners. The CSL (Compute Solution Ltd) is, for the first time, demonstrating their newly developed UNIX Bangla terminal.

Previously, only DOS and Windows operating systems were used in Bengali software.

A number of companies got instant orders from the visitors. Bjoy Bangla software, NEC printer and Compaq CDS topped the list, organisers said.

Citech Ltd installed a video camera in their stall and hooked it up with a computer which showed the live pictures to the visitors.

The list of the exhibitors is as follows: Abacus & Automation Ltd., Acceses Pvt Ltd., Ananda Computer Ltd., Automation Engineers Beximco Computers Ltd., Citech Company Ltd., Computer Solution Ltd., Computer Services, DATEC Limited, Flora Limited, Graphics Information System Ltd., IBM World Trade Corporation, International Office Equipment, JAN Association, Leads Corporation, NSS, Sigma Trade International and Uniev Limited.

The exhibition will remain open today from 10 am to 8 pm.

Leader of the Opposition would be the 'last person' to entertain any settlement formula which did not include withdrawal of the Speaker's ruling.

On the other hand, a member of the BNP team, when requested to give his reactions over Hasina's reported position, said: "The Speaker is not a mere individual. The post of the Speaker is an institution and politicians committed to a democratic process should not do anything to be little this institution."

Replying to a question, the BNP negotiators, requesting anonymity told this correspondent that he and his colleagues were trying to create an atmosphere for a dialogue with the Leader of the Opposition. "No substantial development has taken place so far," he said, but added that he was hopeful the crisis would be resolved by next Monday.

Meanwhile, the AL chief yesterday asked three senior party leaders to prepare the text of the resignation letter.

One of the three members of the team told The Daily Star, again on condition of anonymity, that the resignation letters, if submitted en masse, would contain an identical text.

He said that the text would contain a description of 'the ruling party's undemocratic attitudes so far towards its political opponents in and outside Parliament.'

However, the AL yesterday collected the signature of Abdul Matin Khasru, a party MP from Comilla, who is scheduled to go abroad within a day or two. Explaining the move, an AL leader said that the signature had been put on a white piece of paper in case a resignation had to be submitted before Khasru's scheduled return from Europe.

The leaders of the smaller groups in Parliament are learnt to be awaiting the AL's next course of action.

## Some parties want to foil democratic process: Rafiq

Works Minister Barrister Rafiqul Islam Mia urged the people from all walks of life to help the present democratic government of Begum Khaleda Zia institutionalise democracy in the country which was earned after a nine-year long struggle against autocracy, reports BSS.

Barrister Rafiq also urged all to keep themselves alert against conspiracy by some political parties to foil the fruits of democratic process and a constitutional government.

The minister was speaking as chief guest at a prize giving ceremony organised by the 'commitment' — a non-governmental organisation held at a local hotel yesterday evening.

"We have been elected by the voters to perform some specific constitutional responsibilities," he said, adding, it would be treated by the voters as negligence if we try to evade the constitutional responsibilities at any price.

Barrister Rafiq said that voterless elections held during the autocratic rule could not be compared with the most peaceful and impartial elections through which the BNP government was elected.

The minister cautioned all peace-loving and democratic minded people that those who had ruled the country without the mandate of the people are now again active to foil democracy.

## 50 hurt

From Page 1 Col 5

Of the injured, three persons — Giasuddin, Emran and Nasimuddin — were admitted to the Cox's Bazar Sadar Hospital in serious condition.

Police have been deployed at different points in the town and tension prevailed.

The two factions are commonly known as the 'Oli group' — after the Communications Minister — and the 'Noman group' — after the Livestock Minister.

The Noman group allegedly damaged the office of the Oli group at Badarmok area.

A series of clashes have taken place between the two groups in the past three days and two separate cases were lodged by them with the local police on Thursday.