

Resignation Threat

The ruling party has now officially proposed to Sir Ninian for a nine-member interim government under Prime Minister Khaleda Zia to conduct the next elections. The opposition on its part repeated its rejection of this idea on the ground that it will be a party government, and not a neutral caretaker government as they have asked for. So the 'non-dialogue' has come to another impasse. Meanwhile all three opposition parties — AL, JP and Jamaat — have declared their intention to resign their membership of the Parliament. The latter two parties have even set a deadline — 9th Nov. — for submission of resignation papers to their respective whips.

With the resignation threat, the opposition has put a time frame within which the government will have to meet its demand. We dread to think about the consequences for the country if no amicable solution is arrived at. If the opposition resigns, and if the government tries to hold a new election on its own, the former will obviously try to prevent it. This will lead to widespread conflict and social and political unrest. If, in spite of everything, the election is forced, without the opposition, then it will have almost no credibility. All this means that the dialogue facilitated by Sir Ninian will have to be given another chance.

The opposition's view is that the proposal for a nine-member interim government is not acceptable, because Begum Zia will continue to hold office. Even if all sorts of restrictions are imposed on the PM's power, her very presence as the interim PM is unacceptable to the opposition. So where do we go from here? Political confrontation and severe social and political unrest are what the observers are now predicting as likely outcome if no understanding is reached in the talks. The mood is pessimistic, and there is a sense of resignation in the air. Whatever economic and social gains there have been, seem to be at stake.

As we have suggested in our earlier editorial, taking the BNP proposition as the first step, and not the final one, negotiations should resume. The opposition should, at this stage, go a step further and explain how they see the formation and putting into place of the caretaker government. Let more details of either sides' plans be placed on the table so that the dialogue can go to the next stage. We urge both sides to do everything possible to come to an understanding and avoid the politics of confrontation towards which we appear to be heading.

Mind the Back Patch

The T & T Board is blazing new trails; but the patches behind it are crying out for attention, lest these cast a shadow over further extension of its services.

A parliamentary committee meeting has lately revealed that citizens are using three lakh telephone connections, representing a more than four-fold increase in the number since 1971. The coverage remains shockingly low, even by the standard of a developing country. There is little consolation to be derived from a lakh of applicants being in the waiting list. That is the constrained vision for the future.

There is another, more pertinent way of looking at it. If the available number of connections were served better by the T & T Board, there would have been elation all over for its extension plans. The domestic-cum-international network is to be stronger by another 5000 automatic exchanges and 1270 international exchanges by 1995-96. But hasn't the plea for regular mismanagement been an overloaded network?

The daily experiences with a telephone set are exasperating enough, not to speak of the monthly ordeal of inflated bills. Complaints get you on the tenterhooks.

Many T & T officials seem to think that subscribers owe them visits for, owning telephones. Let them be shaken up first into realising their minimal role by the introduction of a one step-service in respect of revising bills and restoring connections. Then it's lame excuse why analogue telephones cannot be protected from ghost billing. The customer's money may have lost value with the wayward among them, but he cannot put up with complete indifference shown to the value of his time. Are they not contributing Tk 378 crore to the exchequer annually?

Late Bloomers

Mount Etna overlooking a Sicilian township called Zafferana, widower Savatore and widow Maria Caterina, both aged 83, bound them in a fresh wedlock in that idyllic, romanticised setting. Their being 'head over heels in love' prepared them for the ultimate in blissful companionship. But a marriage of companionship it is, of the metaphysical type, on the last fringe of their twilight existence which should evoke a refined compassion for this wedding.

But that is exactly what was missing among the folks in the township, and even in the bride's seven children from the earlier marriage. They absented themselves from the wedding reception as if to add punch to the outrage of the citizens who blocked the main street of the township on the appointed day. It was their way of saying that the newly-weds were letting down their families. The expression is significant for the intensity of the feeling partaking of the typical Italian familial sensibilities; because the allusion is towards 'letting down', not abandoning their families. Although they are no self-proclaimed deserters from their families — far from it, judging by the 'blemish on our happiness' conceded by the bridegroom — for the intensely emotional Sicilian folks there's hardly any difference between being let down and left abandoned.

We also have late bloomers in our country — not in the creative but precreational sense of the term. Those with creaking bones apparently need to be helped out. Young hands are preferred to the fledging ones, companionship coming as a bonus, if at all, in our peculiar gender relations milieu. With the last flicker kindled in the old man, belonging to the rural gentry, and a good cash crop coming his way he could be raring to take the hands of a girl/girls his daughter's age and have so many off-springs add to the already oversized family.

The other day a centurian with quite a few marriages to his credit, had come over on BTW with a few hundred of his progeny of successive generations in full view, to utter his parting words of wisdom thus: "I wish, I hadn't married so many times." It's a family planning message written with his life.

Pessimism Grips Citizens as Crisis Lingers in Society

by Md Asadullah Khan

Politicians acting as navigators and cruising the nation's ship through a turbulent sea with a dark cloud looming over the horizon have to show their prudence, charisma, patriotism and commitment to national goal and aspirations of people.

LEADERS in all segments of the country had drifted on the tides like a sailor oblivious of thunder heads piling high on the far horizon. Nobody realises that the country is sliding into a national crisis — a loss of faith in all. And this serious erosion of confidence in leaders may simply be fatal for the survival of the fledgling democracy.

The current of unhappiness runs far deeper than the normal ebb and flow of a partisan feeling usual in a democracy. The situation as it exists today in the country is a challenge to the settled order of our politics and the inflated expectation it had encouraged in us. All institutions that are supposed to keep the country going in a dynamic speed seem to be too corroded by vanity, cynicism and also money. The optimism that was bubbling in every mind has given way to fear of future and anger at politicians who seemingly had 'mortgaged' it for short-term gain. Truly, leaders, whatever their standing may be, have failed to take note that the engines of economic growth heated up in early '91 appear to have stopped turning.

Leaders of our conscience seem to be blind of the cataclysmic situation developing around us which may ultimately throttle everything. It seems a virus of pessimism was spreading across the country — a sense that we were seriously off on the wrong track — and in the

meantime has infected the whole population.

Altruistically, the euphoria over the glory and achievement of what we have been doing in each of our fields of activity may be wearing off. It would be wiser to recall that even president Bush after his epoch-making victory in the Gulf war and with a glowing approval rating of 70 per cent was caught unaware when the election result reversed everything. It is not likely that the victor, a leader of outstanding eminence till yesterday, can carry the victory card right up to tomorrow.

The dissonance that is evident in the national politics today must not be lost sight of. When one is trying to delve 'deep into-it', one is likely to be haunted by the ghost of an earlier and grader leader. Sir Winston Churchill, war time Prime Minister of England who had been cast aside by his people when the guns fell silent. Truly, both the major parties are basking in their past glory but the world around us has changed so much and we are now awfully reeling. Situation confronting us is just like the day after a wedding. Everyone is tired and dishes are 'dirty'. The crisis that has enveloped the nation over the last few months strikes terror

in everyone's heart. While the Asian countries like South Korea, Japan, Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia are taking a high speed train towards progress and prosperity, we as a nation seem to have been left aside gasping for breath. It is most depressing. With unemployment topping 30%, taxes and VAT on the rise and austerity programme only looming on the horizon, it seems that a gloom has settled over the country. There is no denying the fact that any one who is keeping close watch over the nation's march must be sensing a certain fatigue on the part of the citizens over the country's lacklustre economic performance, political animosity and partisan conflict.

Perpetual poverty has obliged the people to become fatalists and there is no way that they can get over it if crisis continues. Evidently, every year a famine like condition in the month of Aswin stalks some parts of North Bengal and people in those areas have taken this yearly scourge as something *fait accompli*.

Politicians acting as navigators and cruising the nation's ship through a turbulent sea with a dark cloud looming over the horizon have to show their prudence, charisma, patri-

oticism and commitment to national goal and aspirations of people. As things stand today people have discovered that democratic institutions alone cannot bring prosperity and stability. As a result, people have begun to recognise that what they need to-day is not a messiah but leaders with whom who can make a fledgling democracy perform to their benefit. As political impasse lingers, boycott of parliament continues, dithering over national issues goes on, the nation is sliding into a chaotic situation which is fatal to growth-mechanism.

Admittedly, it is economy that counts most in all matters of rise and fall. It is worth recalling here that the greatest stroke of luck for Clinton was the economic upturn, otherwise that could have buried his candidacy.

All concerned must realise this truth that if the problem of distribution of wealth and elimination of poverty is not solved there is no way one can expect to reduce the violence creeping up day in and day out.

The problem confronting the country must not be glossed over. The country's antiquated tax system has yet to be in keeping with the advanced countries of the world.

Tax-reform should be made a centerpiece of domestic agenda. The Govt. effort to stimulate the economy and smooth out taxation and bring about reforms in the banking sector has hit the middle class, salaried workers, pensioners and retirees most. The legislation, which does not raise more revenue, would cut income and corporate taxes but impose somewhat unpopular value-added tax on most goods and services.

In early '91 people were aglow with ecstasy, jubilation and enthusiasm to build a country brighter in all respects. But the euphoria was over soon after it began.

Although the cold war had ended, the economies of the west were booming and democracy was on the rise. But in our case, the sunny forecast which should have proved to be true has given way to despair and pessimism, a free-falling economy and disarray of things across the country. Social order, family ties, relationship with each other have broken down suddenly. The recent twin murder of mother and daughter in Lalmitia and the grisly murder of a school boy in Hathkolia — both prominent city areas — trigger an alarming signal of the social

fabric torn apart from its knots. The reasons put forth for this sort of disorientation is quite understandable. Whatever little economic growth the country has achieved, can hardly cater employment to a large cohort of educated youths. Secondly, the quality of education, as also the education minister has pointed out very recently in a public meeting at Panchagarh of Dinajpur, has suffered most.

The rot started in the school curriculum and teaching.

Very few students coming out with flying colours snatching stars in the school and college level examinations, can face the challenge of job requirement. So much effort has been put to maintain and enhance the quality of English language (still regarded as a major criterion in most employment) teaching in schools and colleges but, to the dismay of all, so little has been achieved. A recruiting examination conducted recently for a certain organisation of candidates not below degree level of qualification, revealed a sad experience signalling something impliedly amiss in the academic background of a great majority of candidates.

The material quality of education in all respects has fallen inexorably. But it is still not too late that there should be a soul-searching effort to find and eliminate causes of the fall and elevate the standard of education. Now, and first of all.

Previous government campaigns to expel illegal immigrants, many of whom are manipulated by political parties, have never taken off and critics say it is wrong for a census to include them in the country's population, as inevitably would happen.

In addition, the politically-opposed urban and rural populations of Sindh are allocated quotas in a range of services, including admission to colleges and universities, and both sections of the population fear that their numbers — and thus their job and educational opportunities — might be found to have fallen in the census.

It was the reporting of absurdly-exaggerated household figures to enumerators in Sindh that caused the abandonment of the 1991 census.

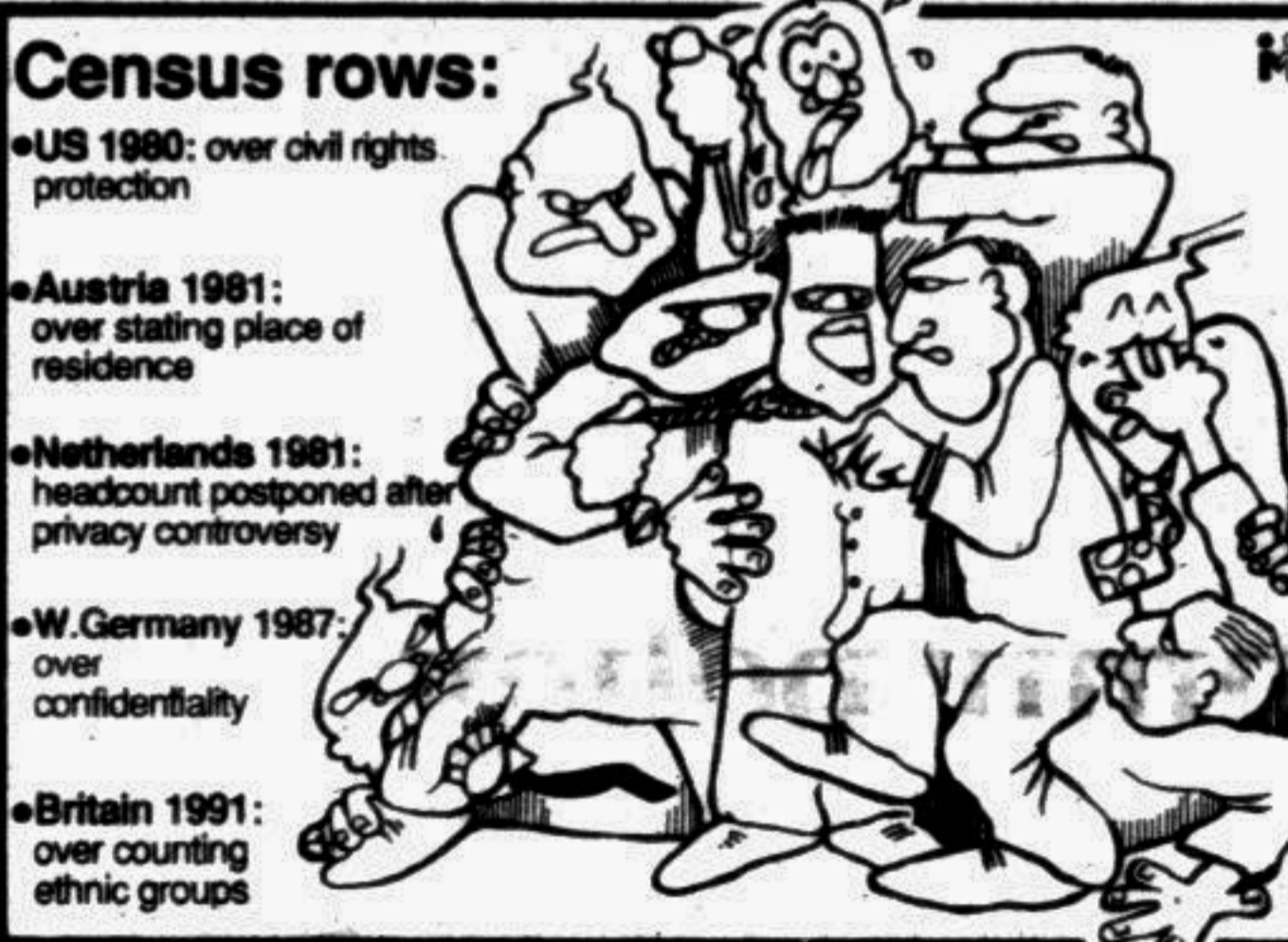
The United Nations Population Fund has expressed concern over the delay in conducting the census, arguing that the lack of up-to-date data hampers its work in Pakistan, as well as that of the government.

Census Opponents Win the Day

Tariq Butt writes from Islamabad

Pakistan's on-off census, already three years overdue, is off again. The official reason was bad weather, but Gemini News Service reports the cancellation was the result of pressure from politicians arguing that the issue of refugees and illegal immigrants should be tackled before the holding of a national head-count.

When the figures don't add up



called for postponement of the census. "We will not accept the census if it is conducted on the present plan," warned the eight-party alliance formed to oppose the count.

Even PPP members in the provincial legislature opposed the census.

Provincial Chief Minister Nawab Zulfikar Magsi wrote to Bhutto and President Farooq Leghari, expressing his fears that the census would not be impartial.

Chief Census Commissioner Javed Akram dismissed the fears, pointing out that "most Afghan refugees are living in camps, away from the urban areas. Enumerators will be in a

position to identify a local and non-local since they have been posted in the area to which they belong."

Constitutionally, a census must be taken every 10 years. The 1981 count gave a population of 84.3 million. Punjab's share was 58 per cent, Sindh 20 per cent, the North West Frontier Province 12 per cent, and Balochistan 4 per cent. The remaining six per cent resided in the Northern Areas, Federally Administered Tribal Territory and part of Kashmir, administered by Pakistan.

The population growth rate has been running at an average of three per cent a year, which

would produce a current total of about 126 million. This would make Pakistan the seventh most populous country in the world.

The accuracy of these estimates, together with other information needed for planning purposes, would have been tested in the 1991 census. But though the count got underway as scheduled, it was halted because of irregularities.

The Bhutto government rescheduled the exercise for March 1993 but was forced to put it off in the face of opposition from Punjab, the most heavily-populated province.

The provincial government proposed that the census

should be held only after a one-day country-wide curfew and other measures designed to stop provinces inflating their population figures.

This was opposed by the central government, which continued to argue that organising a curfew would be a logistical and financial nightmare requiring hundreds of thousands of security personnel.

In Sindh, two other disputes are making the census controversial.

Its capital, Karachi, is home to an estimated one million illegal immigrants, many of them with Pakistani passports and identity cards allegedly obtained by bribery.

Recalling Dr Kudrat-e-Khuda

by Jamayet Ali

WHATEVER you do, do with your might. Things half done are never done right". This was the motto of Dr. Muhammad Kudrat-e-Khuda. Whatever task he undertook he finished at any cost with sincerity, zeal and spirit. The Science Laboratory (BCSIR) is a testimony to his spirit of selfless works. He passed away on November 3, 1977.

Dr Kudrat-e-Khuda, one of the eminent scientists and educationists of this sub-continent was born in a respectable Muslim family in Margram Birhum, West Bengal in May 1900. He was the eldest son of his parents Hazrat Syed Shah Abdul Mukid and Musammat Fasiha Khatun who were very religious. Hazrat Mukid, a university graduate was popularly known as peer because of his piouness and nobleness.

The appellation of Dr. Khuda's family was Seydus Sadat. This kind of family appellation is not usually seen. Once he asked his father about his family status, his father said, "If you can build happy and prosperous life, it will be the best appellation of your family". Nobody knew his reaction to these words. But undoubtedly this inspiration from his father led him towards the peak of prosperity in future.

Dr. Khuda started his primary education in Margram High School. He possessed a sharp merit and keen memory. Any book if once read he could keep it all in memory. The teachers became astonished when they received marvelous results in all examinations from him. He stood first in matriculation examination. Then he got admission to the Presidency College. He also got first division in the I.Sc. and B.Sc. examinations by dint of his merit. He was awarded gold medals. His brilliant result in the M.Sc examination in chemistry charmed all the professors and educationists of the Calcutta University. In this examination he stood first class first securing 89 marks higher than his nearest contestant.

Dr Khuda then joined the Imperial College of Science and Technology, London as a State Scholar from the Government of Bengal. In 1929 he obtained his DIC and D.Sc. degrees from the same college under the University of London. Dr Khuda's Professor was overwhelmed with joy to see his research performance

while doing D.Sc course. It was so much; only one fourth of it was enough for his D.Sc. degree.

After obtaining D.Sc degree, Dr. Khuda returned home despite requests from his professor for doing research in London University. He wanted to serve his country. Bearing this theme in mind he pursued his researches in the Presidency College, Calcutta and was awarded the Prem Chand Roy Chand Scholarship and a gold medal for his post doctorate researches by the Calcutta University. Winning this scholarship was not an easy matter, and he did it.

Dr Khuda made a new revolution in the field of Ketocyclo Tautomerism after modifying Sirain Hypothesis. He first experimentally proved the origia of Strainless Monocyclic Ring. His basic research on Stereo isomerism of camphoric acid has been included in the course for higher study. This research is believed to be the base of conformational theory in organic chemistry.

Dr Khuda was a fellow and Member of the Syndicate of the Calcutta University. Before partition of British India he was the principal of the Presidency College, Calcutta.

After partition in 1947 he came to erstwhile East Pakistan and became the first Director of Public Instruction of the then east Pakistan Government while holding the important position of the DPI. Dr. Khuda wholeheartedly tried to improve quality of education. He believed that if Bengali language could not be introduced in the educational institutions, quality of education could never be improved. So, he instructed for translation of important English books essential in the Syllabus. He was one of those who took pioneering role in the language movement for introducing Bengali in all spheres of our national life.

Dr Khuda was also a member of the executive council of the Dhaka University. In the same year he was appointed Scientific Adviser to the Ministry of Defence of the Government of Pakistan.

In 1949 and 1951, he attended the different conferences organised by UNESCO and Commonwealth. Dr Khuda was the Chairman of the Secondary Education Council

from 1952-1955. In 1952 he was also one of the members of Pakistan Delegation at the conferences of Commonwealth DSIR held in Australia. By this time the east Regional Laboratories of the Pakistan Council of Scientific and Industrial Research was established in Dhaka and he was appointed as its first Director in 1955. Dr Khuda did a lot to expand the East Regional Laboratories. It may be mentioned that East Regional Laboratories started functioning under the leadership of Dr Kudrat-e-Khuda at the Dhaka Polytechnic Institute, Tejgaon in 1955. It was Dr Khuda who took the utmost initiative to build new laboratory building by the side of the Elephant Road (at present Dr Kudrat-e-Khuda Road). Construction work of one part of the new laboratory buildings on 27 acres of land was completed in 1962 when all machineries from the Tejgaon Polytechnic Institute were transferred to the new site.

It may be mentioned that 27 acres of land for the laboratories was acquired by Dr Khuda's own efforts. So he is called the Founder-Director of the Dhaka Laboratories. He got the opportunity to render services as Director till his retirement in 1966. Then he joined the Bangla Unnayan Board as its Chairman when he tried to publish scientific books in Bengali language.

He was actively engaged as the Chairman of Bangladesh Education Commission since 1972. In this period he took initiative in preparing a report with a view to improve education system in the country. The report is known as Kudrat-e-Khuda Education Commission Report. He submitted recommendation of this report to the government in 1975. He was appointed as the visiting professor, Department of Chemistry Dhaka University in 1975 and served there until his death on the 17th Kartik of the Bengali year 1384 (November 3, 1977).

His research works have been published in various scientific journals of national and international repute. The hand of death has taken him away, but his devotion to duty and disciplined simple life will always inspire and activate the minds of innumerable students generation after generation. He lives in our memory.

To the Editor

Air pollution

Sir, Pollution is increasing day by day in spite of our conscious efforts to put an end to it. And when we talk of air pollution in our city, in absence of any air pollution monitoring over the city, it is rather difficult to measure the level of contamination through vehicle emission. Are the levels of carbon monoxide, nitrogen dioxide, sulphur dioxide, suspended particles and lead within acceptable limits any more? No, the levels are rather dangerous for both human being and vegetation.

At our schools, being away from the main street or industrial areas, we always considered air pollution levels to be low, but due to preponderance of short car journeys to the schools at Banani-Gulshan areas, concentration of nitrogen dioxide largely from exhausts has soared up with the result that many of our youngsters are suffering from asthma. It has also been observed that whenever the weather is foggy, or muggy and pollution is trapped near the ground, they suffer from coughs and wheezing. So the link is quite clear.

In our estimation 10 per cent of vehicles on the road are responsible for 50 per cent of the pollution caused. And with the possibility of traffic getting to be nearly doubled on the roads by the year 2025, the situation could be dangerous for all living creatures. Experts say that a fine spray of nitric and sulphuric acid tended to accompany ozone, not only exacerbating asthma

symptoms but also irritating the airways of healthy people.

Therefore, let us take the following steps ourselves in order to check defaulters and try to improve the air quality in our city: doctors must study the links between nitrogen dioxide levels and hospital admissions for breathing difficulties; the newspapers should set up a hotline for people to report registration numbers of cars, lorries etc belching filthy smoke; DPC must get pollution monitoring equipment and forecast air quality reports 24 hour ahead; DCC could encourage garages to give motorists free advice on engine tuning; DCC should take initiatives to close certain roads in shopping/school areas during the peak hours; and hospitals must provide free treatment to clear chest congestion.

Col. Mirza Shafi (retd.), Banani, Dhaka

Bureaucratic hassles

Sir, Bureaucratic redtapism is one of the major problems in our country. Foreign investors have identified this as a great obstacle for economic and industrial growth in Bangladesh. So it is expected that too many departmental and procedural complexities will be minimised to carry out all sorts of works at a reasonable time without much inconvenience.

In tea estates, the supply of labour ration comes from silos. Recently a system has been introduced that a prior approval needs to be taken from the Thana Food Officer besides its

usual process on this account. This is an extra inconvenience imposed upon the tea estates. Bureaucratic problems in all sectors needs to be simplified no matter whether it is small or big. It is expected that these matters will be taken into account by our government and reduce excessive and complicated procedures as far as possible.

Mottus Samad Chowdhury Phultola Tea Estate, Sylhet

HBFC loans

Sir, It is gratifying to note that the government these days has allotted enough fund to the House Building Finance Corporation (HBFC) to encourage housing in the country. Ceiling of the loan has also been raised substantially. It now stands at Tk twenty lakhs. These are all encouraging signs.

Another factor, I believe, will give a flip to house building. If the previous borrowers, who earlier borrowed Tk six lakhs or three lakhs as the case it may be, are allowed to borrow the balance of new ceiling of Tk twenty lakhs for construction of second or third floor of the building, that will encourage construction of additional flats, and thereby, add to the availability of new accommodations.

Since fund is apparently no problem with the HBFC the matter should be considered seriously and sympathetically by the Ministry of Finance and HBFC. Will the HBFC and the ministry concerned look into it?

Saleh Ahmed Chowdhury Dhaka Cantonment