Founder-Editor: Late S. M. Ali Dhaka, Monday, May 22, 1995

E C Gherao

Saturday's Election Commission 'gherao' by the AL and the same action by JP yesterday. brings home a new bone of contention in an already charged political scene. This new battlefront, so to speak, need not have been there, and one that we definitely did not need. If the BNP showed a little more political acumen, a quality for which they are not very well-known, then perhaps the crucial position of the Chief Election Commissioner could have been spared of this critical glare.

There are two sides to the appointment of the Chief Election Commissioner. The purely legal side and the equally important one of his general acceptability, a non-partisan stature, and an image that is beyond reproach of any kind. There are clearly laid down rules to appoint the CEC and nobody has accused the government of violating any of them. But then, there are also, if not laid down but very much in vogue, norms in such appointments that the government can be accused of being very much callous about.

The extent of callousness becomes critical when seen in light of the political stalemate that is in existence for more than a year now. When, over the past four years, the relations between the two sides have been marked by suspicion, acrimony and a politics of doing everything to embarrass the other side, how could the ruling party think that a crucial appointment like that of the CEC can be done without any consultation with the opposition political parties?

We think that the opposition is correct when it criticizes the process of the CEC's appointment. But we are, frankly, a bit worried as to how far the opposition will go to vent its criticism. We note with hope that though Sheikh Hasina has been vehement in her criticism of the appointment, she did not reject the possibility of cooperating with the EC and its new man-incharge. This is pragmatism. For it will be disastrous for democracy and the total election process, if the opposition should try to force a change, through agitation or otherwise, the appointment to a statutory post. The precedence of changing a so-called bad appointment will be far worse. Then again, condemn the process as much as possible, but why the man?

Now that all sorts of protests have been lodged, the opposition's full attention should be focused on other measures to ensure a free and fair election like proper voter registration and accurate and fair delimitation of constituencies, etc.

Waiting for Relief

When reports said diarrhoea had taken six lives in tide-hit Noakhali, we said it would spread and take more lives. Now three days later 300 people are reported to be dead of that disease and 50 thousand afflicted only in Noakhali which is but one among the five or six districts affected by tidal surge. And now we say many more will die in the wake of this unchallenged epidemic.

That should mean that the drinking water problem has not been solved in the devastated areas. And also that enough ORH preparations are not reaching the spots. And there are reports confirming a continuing hunger problem among the affected people. Food and medicine are not reaching those that are dying for want of these.

It is as usual the same old story. Most devastated areas are yet to be reached by administration. Sandwip is going to repeat its unbelievable record of being inaccessible to government supplies for close to a week after tidal surge had struck it. If Sandwip, home to millions and distinguished for high literacy, can be farther than the moon to Bangladesh government what would be the fate of chars like Nijhum? In fact, most affected areas even on the mainland are in effect unreached so far by the government. Tens of thousands people are living in pockets on dams and bunds without food, water and medicine with no sign of when relief would start arriving.

This year's early Jaishtha calamity has, however, been distinguished singularly by a new phenomenon of the government completely ignoring the disaster. So far the Speaker Sheikh Razzak Ali and a mini-minister Mosharraf Hossain Shahjahan have gone down to the sites of devastation. The Prime Minister must have been tied up by business more important than attending the rotting lakh in the tidal swamps. What happened to her ministers and administration top-brass? For many of them this should has been a call of duty. If they fail to move in time of such emergency. Then why are they there for ?

Remembering Nazrul

Poet Nazrul Islam's birth anniversary is usually celebrated on the 11th of Jaishtha or May 25, although there remains serious controversy about the correct date of his birth. And today is only the 8th of Jaishtha. The celebrations begin today and will continue over the best part of a week. These are government celebrations. But for a government to hold a week-long commemorative festival for a poet, and every, year, is something unique in the world.

Nazrul was, to his core, anti-establishment, whatever the nature of the establishment. That explains the pet epithet — rebel — that goes with his name, better than all other attempts. And with government celebrating his memory in a very enthusiastic manner we enter the realm of paradox. Which is only exacerbated by the fact that the government's cultural pretensions do not quite fall in line with Nazrul's avowed and uncompromising stance on culture and society, politics and religion.

Nazrul was the embodiment of Bengaliness. More than many of the stupendous stalwarts of our culture and history. And Bangladesh as a nation-state founded by the Bengali people is a vindication of Nazrul's idea of his national and cultural identity. That way the state and society of Bangladesh is in a special position to remember the great poet and composer. And this fact devolves special responsibility on us all to see that it is Nazrul and his art and his achievements and ideals that are celebrated and not their travesty which is often time the case.

Lessons from Oklahoma City Bombing

by Muslehuddin Ahmad

Though political reasons including suppression of people's right, forceful occupation and expropriation of people's land etc appear to be the important causes for worldwide terrorism, happenings in Waco (Texas) and Japan clearly show rise of religious cult in many places around the world. These cults preach fanaticism and destruction of established civilised system.

and the deaths at Oklahoma

HE bombing of the Fede

L City was undoubtedly an

awful crime against the

citizens of the United States.

So far safe America seems no

more safe as the source of such

a tragedy is now within the US.

Some of the media agencies

with high international

reputation, however, appa

rently compromised their

sponsibility by their a priori

assumption of the alleged per-

petrators' connections with

Middle: East or so-called

Islamic fundamentalists

Fortunately, the US adminis-

tration and its investigating

agencies kept themselves

above those assumptions and

maintained that they were se

available to them.

riously pursuing many leads

taking place through Middle

East and other connections but

such assumptions with wide

publicity network as those

media agencies have do create

or add to the existing tensions

between various religions and

nationalities. Ibrahim Ahmed.

an American-Jordanian who

flew out of Oklahoma just one

and half hours after the blast.

had to face serious humiliation

though he had nothing to do

with the bombing. The worst

thing was that when the news

of seizure of Ibrahim's bags was

announced, people started

doubting him and indeed his

wife was terribly humiliated

when some reportedly spat on

her. However. Ibrahim's posi-

tion was vindicated when he

cooperated fully with US inves

tigating agencies and was

the media should avoid making

such conjectures on any such

serious matters and keep their

options open. Indeed, these

media agencies are well re-

spected and generally relied

upon and indeed they deserve

appreciation for the vivid cov-

erage of the carnage at

Oklahoma city. Not only the

people of the US but also the

people around the world were

shocked by the devastations

T / HEN Bangkok's traffic

these days they are bombarded

by a host of talk shows

discussing hitherto taboo

topics ranging from sexual

misdemeanours of the

Buddhist clergy to the impor-

tance of the Thai military in

'On the third anniversary of

the momentous events of May

1992, for many Thais such in-

creased media and political

freedom stand out prominently

as the rewards reaped by the

country in return for the sac-

rifices of pro-democracy mar-

demonstrations demanding

the resignation of the armed

forces chief Gen Suchinda

Kraprayoon from premiership

were brutally suppressed by

the military. Thousand were

injured in the attack carried

out by the military, but the

even also paved the way for

Suchinda's exit and the forma-

tion of the country's first freely

in Thai political life and the

democracy we witness now

would have been impossible

without it," says Dr Kritaya

Archavanitkul who runs a

"hotline" service at Bangkok's

Mahidol University to collect

information about those who

went missing during the vio-

has come about in the past

three years had been the

heightened participation by

villagers, farmers and students

in movements around the

country fighting on a host of

issues ranging from ecological

based research group, more

than 900 demonstrations and

rallies, around the country

have taken place since the

Chuan Leekpai government

According to a Bangkok-

preservation to corruption.

One important change that

"May 1992 was a watershed

elected government.

lent events.

Three years ago peaceful

protecting national security.

weary motorists tune

into their radio sets

What is necessary is that

cleared of all doubts.

Not that terrorism is not

media neutrality and re-

ral Building in Oklahoma

As terrorist attacks are on the increase in many places around the world it is high time to give very serious thought to these, look for causes and see how these could be brought to the minimum when total elimination is not possible. Though political reasons including suppression of people's right, forceful occupation and expropriation of people's land etc appear to be the important causes for worldwide terrorism, happen ings in Waco (Texas) and Japan clearly show rise of religious cult in many places around the world. These cults preach fanaticism and destruction of established civilised system.

These need to be nipped in the bud. It seems that Oklahoma bombing's main suspect Timothy McVeigh had initial connection with Waco's branch Dravidian cult but later with some local militia groups within the US.

The US being the most democratic and free society probably allowed these militia to grow at different places but Oklahoma bombing should provide enough lessons to the authorities for having a serious look at militias' activities. Liberty, freedom, individual rights etc. are precious things in any democratic society but the government must ensure security and safety of the citizens and hence the need for curbing activities of such fully armed groupings. Such local armed militia groups appear to be the organisations working against the democratically established governments. Non-

violent political opposition is one thing but preparation for armed resistance is another

As various reports show, the activities of these militia groups in the US are no longer confined to the US, they have well established network abroad. Former Police Chief of lowa. Joseph Melnichak said. "The more you look at the militias, the more you see links to neo-Nazi and other far right groups both here and abroad." This was, Indeed, confirmed by some neo-Nazi leaders and one clearly mentioned, "We're networking today just like leftist groups have for decades." It is time for the US authorities to wake up and take stock of what has been happening within the US. Till today they have an obsession about terrorism from Middle East and so-called "Islamic fundamentalists" sources.

But as the events are unfolding, far right militias apparently having anti-Semitic views and vowing to establish white power supremacy may ultimately create havoc in terms of terrorist activities in the US and Europe. This is no conjecture. Some reports (New York Times Service) show that "Americans express high anxiety over militias." Paul Hill, a retired aircraft mechanic, apparently a sympathiser of militias while sitting in a cafe complained of "Gestapo mentality" of a federal government. Hill said, "Militias are a patriotic reaction to tyranny." "It smells like what happened in Germany, Barbara Corman, a technical writer, sitting in the same cafe felt. "shuddered when she

those involved in the May

military leaders has proved too

tall a task for the elected gov-

ernment so have its attempts

to make the constitution more

proposal to introduce consti-

tutional amendments was de-

feated last year after opposi-

tion MPs and senators in the

parliament's upper house

joined hands to push through

forms were the lowering of the

voting age from 20 to 18 years.

greater access to information,

setting up of an independent

election commission and a cut

The opposition promoted

in the number of non-elected

constitution, still being fi-

nalised by a specially formed

parliamentary committee, is

considered by many democ-

racy activists as being even

more "retrogressive" than the

strations which ended with

the intervention of the Thai

Monarch Bhumibol Adulyadej a

compromise was reached be-

tween the pro-democracy and

pro-military parties to work

together to democratise the

the country's politicians, say

democracy activists, have

turned the political clock back

to where it stood on the eve of

can succeed in all that it is was

to do but what is worrisome is

the fact that the present ad-

ministration has even stopped

trying to bring about meaning-

ful change;" says an activists

with Campaign for Democracy,

a lobby group involved in mo-

bilising people during the May

1992 demonstrations.

"No elected government

By reneging on this deal

constitution.

the violent events.

Following the May demon-

one sought to be changed

senators in the upper house

Among the proposed re-

an entirely new constitution.

The Chuan administration's

democratic.

If punishment of former

Thais Remember their May Day

S Satyanarayan writes from Bangkok

Three years after the pro-democracy demonstrations that ended General Suchinda Kraprayoon military

government, Thailand enjoys much greater freedom, reflected in its vibrant media. But the work of

democracy activists remains unfinished as the army continues to dominate That politics.

The greater democratic

While Thai newspapers and

space available for anti-estab-

lishment voices is also evident

in the tremendous boom in the

magazines have become bolder

than ever before with their in-

vestigative stories the partial

privatisation of the country's

radio and television channels

has led to a greater diversity of

views suppressed earlier by

tight military and government

tivity continues without inter-

ruption for the next five years

if will become impossible for

the military to take over power

again from any elected civilian

democracy movement has

been the discrediting of the

military, which has tradition-

ally dominated Thai politics in

the name of protecting the na-

tion, religion and the monarch.

administration that took power

temporarily after the May

events and the elected Chuan

government have taken care to

appoint "democratically ori-

ented" military offices in key

pacts the democracy move-

ment has also left behind deep

wounds within sections of the

That people. A civil court in

Bangkok is to take up a peti-

who died or went missing,

tion filed by relatives of those

demanding 23 million baht in

compensation from the key

military figures in power at the

only one side of the issue for

the relatives whose attempts at

filing criminal charges against

former military leaders have

been blocked by a controver-

sial amnesty decree passed by

Monetary compensation is

time of the violence.

Despite these positive im-

Both the Anand Panyarchun

A major legacy of the

Says Dr Kritaya: "If such ac-

media, both print and elec-

came to power.

controls

government.

positions.

heard such talk". She said. "I'm Jewish, so there is that extra fear. Where is all this anger coming from?" The signs are ominous. And if these militias can link up with other terrorist groups, though their agendas are different, on some possible common elements say anti-Semitism - then the

worst may happen In the US itself - whether it has been well-realised or not drugs, guns, racial hatred, devastating onslaught on moral and ethical values, homosexu als. AIDS, broken families, undue emphasis on individual's rights much of which can hardly be distinguished from licence to do whatever an individual wants to without having any regard to its effects on others etc pose a real threat to the society as a whole. Local militias with automatic weapons (collection and use of nerve gas like the Japanese Aum Shirnikyo not to be ruled out), bomb making capabilities, neo-Nazi fanaticism and their liberty to grow, function and operate unhindered may one day become a real threat to the Federal system as such. The

trend appears dangerous, All these call for total rethinking on the part of the US authorities and politicians on domestic and foreign policies. In the foreign policy area, it seems relevant to mention that for getting Jewish vote, political support to Israel's expropriation of Palestinian land in Jerusalem and moving bills in the US Congress for shifting of US embassy from Tel-Aviv to Jerusalem which has so far been resisted by the successive US Presidents including the most conservative President

He is particularly critical of

the way the Chuan coalition

government has survived in

power by even accepting into

its fold political parties that

supported Gen Suchinda dur-

the government, activist

groups are confident about the

future of democratic institu-

tions in the country. The say

the major lesson from the May

1992 events for any would be

dictator is that there will al-

ways be those who resist

Exchange rate: 1\$= 25

S SATYANARAYAN is an

GEMINI NEWS

tyranny whatever the odds.

Despite harsh criticism of

ing the 1992 crisis.

Ronald Regan would not only endanger the Middle East peace process which US itself successfully brokered but may also give ammunition to these militias for more anti-Semitic views and create hatred within the US society.

While legal and strong administrative actions are needed to be taken by the authorities at the domestic front, US politicians, irrespective of their party affiliations and their genuine desire to enter the White House, must exercise due caution in their political pronouncements that can have wide ranging political and foreign policy implications. Oklahoma City bombing should

be a lesson for everyone.

The present vote catching

strategy of some US politicians

may also backfire. All these

may indeed bring the evil ele-

ments together resulting in

more violence within the US

Buchwald's COLUMN



Hail to Thee

VERY spring I choose one graduating class to address. This year was very special because I spoke to one that never was. On Sunday, May 14, 1995, George Washington University was supposed to hold its graduation. Chairs had been set up outdoors on the Ellipse to accommodate 3,000 students and 17,000 guests.

At 9 am that morning it began to rain. Unbelievably, the university officials, having failed to make any alternative plans, called off the graduation.

I was one of the guests. The daughter of a friend of mine. Julie Margulies, was expecting to get her masters degree. Julie's party consisted of her grandmother, mother, father, sister and seven or eight out-of-town friends.

When to everyone's dismay the graduation was called off. we retired to the Four Seasons for a disconsolate brunch. It was there that I was prevailed upon to speak at a graduation that never happened.

"My fellow Americans: This is the greatest day of your life or at least it could have been if someone hadn't rained on your parade. Your administration feels sick about the inconvenience, but it urges you to turn this into an educational experience that you will remember in the years to come.

You are experiencing your first 'life is unfair' trauma, or what people in charge of graduations call an 'act of God.' This means that if you or your relatives and friends who came from all over the globe are upset, you should blame the Lord, not GW, for failing to have a backup plan.

In the academic world, we call a failed graduation tough luck and obviously something that no administration is pleased with. But there's no reason for parents who shelled out \$100,000 to make a big deal of it.

"And one more thing - just because you paid a \$ 50 fee for your cap and gown doesn't mean you're not going to get it back even though your graduation never took place. Originally your school intended to use the \$ 50 fee as a contribution to find out why no administrator thought to have a plan B - despite the fact that the weather experts had forecast rain.

"I wish that I could personally hand each of you your diploma, but I can't because by now almost every graduate and his family is speeding down the highway hardly talking to each other because someone goofed.

"I know that many of you are asking. 'Why me?' As a truly educated person you should be asking, 'why not me?' When thinking back on this day you will always remember that even though it was wet at GW, the rain in Spain stays mainly in the

. "Could this graduation, and the 20,000 people who had hoped to be part of it, have been held in a dry gymnasium or Constitution Hall or the Kennedy Center?

"Yes, it could have, but that would have meant someone needed to think about it. You can't assume that university administrators with Ph.D.s think.

"My fellow students, do not despair because you are out in the cold in your rented caps and gowns. In the years ahead when your children ask you what you did on graduation day, you can honestly say, 'I was canceled.'

I'm pleased to report that although it was a small crowd at the Four Seasons. I received a standing ovation from all the disappointed families in the room.

By arrangement with Los Angeles Times Syndicate and

Indian freelance journalist based in Bangkok. Selecting the Election Seekers

by Kazi Alauddin Ahmed qualifications.

TOTWITHSTANDING the present political turmoil ▲ ▼ over the issue of election under a neutral caretaker government, the contending parties in the arena are busy working on the selection of the potential candidate's as respective party nominees. This has been a regular feature in the past and will continue to remain as such in the future.

Still then, faulty nomination often proved suicidal. Despite the known strength of the party in the constituency, placing of a lesser candidate invariably runs the risk of failure. As a result, the party laments the erroneous decision.

It is not to suggest; however, that a more formidable candidate does not have any risk of defeat. He has it though at a minimum. That unpredictable episode happens when the electorate is divided between more than two contending political parties.

Keeping such a remote possibility in view, a reasonable list of the most potential and widely acceptable candidates can be drawn up. Such exercise will, of course, demand a pragmatic approach to address the realities obtaining in the constituencies. The required pragmatism is never expected to shower from high heavens. Rather, it shall be handy if the

I am consciously driving my regards to the basic point of information. This is the principal area whereform the proposed exercise should start. In fact, correct data-based information has no more effective alternative. In making the right choice of the right candidate as the most suitable party nominee, due and dispassionate care must be taken to make the ultimate judge ment on some pertinent information about the person(s) vying for party nomination. In this, the party bosses will have

to ensure total neutrality. aspirant for party nomination:

Since when he/she has constituency?

discerning eyes can locate it.

These are the essential particulars needed to make the objective evaluation of an

Name age and educational

failure?

been enjoying primary membership of the party? Is he/she ordinarily a resident in the concerned

If not, what is the approximate period in a year that he/she stays in the constituency? What is the nature of

his/her linkage with the party in the constituency? As a member of the Central body As a member of the Local committee

If he/she belongs to the local committee, what position does he/she hold?

What documentary evidence can he/she furnish on the distinguishable contributions that he/she has made over the past several years?

8. His/her specific contributions to expand party membership with statistical data.

Brief resume about his/her present profession and/or source of income.

His/her personal contribution so far to the local fund of the party.

Brief statement on the specific contributions that he/she has made to the socio-economic velopment of his/her constituency.

12. Brief statement about his/her own contributions to education in the community.

13. Any specif contribution that he/she has made to activities related to cooperative ventures in the locality.

14. A clear and specific picture about his/her personal rapport with the local administration even though there is an antiparty bias

15. General views about the family of the nonanation seeker amongst the local

residents. 16. If nominated in the past

but without success, how

would he/she explain the

17. If, as the nominee of the party he/she emerged successful in the past what specific contribution he/she could make to improve the lot of the local people?

What specific programme he/she has to undertake for the welfare of the general public in his/her area if he/she gets elected to Jatiya Sangsad?

Does he/she have any objection if an independent evaluation as to his/her honesty and integrity is conducted before deciding on his/her prayer for

yes I no 20. How would he/she evaluate himself/herself to justify that he/she is the most competent candidate

nomination?

for party nomination? 21. In the event he/she does not get nomination, for the greater interest of the party, shall he/she still be

willing to:work selflessly for the actual nominee:

remain inactive: a contest election as an

independent candidate: support other contes-These are some of the more

important points that will have to be dispassionately addressed to arrive at a reason ably better solution to the problem of selecting the best and most acceptable nominee for a party. It may, however, be borne

in mind that the proposed ex ercise may not be a panacea. The practical variables and diversities being enormous in size and nature there cannot be a full-proof answer to the problem. It will be just an honest endeavour to reach the proximity of a tangible solu tion. The central principle will have to be a consultative decked process included the acceptable judgement A lair and just dispensation is thus envisaged

the parliament absolving al

Brutal murder

Sir, While going through your newspaper of 9th of May, was deeply touched and upset to read about the brutal murder of Mr Jinnah at the hands of a few hijackers just two days before Eid. Imagine what the late Jinnah's son, Dibu, who all along accompanied his father, might have gone through! Imagine what agony and depression the victim's other family members have gone through during Eid! We can only sympathise... but the one who loses really feels the pain." Will Dipu ever forget the gruesome incident? This cruel change in fate will now compel him to lead a revengeful and hateful life.

The authorities have again proved their failure to check even open broad day light murder and immediately put the criminals behind bars. I often think what is the use of having this sort of a police force, which is found to be sloppy in protecting the lives of the citizens? What is the

reason behind this strange at-

Ititude? Are not the public

paying taxes, or are the forces not so trained or efficient? It is felt that providing our hard earned revenue for maintaining such a large force is not justified.

Time and again there have been so many suggestions to help check crimes, out of which the most sensible suggestion perhaps is to set up check posts in every nook and corner of the city or at least at main points and stop suspicious movement through body check. Take drastic measures against those found guilty without fear or favour. Rather surprisingly, no such appropriate steps have ever been taken. Why, and who must we accuse

Murder and hijacking are not unusual these days although certainly unwanted. Therefore, what is preventing the authorities to keep mum about it? Why not then legalise use of arms? This will greatly help the 'innocents' to fight back rather than die like flies, Let one take at least one 'criminal' on.

I might not sound sensible and wise or may seem over-

emotional, but that may not be the case with those who have lost their beloved ones at the hands of some frustrated drug addicts, greedy and mentally sick youths.

'Making Govt Work' Sir, "Analyst" was factual in his interesting column (May 7); but, typically, as a former bureaucrat, he has fallen into his own trap, by suggesting the formation of a 'committee' to look into 'meetings'.

It is hoped he will deal with the flirtations with 'committees' in one of his future columns. Also on the noting system; and the Yes sir! syndrome. Cantonment gossip tells me that curtains are being re-

moved from junior officers' entrance doors, for transparent vision (2-way) in the office. Let us remove the purdah from Eden Buildings (no longer a female college).

Dhaka

A citizen

A retd bureaucrat