Founder-Editor: Late S. M. Ali

Dhaka, Friday, May 26, 1995

For a Flawless Electoral

Election preparations for our sixth parliament began in earnest from yesterday with the starting of the process of voter registration. The new Election Commissioner, in a nationwide address on Wednesday night, laid stress on the preparation of a flawless electoral roll and sought co-operation of all in this effort. We are fully with him when he stresses the need for an authentic voters' list, and goes on to say that without it a fair and acceptable election is not possible. So far so good. But how can the Election Commission ensure that? Well, to start with it has mobilised a work-force of 4,06,760 individuals who will reg-· ister every single voter independently, using separate registration forms to be signed or thumbprinted by individual voters. In the next six days — up to May 31 — 60 million voters are to be registered by the primary enumerators. Then on June 1 supervisors are to visit every single address and verify the authenticity of the information contained in the forms.

These two steps are really the most critical to make a 'flawless' electoral roll. It is well-known that many defects existed in previous voters' lists, which have cast shadow on the election process and the outcome. We lived with it because of our eagerness to get democracy going. But election for the sixth parliament will be different. This election will be much more keenly fought on all counts. Hence the need for an authentic electoral roll cannot be overemphasized. The new CEC will have given our democracy a tremendous shot in the arm if he can ensure the preparation of such a list. This will really get our election process off to a great start. Not to mention such a success will also remove some of the cloud that hangs over his appointment caused by ruling party's insensitivity to opposition demands.

But the EC can perform this gigantic task only if people from all walks of life cooperate in this effort. Normally we could have expected a very constructive role to be played by the major political parties. But given their extreme rivalry, we are doubtful as to how much helpful they can be. This leaves the independent groups, communitybased organisations and the grassroots level leaders to help out with the process. We particularly appeal to educated people in our villages to cooperate with the EC's effort to prepare the "flawless" electoral roll that the CEC has promised us.

Water-logging to Go!

The watery spectacle of city roads after consecutive days' rains recently was enough to convince one that Tk 159-crore being spent on an integrated project is going down the drain. To assuage that fear the Dhaka Water and Sewerage Authority (WASA) has come up with some confronting news. The news is that the problem of water-logging will no longer exist after two or three monsoons. That is when the Dhaka Integrated Flood Protection Project has been completed by June 1997. Already 50 per cent of the project has been completed. Notwithstanding some legal hassles that delay work, the authority hopes everything will be ready by another two years.

For the WASA to inform the citizens of the inconveniences they will be facing for another two years is a nice piece of public relations work. The city-dwellers are often put to great distress without prior information. The WASA initiative — presumably prompted by the recent deluge around the Secretariat and other city areas - in this regard is remarkable. We hope the two years' time it sought to complete will not be further lengthened. People are ready to bear with the authorities if they are timely informed. Can we repose our confidence on WASA's calculations and homework regarding the filed situation?

It should be admitted that the WASA alone cannot take all the responsibilities of the waterlogging problem. A mega city growing without any central plan poses a challenge no service system can meet. For a sewerage authority the task is even harder. Why? The answer is quite simple. Unplanned growth of a city's physical infrastructure - such as through land filling and huge constructions - stand in the way of receding rain water from the roads and streets. So there is a need for close coordination between the Rajdhani Unnayan Kartipahka (RAJUK) and the WASA. Also there must be a central system for monitoring the expansion of the city. Then a total ban on polythene bags which are thrown away anywhere and everywhere and clog the arteries of drains, has to be enforced. Only then the WASA project stands to yield the desirable benefit.

A Popular Premier Passes away

Former British Prime Minister Harold Wilson is no more. His passing away at the age of 79 is not quite premature. Still his departure will be deeply felt by many perhaps across the globe and certainly in Britain. A two-time premier, Wilson was the last socialist or Labour party candidate to have made it to the 10 Downing Street. He has the distinction of winning more general elections four out of five — than any other this century.

More importantly, he brought about a discernible change in the style of premiership. In a sharp contrast with his predecessor Sir Alec Doglas-Home's lack of touch with people, he soon earned among them a popularity rare and unimaginable at the time. He was also the first British premier to have realized the importance of media in personal promotion.

Both his terms as premier saw immense changes in domestic and international politics. But the most outstanding are the legalisation of abortion and the recognition of equality of sexes. On the international front he refused to help America on the Vietnam issue but did not condemn it for its aggression. So there are some political moves taken by him that look quite paradoxical. The fact that he left the office at the age of 60 is still a mystery. Whatever it is, he knew exactly when to step down. That is no mean a quality. Not everyone can have such an acute sense of propriety. Wilson's stature is only enhanced by this voluntary decision to relinquish.

HE government is From Rao to Rao: A Failure barking up the wrong tree in Kashmir. For some time it has been doing so

because of lack of policy. The By putting the blame on others, or dubbing them as 'enemies within', the Congress party cannot problem is the alienation of absolve itself of the responsibility of making a mess in Kashmir. Kashmiris, which has only

about infiltrators from Pak-

Till today New Delhi has not realised its mistakes. The The fact is that somewhere burnt site of Charar Sharif was along the line the link between first handed over to the army New Delhi and ordinary What message was sought to be Kashmiris has been severely conveyed? It is not the iron strained. The policy should fist that is needed, but an efhave been a political strategy fort to understand and heal the how to retrieve them. But instead of that the administrahurt the Kashmiris have carried for years. tion, which has failed to pro-A person like General Krvide even the basic amenities ishna Rao was never the an

deepened with the destruction

Governor Rao's assessment

is that a Low Intensity Conflict

(LIC) is raging in Kashmir. And

it can be tackled in the same

way as he handled the situation

in Nagaland. (Insurgency has

broken out again in Nagaland).

With no contact with people,

Rao sits in his palatial bunga-

low pouring over the map of

Kashmir as if he is giving

shape to a military strategy.

And when it comes to the

jargon is that the Kashmir sit-

uation is the result of a proxy

war between India and Pak-

istan. No doubt, Islamabad is

arming and training militants,

as well as instigating Afghans

and those Kashmiris it con-

trols to cross into the valley.

But these people could not

have found any response if

New Delhi had not lost faith

with the Kashmiris. In 1965 it

The Government of India's

field, he miserably fails.

of the Charar-e-Sharif shrine.

has relied on the indiscrimi swer. His misdeeds in Naga nate use of force. land are well-known. To ex The manner in which the pect that he had changed was government handled the ear at best Prime Minister lier crisis at Hazratbal shrine Narasimha Rao's indulgence underlines the point that force for a Telugu brother. All politiis not the answer. Human cal parties in Jammu and right's activists were brought Kashmir state, including into the picture at that time Congress, have demanded his and they were able to persuade replacement at one time or JKLF leader Yasin Malik to another But the Prime Minisbreak his fast unto death. Govter has continued with him ernor Rao was vehemently opapparently because he too beposed to the settlement and lieves that force is the only way tried his best to sabotage it. to deal with the Kashmiris.

But Prime Minister Rao overruled him and ordered the redeployment of security lorces, which should not have been there in the first in stance, so that the shrine was accessible unhindered to pilgrims. Governor Rao's warning that the Hazratbal shrine would become a den of militants has been proved wrong and the shrine has returned to

its age-old glory. When it came to Charar Sharif, Prime Minister Rao apparently followed the advice of the hawkish Governor Rao, who made it a prestige issue. Some bureaucrats in Srinagar and Delhi are of the same bent of mind. The entire handling was wrong. For six months militants were allowed to have a free run. Three months later the security forces were put at a distance of one and a half kilometres to ensure that no weapons would be carried into the shrine. Obviously, this was

or the smuggling in of arms.

The result is known to all. The government depended completely on force. No human rights activist was contacted. Even Yasin Malik and another popular young Kashmiri leader. Shabir Shah, as well as veteran Kashmiri leader Abdul Ghani Lone, were stopped from going to the shrine and contacting militants to find a way-out.

Who burnt the Charar Sharif is not so relevant as is the ability of militants to be a focus of attention. Yesterday they were

fore the middle of July. It will be quite a spectacle. Not even one per cent of the electorate in the valley is expected to participate. Aviation Minister Ghulam Nabi Azad is said to have cautioned the Prime Minister that the polls might turn out to be a referendum against India and the prevailing impression that none in the valley is on India's side may be confirmed. The Border Security Force chief, whose men bear the brunt in the op-

BETWEEN THE LINES

Kuldip Nayar writes from New Delhi

at Hazratbal shrine, today they are at Charar Sharif and to morrow they may be at some other shrine. The government's responsibility is to seek the root cause of militancy And we come back to the alienation of people. At least, a Supreme Court judge should have been appointed straightaway to hold an inquiry to find out who set fire to the shrine. Whatever the propaganda, the country must know the truth.

Kashmir is back to square one. Whatever little New Delhi had gained - people were get ting tired of the gun culture has been frittered away. Once again there are demonstrations and instances of defiance even in the face of teargas and lathi charges. Muslim fundamentalists are exploiting the situation; they have demolished six Hindu temples and set fire to some 20 vacant houses of Kashmiri Pandits. Even otherwise, they are polluting the atmosphere.

What is surprising is that the government insists on vised against the elections. No doubt, periodical elections are the only way to know the people's attitude towards their rulers. But they are only a means to an end. The end is man's sovereignty. We talk of the good of Kashmir. Is this something apart and transcending the good of the individuals composing it? If the Kashmiris are ignored or sacriliced for what is considered the good of India, is that the right objective to have? The touchstone should be how any

Even if the government has to have elections, it must propare the ground for them. That means initiating a political process that will culminate with the polls. One important ingredient is transparency so that the Kashmiris are seen to be determining their own destiny without any pressure from the state, militants or the peo-

political process enables the

individual to fulfil his aspira-

It would have given

intellectual people and I can-

to any kind of terrorist act.

not imagine them being linked

"Some of the lawyers I met,

Police in Colombo say the

from Japan, seemed to be very

respectable professionals," she

285-member local sect is gov-

erned by a 16-member board

headed by Rev Punna Thera, a

When a group of journalists

prominent Buddhist scholar-

visited the ashram, the Rev

Punna Thera was calmly dis-

tributing bags of rice to the lay

employees and parcels of

clothes to 30 children of the

employees to celebrate the

Sinhala and Tamil New Years

monk.

credibility to what the government faced on the fateful night when Charar Sharif was demolished if the media had been given free access. The reason why Operation Black Thunder went down well in Punjab was that the flushing out of militants was done in the full glare of TV cameras, photographers and other press representatives. The government conducted a press party to the Charar Sharif site, but did not allow erations, has reportedly adjournalists to go on their own. The request by human rights organisations to visit the site was rejected.

The debate in parliament. where Prime Minister Rao was a glum spectator, should have come to grips with the guts of the Kashmir problem. The trouble did not start in 1990 when Farooq Abdullah resigned (he regrets that he should not have taken former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi's advice and quitted because that aggravated the situation). It is a series of acts of omission and commission since 1953. when Sheikh Abdullah was arrested, which has led to the

the responsibility of making a mess in Kashmir, None, not even Congressmen, know what is the government's policy beyond sending more troops to Kashmir and extending newer repressive laws. One minister complained to me on the debate in parliament that there was no briefing on Kashmir and that he did not know what he was supposed to say. During the debate, much was made about the disappearance of Mast Gul, the Afghan who reportedly masterminded

present situation.

By putting the blame on

others, or dubbing them as

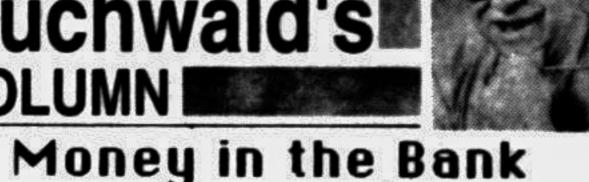
'enemies within', the Congress

party cannot absolve itself of

the Charar Sharif incident. Many other militants also disappeared. The security forces could not act on their own because the entire operation was conducted on the instructions of Raj Bhavan, which is said to be in constant touch with the Prime Minister's office in New

sentially, the Kashmir policy is between two Raos, the state governor and the Prime Minister. Whatever that is, it has failed. Not only that, it has given India a bad name. Someone has to be held accountable. At least one of the Raos will have to be sacrificed to atone partially for the mistakes in Kashmir. It is obvious who that Rao should be.

Buchwald's COLUMNI



I keep hearing from the budget cutters of both parties that it we don't balance the budget, there will be no money left for our children and grandchildren.

On paper this is a telling argument, but then I wonder if making the sacrifice will be appreciated. Will our offspring say as much as "thank you" for what we have done for them?

This thought often comes to me when I look around at the generation we raised - the so-called "baby boomers" who are now worried that there won't be anything left in the Social Security system when they become eligible.

People of my post-World War II generation were very concerned about the welfare of our children - so much so that whatever they asked for, we gave it.

It didn't take long for them to realize that they were on to a good thing, and the more we gave, the more they took for granted. The reason it hurt was that none of them felt obligated to thank us. Most of them had never heard the word

At some point - it might have been on the Fourth of July in 1970 - the people of my generation said. "We have been doing all this for the next generation, and they only spit in our eye. Let's spend a few bucks on ourselves."

Well, we started doing it in style. At first we used up the surplus, then we began to borrow money wherever we could get it. We hit a trillion dollar debt in no time before some

spoilsport economists complained that/we were leaving a legacy of enormous debt. When one kid challenged me on the subject I told him, "It was our money, and we could do anything we wanted with it."

So here we are. We have been told that we must go back to our parsimonious ways, cut the pork and face a reality check. I told my friend Kevin Hennessey. "They tell us we have to stop spending the government's money, especially for Medicare and unwed mothers."

Kevin said, "What about farm subsidies? They're cutting those too.

"No one is touching farm subsidies," I assured Kevin.

"What about tax cuts?" "The Republicans say that you can have a tax cut."

but it will be the last time we do it.

"What about school prayer?"

"We have to have that to balance the budget." Hennessey said. "That does it. I'm going to take a nap." Okay, so our generation will sacrifice Medicare to make up the trillion. We have every intention of balancing the budget -

By arrangement with Los Angeles Times Syndicate and

ple across the border. was the Kashmiri shepherds who reported 'to the army holding assembly elections beno way either to stall militants Indignant Monks Deny Link with Tokyo Gas Attack

Vilma Wimaladasa writes from Colombo

While attention in Sri Lanka is focused on the flare-up in the civil war, police are also keeping an eye on a Buddhist offshoot of the sect which the Japanese authorities have been trying to link with a deadly nerve gas attack in Tokyo. The Sri Lankan group is indignant.

HE Sri Lankan authorities are keeping a close watch on the Aum Sacca Sangha Association: local branch of the secretive Japanese sect which Tokyo police suspect is linked to a nerve gas attack in a Tokyo subway in March.

After the death of 11 people in the attack and injuries to almost 5,000 commuters, police raided the offices of Aum Shinri Kyo ("Searching for the truth") in Japan and questioned its members.

No charges have been made against the Japanese group. which has denied any involvement, and no evidence linking the Sri Lankan group to the gas attack has been found. The Association's lawyer. Manel Weerasooriya, stated that the "Aum Sacca Sangha Association had no links whatsoever with any illegal activities, let alone violent action, such as those reported in Tokyo."

Nevertheless, police have been making regular checks on the organisation and the Japanese embassy says it has been monitoring the situation. Speculation and rumour have been rife, including reports by local villagers that the head of the organisation here, the Reverend Punna Thera, left Sri Lanka the day after the nerve gas attack in Tokyo.

Weerasooriya insists that the Rev Punna had gone to open another branch in the Himalayan kingdom of Bhutan and that his visit had been planned weeks before. There are other branches in New York, Moscow, Bonn and

Vladivostok. Punna Thera, a Japanese monk, is annoyed by the rumours: "All the accusations against our sect in Japan are false. This is a CIA (US Central Intelligence Agency) plot to destroy our spiritual move-

The group was established in Sri Lanka in 1993, on part of a



Met the Prime Minister Cult leader Shoko Asahara

48-acre site purchased three years ago by Aum Shinri Kyo amidst the lush vegetation of Ruhuna in the southern Galle district.

The original aim was to establish a noodle factory but later an ashram (hermitage) was set up. A police spokesman says previous efforts to ordain young people in the area were resisted by villagers learing the spread of an alien

Since its establishment here, it has donated Rs 100 million to various projects. It plans to expand its community services programme in Sri Lanka, open a radio station in Baddeggia in the south, and set up a university for religious studies and an industrial estate

in the Galle district. The Aum Shinri Kyo sect. which has its roots in the oc-

cult and predicts that the world will end in 1997, has had contacts with prominent Buddhist priests and politicians in Sri Lanka.

During his visit to Sri Lanka in 1992 the now fugitive leader of the Tokyo sect, 40year-old Master Shoko Asahara a former acupuncturist known to his followers as "His holiness the Master" - met the then Prime Minister. D B Wijetunga.

Weerasooriya says she has personally met Master Asahara as well as other sect leaders. including the head of the Moscow branch, Ven Homidiru Joyo, who is currently acting as spokesman for the Master.

Though much of the international publicity about the sect has focused on its eccentricities. Weerasooriya says "they are a highly educated and

ment of atomic bomb then all

the blame should go on the

shoulder of Israel and not Iran

Martyrdom of thousands of in-

Colombo-based freelance jour-OPINION

VILMA WIMALADASA is a

- GEMINI NEWS

T&T and E-Mail Johny Brakkee not know what it is talking

Customers lines are cut off

blamed for not paying the bills.

but T&T's administration itself

as it is well known that bills

are not received at all or re-

ceived months later. The re-

sults are obvious, T&T just

whether I was interested in

cheap international calls. I, of

course, was but after investi-

gating how this would be pos-

sible, I found out that they

have devised a very easy way:

Just pay somebody Taka 1000

a month, and some of your in-

ternational calls will be di

rected to somebody else's bill!

An easy solution but a very

nasty case of fraud. T&T prob-

ably seems not at all worried as

We also have to take into

consideration that Bangladesh

is a member of the Interna-

tional Telecommunication

Union (ITU) in Geneva. It is

surprising that especially in

the telecommunications, rules

and recommendations of the

Bangladesh. This is also true

for the wireless radio com-

munications in Bangladesh.

Rules and laws in these re-

gards need a thorough revi-

sion, but T&T seems yet to

into the details, and it is also

not the intention here. I just

want to remind that what T&T

is planning regarding E-Mail. it

It will be far too much going

notice the need of it.

tions industry

ITU are not followed

this practice is still going on.

I personally once was asked

shuts off your lines!

I read with great interest a report under the heading "T&T plan to levy, regulate E-Mail providers protested in The Daily Star of Sunday May 21. 1995 and want to add therewith some comments from my side as a telecommunication engineer. In the 25 years of my career as a telecommunication engineer, I must admit that. I never have read or heard such a great nonsense! But thanks to The Daily Star for publishing the report, as this shows how unprofessional the T&T is. T&T once again does not know what it is talking about and I can assure everybody that this is not only the case with the E-Mail matters.

If we look at the entire T&T-related works, we only can conclude that it's all a mess. Even the basic communication system - such as Telephone and Fax etc - is still not running smoothly and will probably take years to develop. The reason is perhaps not the resources but the management itself.

National and international lines are still unreliable and resulting in ineffective work ing conditions, as well as an expensive issue, e.g. tests on a 24-hour basis of sending faxes abroad shows that 60 per cent of the faxes have to be re-sent up to 3 to 4 times! (Customers are even though billed for these trials).

Most of the days also telephone calls seem to be impossible or the customers have to re-dial up to 5/6 times, before through.

a connection finally gets · Billing is not accurate and worse is that customers are billed for telephone calls they never made. This is happening

repeatedly.

suggestions may be of some by T&T because, as it says, the bills are not paid. T&T seems help to T&T. not, or does not want to understand that'it is not the customers who should be

Before starting (or even talking about) a new technical issue such as E-Mail, T&T should first investigate all possibilities and have technical expertise.

about. I think the following

Technical advise and consultancy are the most important things. These might be expensive but in the long run fruitful and thus cheaper. Using the x.25 and x.400 system will not ease access to Internet and it will far more expensive to change it again.

T&T has no right to tell a user what kind of information he wants to send via his paid telephone line. Customers pay fees for their telephone lines and telephone conversations and in fact this is not cheap in Bangladesh: After reading the Star report I get the impression that T&T now also wants to tell its customers what to send through their paid lines! It is useless to say that this is ridiculous and cannot be found elsewhere in the world.

It is obvious, T&T is sniffing money, yes big money. But ex perts can tell them that they are wrong, and they will not be able to render a good service to their customers.

And that's what it is all about in the world of telecommunications: Don't render any service if you can't afford a good reliable one

T&T seems not to care about all this and proved it already for many years as the services it is providing are still below standard and in fact very

it is true, it will be a catastro Maybe T&I in a migh histo wants to be different than phe for the data communica T&Ts in other countries of the Here again T&T really does world

Political crisis

Sir, Reference Mr M A Laskar's comment (letter, May 7) on the Prime Minister's stepping down 30 days before elections; the PM has the right to resign at any time.

The Opposition do not want the elections to be held with Khaleda Zia as PM, but the Opposition want her to step down 60 days before. So, what is the issue?

Someone may kindly clarify. A voter

Dhaka-1207

Unfair sanction

great regret about US Presi-

Sir, We have learnt with

dent Bill Clinton's decision and announcement to impose a trade and investment embargo on Iran when he was attending the World Jewish Council. The claim by US President that Iran had intention to manufacture atomic bomb or accusing her of supporting terrorism are not something new. These types of claims have both political and destructive intentions.

I wonder that how it is possible that a country like US, its government and president, be so influenced and manipulated by israel whose enmity towards Islam is doubtless.

If it is a matter of accusa tion of supporting interna tional terrorism and develop-

nocent people in occupied Palestine and unwillingness to sign the Non-proliferation Treaty are a few examples and evidences that no one can deny or ignore. It is a matter of great concern that the United State has not yet taken any effective

measure to stop the barbaric act of Israel in occupied Palestine and south Lebanon, and, instead, it is imposing unfair sanction on Iran!

Seyed Rahim Ashnakhah BUET, Dhaka