

DMCH Needs Treatment

Some doctors were assaulted by the owner of an unauthorized pharmacy located within the premises of Dhaka Medical College. Resultingly, innocent patients will now have to pay by going untreated and unattended to as the doctors are on strike. We unambiguously and forcefully denounce the doctors' action. They have brought shame on the nobility of their profession, at the core of which lies their legal, moral, professional obligation to their patients. Patients should come first. Not their ego.

Having expressed our views on the doctors' action, we would like to ask of the DMCH administration as to how such a situation could at all exist in which a doctor came under assault? What happened at DMCH did not develop over night. This newspaper has reported many times that through an unholy alliance with a section of the staff, female attendants and sweepers, criminal elements have literally taken control of our biggest hospital. It is said that if one wants admission in the hospital and a semblance of treatment, it is far safer to go through the 'other' route than the official one. Following the latter one will get neither a bed nor any service.

While condemning the doctors' strike, we decry with a far greater vehemence the administration that allowed these criminal elements to 'take over' the hospital, and the health ministry that did not do anything to prevent it. We have a habit of ignoring breach of discipline and violation of rules till they result in a type of outburst as the one we are seeing now at the DMCH. We demand an immediate inquiry by the police and the health ministry into the assault on the doctors together with the cleaning up of the hospital once and for all. We think a special inquiry committee should be formed to look into the totality of operation of the DMCH, especially what happens to the medicines that are supplied by the government whose use is supposed to be free of charge. Unless immediate stern action is taken to establish the authority of the administration over these criminal elements, we cannot expect the conditions of the hospital to improve. Will the minister himself take it up?

In the meantime, we request the doctors not to punish the patients which their strike actually amounts to.

Rokeya's Dreams

The Prime Minister came on the TV screen on Sunday evening, courtesy Begum Rokeya. For the first time perhaps, she was requested to be giving the clapstick to a movie and she could not help but oblige the makers because it was to portray Begum Rokeya and her strivings. That and the presentation ceremony for the gold winners at SAF Games offered very good occasions for the TV to feature our PM. Khaleda Zia took the second occasion to assure the nation that government had taken 'massive programmes to enable the country to brighten its position in the arena of world sports'.

Begum Rokeya's dream was now becoming a reality in Bangladesh, she said. On the face of it, this is rather a tall claim. For sure, Rokeya envisioned a just society — just specially genderwise. Is it a just society that we now have? Or is it moving towards one, at all? And how do we stand in terms of gender exploitation and inequality? In the land of Yasmin Akther or police rape and murder and Moshaera Diba, the latest in a chain of kidnap and murder or a very widespread record of wife-bashing, that question is either naive or cruel or both.

Begum Rokeya was no Mother Teresa. She had very strong opinions and her harshest comments were on the way of the bigoted — segregating and cloistering women to a life of slavery. While enrolment figures for woman children at the primaries grow, society at large has a long way to go to rid itself of the ordained inferiority of woman.

One needn't go far to know about Rokeya's dreams. Sultana's Dream — all that is in it — is the key to Rokeya's. If one knew the extent of Rokeya's feminism, one would rather not talk of her dreams without introspecting about the degree to which these have been translated into reality in our society. We should content ourselves with the truths of her position and of all her strivings. These can work as a beacon light for our nation in its dire need to get out of our present social and intellectual morass.

Crime on Ivory Tower

A committee set up by the Dhaka University Syndicate has recommended penal action against two teachers of the Economics Department. The facts of the crime committed by them, specially Mr Mahbubul Alam, and as arrived at by the committee, offer a horrendous read. The nature of the crime impresses one as coming from the basest part of a morally decrepit society. Unfortunately for this nation, it has come from the uppermost perch of the citadel of our knowledge and moral being.

The teacher about whose misdemeanour the committee is convinced, used to set questions for a compulsory paper at the master's level — and himself evaluate the answers at the in-course exams. He allegedly manipulated marks in accordance with the amount of money he received from the students. This could not be under the wraps indefinitely; and so it came out, but then only belatedly.

The *modus operandi* he employed seems inconceivable.

Once the trust in our teachers has been dented as deeply as that, there is no knowing the depths to which credibility of the highest seat of learning can plummet. Exemplary actions need to be taken against offences of this nature.

A S I had walked into my room of Hotel Corinav adjacent to Geneva Rail Station around midnight of January 15/16, '91, my confidential assistant in Rome called me. I had just returned from Berne, the Swiss capital, by train, after offering New Year's greetings to the Swiss president. On the 16th forenoon, I was booked to fly to Tunis, where a meeting had been fixed with president Ben Ali; I was also scheduled to call on Chairman Yasser Arafat.

The US-led coalition of over 30 countries formed under the Security Council resolution, had got into action to vacate Iraqi occupation of Kuwait, member of the Arab League, Islamic Conference, Non-aligned Movement and the United Nations. Iraq violated Article 1 and Article 2 of the Charter by crossing the internationally recognized border of a sovereign Muslim Arab country. Kuwait appealed for support to the UN under Article 51 of the Charter which states, "Nothing in the present charter shall impair the inherent right of individual or collective self defense if an armed attack occurs against a Member of the United Nations."

The coalition, including Bangladesh, did not take long to dislodge the Iraqi troops

from Kuwait, and decimated a significant portion of the Iraqi military wherewithal. The much-feared war of mass-destruction did not take place after all, excepting the launching of a few wayward Scud missiles by the Iraqi troops to Israel. If the Scuds made any impact on Israel and other concerned world Chancelleries, it was the realization, particularly by Israel, including the hawks, that a permanent and comprehensive peace settlement with the Arab World was the only guarantee for the long-term security of Israel and the termination of Jewish diaspora that started with their departure from the plain of Shinar under their leader Abraham. Perhaps quite unwittingly president Saddam Hossain facilitated a Middle East peace settlement, which is still in its process, thus allowing the Palestinians to return to the Biblical land of Judea and Sumeria. We are too close to history to make any final judgement, of course.

Today at the time of the fifth anniversary of the Gulf

War, many in the land of the Tigris and Euphrates would hasten back to the swash-buckling Lawrence of Arabia, for the support he extended to the Arab revolt against the Turks! Between August 1921 when Emir Feisal, a member of the Hashemite dynasty, was proclaimed king

UN rating, Iraq was occupying a very high place in the table of development — in health, education, calorie intake and over all life expectancy of the people of Iraq. Iraq was cited as a model of development in the Arab world. Iraq's active support and assistance, moral

leaders and fled the country. President Bush believes that it was a mistake not to have done more. His then national security adviser General Scowcroft disagrees: he suggests that the policy was correct and if the alliance had gone up to Baghdad they would, perhaps, still be sitting in an unfriendly terrain, propping up a puppet government! In addition, other Arab countries like Egypt and Syria would have broken away from the allied phalanx.

Scowcroft is perhaps more to the point — the secret Oslo meetings followed by the Madrid summit and the 13th September, 1993 handshake in the foreground of the White House between chairman Arafat and premier Robin seem to be the direct result of the coalition strategy.

President Saddam, a hero in his land, and a riddle to Mr. Ekeus and company, must have had a vision of his own. But the vision is perhaps haunted, not because of his deeds though, by the bad memories of young king Feisal and his grandmother.

holding the Holy Quran in her hand, on that fateful dawn of 1958. General Kasem's revolutionary zeal soon degenerated into a national malaise which needed another revolution to put the state in order. The fertile Crescent once ruled by Assurbanipal beacons every leader, as it were, to an evanescent thought of attaining indestructibility in this world and immortality in the world thereafter.

The great epic hero Gilgamesh, the legendary king of Uruk, who sent expeditions in the third millennium before Christ, was no exception either. While in search of the secret of eternal life, grief-stricken Gilgamesh came to realize that immortality was a special gift given to gods only. Gilgamesh was sad but understanding — no human being could escape old age and death. "Death is the privilege of human nature, and life without it were not worth taking."

The heirs to the great cradle of civilization would do well to remember the last signs of Gilgamesh: The toiling people on the fertile valley of Tigris and Euphrates would be eager to reminisce with sobering pause George Santayana "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it..."

The Last Sigh of Gilgamesh

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ENCHIRIDION

Walim Rahman



by the British, to the rise to power of president Saddam Hossain in the seventies, the land of ancient Babylonia and Assyria which developed one of the earliest civilizations, with its capital in Uruk, made significant socio-economic progress. Iraq was commended by the UN, and even by the other Arab countries as having done an excellent job in utilising the petrodollars in improving the quality of life of its people. In any

and material, together with president Anwar-el-Sadat of Egypt, to our glorious War of Liberation, was perhaps a high water mark in the foreign policy projection of Iraq in modern times.

Defying all prognostications, President Saddam still remains in power, albeit much weakened and diminished. His two sons-in-law apparently revolted against the Iraqi

Congress Prepares for Battle without its Halo

D K Joshi writes from New Delhi

The impending razzmatazz of one of the greatest shows on Earth — an Indian election — is tempered this time around by an air of uncertainty and unease. Gemini News Service reports on the coming struggle.

THE world's biggest democracy is preparing itself for the possibility of a coalition government after this year's general election.

And for the first time since independence, no member of the Nehru-Gandhi dynasty is in the race for the highest post — assuming that Sonia, widow of assassinated Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, holds back from the hurly-burly of the hustings.

The enigmatic Sonia continues to breathe down the neck of Prime Minister Narasimha Rao, but has consistently refused to accept a direct political role despite the pleas of Congress Party activists, who believe her name would automatically harvest millions of votes.

She carries the halo of the dynasty started by the country's first Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, and passed on to his daughter, Indira, and her son Rajiv.

She unofficially presides over an extensive social and cultural network which reaches out to the opinion-making elite. But the mild-mannered Rao — once widely mocked for his apparent torpor — has quietly proved to be his own man and manoeuvred around her.

Top-level advertising and marketing experts have taken on the daunting job of overcoming his lack of charisma and building up his profile, helped by use of the government-owned television network, Doordarshan.

Rao has presided over a

dramatic opening up of the previously protected economy, which has brought benefits to the extensive middle-class, generally estimated to number between 250 million and 300 million.

But the benefits have not trickled down to the even greater numbers of poor, some of whom are even worse off than before the beginning of the reform programme.

Rao has also lost the support of many of the country's huge Muslim minority, because of his failure to protect

Giving convincing assurances about the safety of the

Babri Mosque in Ayodhya from Hindu extremists. Muslims form an important bloc — 12 per cent of the electorate of 550 million, and 25 per cent of voters in 46 constituencies for the 543-member Lok Sabha (Lower House).

Rao's strategy depends on convincing people that economic reforms are worthwhile and are best delivered by Congress, and that only Congress can deliver political stability.

Another warning has been sounded by the World Bank, which, though pleased with Singh's programme, has pointed to the dangers of

economic reforms is complicated by political demands on the architect of economic liberalisation, Finance Minister Dr Manmohan Singh. Rao has promised to put a "human face" on the economic programme, and Singh has been forced to allow the budget deficit to exceed 6.5 per cent of gross domestic product, against the promised 5.5 per cent.

Even the conglomeration of quarrelling left-wing parties — which, with the boastful but faction-ridden Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), form Congress' main opposition — accept the efficacy of the reforms, although they oppose the entry of foreign-owned transnationals in the consumer sector.

The National Front-Left Front combine is roping in as many regional parties as possible in an attempt to make itself a viable alternative to Congress, and has notched up some notable successes.

In Uttar Pradesh, for example, it has lined up with former Chief Minister Mulayam Singh Yadav, widely seen as the only person capable of halting the BJP bandwagon in the state.

The BJP is also hoping that its stand against transnationals in the name of *savadeshi* (nationalism) will carry votes together with its campaign against corruption in high places.

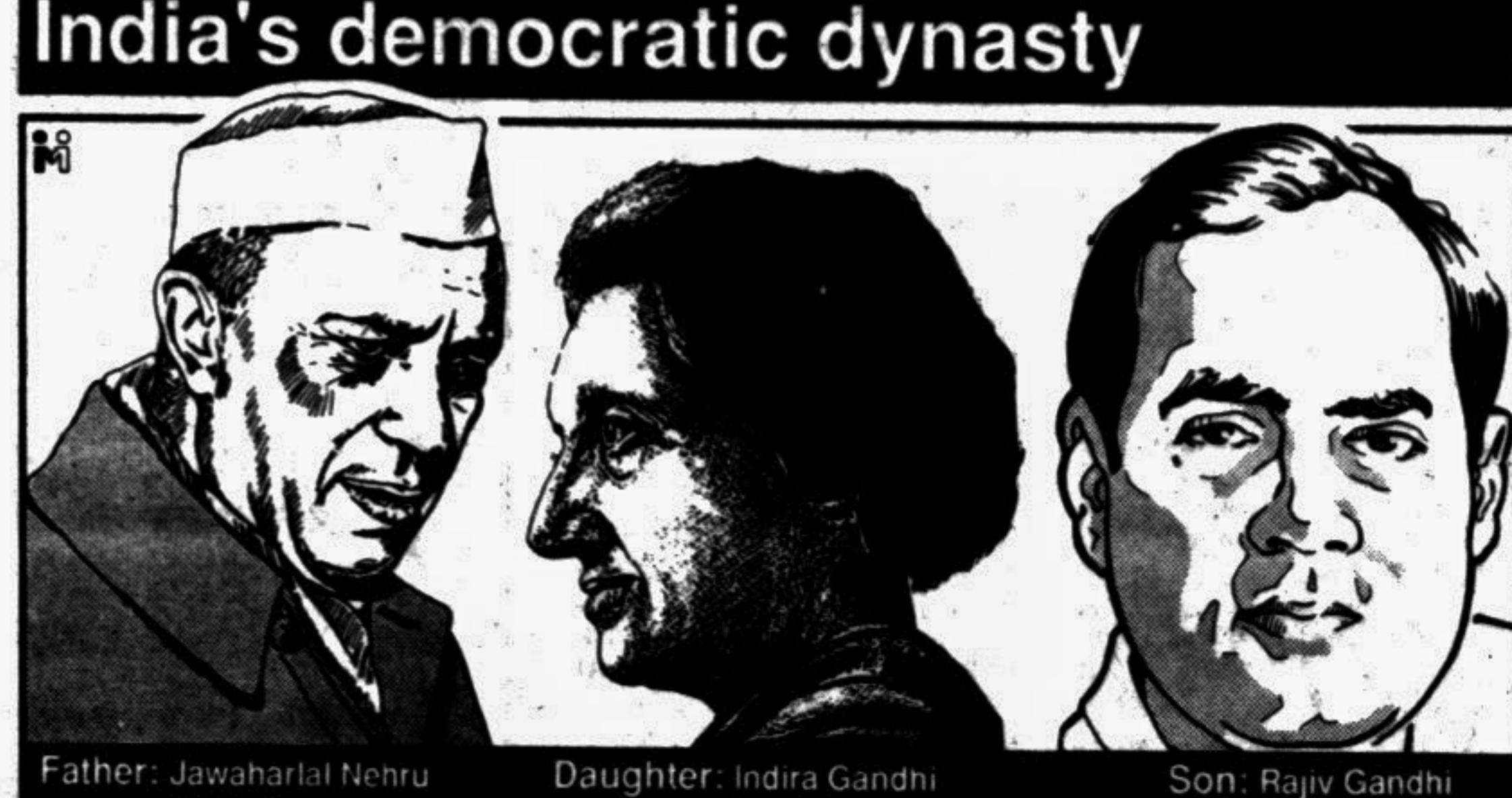
It is searching for a slogan with which to inspire voters, since its religious appeal has lost much of its popular shine. Nevertheless, hardcore leaders of the party, including party president Lal Krishna Advani, still believe *Hindutva* — Hindu religious appeal, with its anti-Muslim undertones — will be as electorally effective as its chariot march to Ayodhya in 1991.

The opposition showed its determination to make use of corruption in the just-concluded winter session of Parliament when it managed to stop all business in both Houses as part of its demand for a probe into telecommunications contracts.

Rao showed his managerial skills by using the period of the stalled session quietly to make contact with his party's MPs as part of his assessment of their parliamentary performances and their constituency clout. He has let it be known that not all sitting members will be fielded in the forthcoming battle.

Rao's Congress has lost power in most of the states in which legislative assembly elections have been held during his five-year term, and the party is beset by rivalry and divisions. The party clearly is not going to sweep the board in 1996, but nor are its rivals. A minority government, or a coalition, looks likely.

D K JOSHI is a freelance journalist



Father: Jawaharlal Nehru (1947-64)
Daughter: Indira Gandhi (1965-77; 1979-84)
Son: Rajiv Gandhi (1984-89)

To the Editor...

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

Postpone the general elections

Sir, In a multi-party democracy, spontaneous participation in the general elections of all concerned including the ruling and opposition parties and the right of the people to cast their votes without fear or favour is imperative.

Have not the two years of our political crisis and tension in the country and the untold sufferings of the people taught us a lesson?

Time and again the opposition Awami League, Jamaat-e-Islami, Jatiya Party and others have vowed that they would boycott and resist the general elections if not held under a caretaker government.

The tenure of the ruling BNP ends on April 05, 1996. Even if the BNP wins the forthcoming February 15, 1996 general elections, would it be able to resolve the deteriorating political crisis in the country and mitigate the sufferings of the country?

In the face of opposition of the mainstream opposition parties, has not the ruling BNP met with a fiasco to hold by-elections to 145 vacant seats of the members of the Parliament? Has not the original date for general elections shifted? Has not the BNP failed to face and contain the opposition parties' frequent hartsals, strikes, rail-road-waterway blockade, street agitations at the cost of untold sufferings of the people?

Has not the BNP government issued only 22 lakh Identity Cards so far instead of a total of 5 crore and 60 lakh to all voters?

Under such complex and formidable circumstances, is

have no option but to go for a caretaker government to hold a free, fair, acceptable and peaceful general election to overcome the political crisis in the country.

Let us therefore postpone the general elections from February 15, 1996; form a caretaker government either under Chief Justice of Bangladesh, Mr. M. Afzal or former Acting President Mr. Shahabuddin Ahmed; issue Identity Cards to all voters; fix a new date for holding the general elections in a congenial, friendly and peaceful atmosphere; make post facto amendment in our Constitution and save our democracy and the country from disaster.

Where there is a will there is a way, and all is well that

ends well.

O H Kabir
Dhaka

The brutal murder of a university teacher

Sir, On December 26, 1995, I came to know that our favorite teacher Nuban Ahmed is no longer alive. He was stabbed by some muggers on December 17, and after experiencing unnatural suffering for eight days, breathed his last on December 26. He was the liveliest, benevolent and cooperative teacher of our department I have ever seen. May his soul rest in peace.

But matter does not end here. We are constantly haunted by a number of questions: who killed him? why should they kill him? why the ruthless killer has not yet been arrested? The murder of a teacher — a nation-builder and pioneer of the society — mirrors the utmost deterioration of the law and order situation in the country. Once again, we feel ashamed that we cannot give certainty to the lives of our intellectuals.

This horrified murder shakes the conscience of the whole society. We demand exemplary punishment of

those murderers. Time has come to protest against those evils. We can also be victim of such terrorist activities at any time. So, it's may frank and sincere invitation to all the students, teachers of the DU and eventually the people of all strata to come forward and help success to eradicate this social evil. And we want to let the 'murderers' know that evil can't ever win.

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arms were distributed (by name) and how many were recovered after the fall of Ershad.

We believe all those arms

are currently being used in murders and in other criminal activities like dacoity, extortion etc., for which all the political topnotches may be tried in the court of law.

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and squeeze themselves into a rejected circle. The opposition will take the advantage and stick to the streets and the streets will lead the opposition to their goal. For, my experience says, "The House has a little patience to endure a one-party parliament."

Razzak Raza
SM Hall

University of Dhaka.

A prison of power