The Baily Star

Founder-Editor: Late S. M. Ali

Dhaka, Saturday, February 24, 1996

Leave Economy Alone

From today starts the so-called non-cooperation movement of the opposition. If so, then what have we had for the last three years. Obviously it is the same old hartal, called under a new name. Does it mean that opposition is finally getting the message that people are getting sick and tired of hartals, so a new word is being used?

Whatever the name, it is clear that all sorts of economic activities will once again be hard hit. We have already lost several days of production in the last two months. From today we face three more days of work stoppage. How much more battering can our fragile economy take? The opposition must consider this question now if it is not to risk serious loss of public support.

Economic reality imposes a strong compulsion on the opposition to remodel its political programmes keeping the economy free. Refusal to deal with the government may have a logic in the political context. But the economy does not belong to the government. It belongs to the people, and as such must be kept free of the political tussle. During the last three years political disturbance and strikes have cost us enormously. Hartals during the visit of trade delegations from possible investing countries - Japan and UK to name two - and also during the Euromoney conference have damaged us immensely. It was the not the government's image that was damaged, but that of the country's. Foreign buyers of our garments, leather and other export products have started to move away. By all accounts the signal is alarming, and the opposition must pay heed to this. Similarly the ruling party and the government cannot afford the policy of continuing the political unrest calculating that more strikes and hartals will lead to unpopularity of the opposition, and indirectly benefit them.

Too much politics has reduced our economy to shambles. There is a limit to how much pressure an economy like ours can take. There is also the question of threshold of patience of our poverty stricken masses. For far, too long the opposition has taken a damn care attitude about the economy. Time has come to change it, and do so immediately. So go on with politics to your heart's content, but please leave the economy alone. It is the most important patriotic task of the moment.

Print Media is the Villain

There were hints of it in the Prime Minister's discussion with the editors just prior to the elections. And now it has been made official during her post-election press conference - press is the villain: "By and large elections have been properly held" and it is only the newspapers and periodicals that are reporting otherwise. We are guilty of either outright lying, or being biased journalists as we are putting together our reports sitting in our offices. In one word there is "nothing wrong" with the elections but only with the "reporting" of it.

We have taken the reaction of the ruling party seriously, and as responsible media, we, The Daily Star, have gone back to the sources, not through one channel but several. In all cases of our reports we talked to the returning officers, the law enforcement people and the election commission itself. As for our out of town reports, the office of the DC, the SP, local TNOs, OCs and officials of the EC were invariably consufted, in addition to many other sources. The fact that those responsible do not tell the truth to the "official channel" or to the ruling party is something for which the media cannot be held responsible.

The strategy of blaming the messenger for bringing home a 'bad' message is as old as history itself. But to see its vehement return in today's context, and especially by a government and a party which benefited from wholehearted press support during its own struggling days only shows that "more it changes, more it remains the same". May we remind the BNP that during the anti-Ershad struggle the same print media was also blamed by the JP for reporting only from the urban centres, and not venturing out into the rural areas, where Ershad was supposed to enjoy undying loyalty and widespread support.

We do not, and cannot, claim that we do not make mistakes. We do, and we humbly apologise to our readers for them, from time to time. However, our election reporting was not such a case, and faster the ruling party leaders realise it, the better it is for them, for us, and for an amicable solution of the present crisis.

Man Beats Machine

Mankind sighed with relief when early last week Garri Kasparov clinched his sixth and last game against the IBM supercomputer Deep Blue. Not all of mankind but the master is superior to the world's best computer calculating 50 billion. positions in just 3 minutes — that much has been decidedly proven with Garri's remarkable wins: three wins, two draws and one loss.

What is perhaps no less remarkable is Garri's grasp of the message the reassuring episode had for all of us. There are more than one kind of intelligence he thinks. To quote him: "What I do by just feeling right or wrong, the machine finds by making these billions and billions of calculations.

Kasparov also said he had learned more about the game of chess during his encounter with Deep Blue than from anything else. And he said he didn't know he was up against such a formidable adversary. Although even Deep Blue possibly doesn't learn from its mistakes or the, opponent's brilliance — its programmers do. Ultimately it is in fact a man pitted against a team of men. What the team has devised through the help of the latest in cybernetical knowledge and skill is speeding up the job of evaluating moves far beyond the human capacity and making the evaluations infallibly correct. But learning is somehow beyond the powers of these machines perhaps because this activity as well creativity is essentially related to fallibility — the power to make mistakes. No doubt the programmers too of Deep Blue must have learnt a lot from the match and the next time Garri or some other phenomenal chess genius comes up to challenge the supercomputer _ he will face a . of some formidable adversary, &

The Null Hypothesis is Accepted

While the paradigm of constitutional continuity and democracy is widely accepted and acclaimed, it is true that the kind of election that the 15th February showered on us and the type of democracy that the said election tends to breed, is not the election and democracy that the holy constitution stands for.

party. Others, allegedly, are considered political archins. Quite obviously, in such a situation, a very low turnout of voters at the centres was apprehended by concerned quarters. The Chief Election Commissioner and the PM herself, on the eve of the 15th February election, assured the nation that the degree of turnout would be far less important to them than the degree of neutrality and fairness in polls arguing that empty ballot boxes were welcome (if at all it happened to be) but no attempts to pour in fake votes (like autocrats') would be tolerated this time. Notwithstanding projected low turnouts in the 15th February polls, a provision for free and fair election thus constituted the last credibility card for the ruling BNP that witnessed the countrywide long political turmoil, a shattered economy as spill over effect and huge loss of lives and property surrounding the vital question of neutrality and fairness in Bangladesh elections. The 15th February 1996 was, thus, a day to empirically test the hypotheses — the null or the alternative floated by the opposition and the ruling party respectively. The rejection of the null hypothesis i.e. a scenario where 15th February election could emerge as free and fair. would establish the alternative hypothesis of the government that party in power can also do the same job done by a care-

stance on the issue. The most pertinent question is: Did that happen on the 15th February

Lidless Ballot Boxes!

The answer is as could be gleaned from the available reports - a simple No. Reports from foreign and domestic newspapers, election monitoring agencies, media like BBC. VOA etc point to an average turn out of 10-15 per cent of

plea that no evidence contrary was available to treat them as rigged. It may be mentioned here that when the results of the postponed 35 seats were declared, for reasons unknown, the EC did not provide the number of votes bagged by these candidates which the EC did at the first time. Suspicions also mounted as to why the election results were declared as one-shot rather than centerwise. The PM also

Beneath the Surface

by Abdul Bayes

voters. However, when results started to pour in, 80-90 per cent of votes were shown to have been cast. In many centres, ballot papers, allegedly, were hijacked and sealed by groups of miscreants to raise the number of votes. A dozen of the candidates, including the PM, secured votes which far exceeded the number of votes fetched by them in 1990 general election, an election till now considered as the most neutral and participatory in the history of Bangladesh. The performances of the candidates this time seem enviable no doubt, but stand unbelievable with equal weight. The EC postponed the results of 35 constituencies suspected as rigged but within few hours. cleared them off just on the

seemed to have accepted the fact that riggings took place but she blamed the opposition for all those riggings. By and large, the last parliamentary election is reported to be griped not only by low turnouts of voters in centres but also by high turnouts of votes in ballot boxes — a clear case of massive rigging that seemingly demolished all semblance of neutrality and fairness. The EC could hardly give any satisfactory explanations to these sordid variations. Needless to mention these allegations were not "cooked" by the parties but were established by foreign observes and reportedly by some diplomats too.

Important Lessons The last parliamentary

election, despite its serious limitations in terms of representativeness. fairness and neutrality, tends to offer to the nation few important lessons which if taken into due cognisance by both the BNP and the opposition might provide clues to future directions - directions which would help us leap out of the current political

First, the alternative hypothesis that a free and fair election is possible under a political government by making the EC strong is rejected and the null hypothesis i.e a caretaker government is needed to do that job is clearly established. In fact it seems to be the wisdom that the power of the EC is the power of the neutral and caretaker government. To substantiate this, one needs only to compare the role of the EC during Justice Shahabuddin's tenure and during the tenure of the present regime.

Second, an elected govcimment may not necessarily be a democratic government. Election is, thus, a necessary condition while the sufficient conditions are development of democratic institutions. A government might have come into power through the most fair and free election and another by the most rigged one or by the game of the gun. But when the question of staying in power is concerned, both may use the same tools as we possibly observed during the last

general election. Future parliaments would have to take this factor into serious consid-

Third, important political derisions should be left with professional politicians. It is often observed that within Bangladeshi political parties. the language of weapon tends to outweigh the weapon of language implying that the muscle power somehow wins over the control of the party. Such political parties are doomed to fail and destined to face severe consequences. The shift of balance in power between the necessary and the evil is again a function of the degree of democratic practices that a particular political party seems to cultivate over the years.

Concluding Remarks While the paradigm of con-

stitutional continuity and

democracy is widely accepted and acclaimed, it is true that the kind of election that the 15th February showered on usand the type of democracy that the said election tends to breed, is not the election and democracy that the holy constitution stands for. The arguments could, possibly, hold some water had the recent election been fair and neutral. The last election, instead of paving ways for a way-out, in fact placed the whole nation on another grave crisis. This time the legality and credibility of the government is put into serious question and with that its moral strength to tinker with state affairs seems to have evaporated. Unless the ruling party accepts the happenings sportingly, serious ramifications ought to loom large on the socio-economic and political horizon. The fragile economy can hardly accommodate any more volatile political situation. The sooner it is realized, the better it is for all of us.

Waltzing with Walls

HAKA is a city of mosques" is now as true as Plato's lest Atlantis. Mosques had been the dominant edifice of the city from Sultanate period till thieves, romantic paramours and peeping toms (not in order) got the better of the citizenry. From as early as 1457 when Binot Bibi's mosque, the oldest, was erected in Narinda till about the time when demand overran Supply, these prayer houses decked with domes and arches have been the singular emblem of the reli-

N the whirlwind of politi-

es in the country for the

last two and a half years

two hypotheses apparently

dominated political thoughts and tended to dictate the

courses of political actions.

Needless to mention, the

hypothesis sprang as an

offshoot of the famous Magura

By Election where massive

election riggings were alleged

to have taken place. The op-

position's null hypothesis that

only a neutral and caretaker

government can ensure a free

and fair election in Bangladesh

and their resignation from the

parliament in support of that

added further fuel to the polit-

ical flame in the country.

Dashed by heavy pressures

from the opposition to table a

caretaker government bill in

the fifth parliament, the ruling

BNP floated an alternative hy-

pothesis: election can be made

free and fair even under a po-

litical government with the

proviso that the Election

Commission (EC) is given

more power and autonomy

than it currently holds. To this

effect, the party in power was

reported to have brought some

changes in the modus

operandi of the EC during the

period when the opposition

was staying away from the par-

prepared to go for election to

the sixth parliament before the

21st February 1996. It was a

must, as EC sources pointed

out, time and again, to uphold

the principle of constitutional

continuity and protecting

democracy in the country. This

argument of the EC and the

government miserably failed to

bag any sympathy and positive

response from the major op-

position parties who vowed to

resist the "farcical" polls in the

"pretext" of constitutional

continuity and democracy. The

election thus, headed forward

with BNP as the only recog-

nised participating political

In the meantime, the EC

liament.

400-year old city. Today, to be honest, this is a city of walls. In a constant battle of wits, with intruders seemingly enjoying a clear edge over the ever-so-concerned house-owners, the outcome has been grotesque frontiers between the outside and one's property. The would-be trespasser has successfully

gious fervour of this plus

encaged the house-owner in his own house. At this moment in time. security overrides all other factors in building design. It is more than an architect's nightmare to see his creative space, mass and volume violated by grills and walls, gets and shutters. But, such is the societal order today that, besides fresh air, plenty of unwanted flesh and blood may blow in through your southfacing open veranda.

In the 1950s, palatial or lesser houses had two gates. one appropriately named IN, the other obviously OUT. It is not known for sure whether the intruder abided by such Victorian instructions but the house-owner was compelled to shut one of them by the late 60s.

The use of both the main entry and service/private doorways in houses erected in the 60s has long since ceased. Today, either one of them is permanently shut, and the more pragmatic of builders are opting for only one door.

Verandas are meant to be expansive and open. But, since the 80s hideous contraptions of iron have literally by Chintito

altered for good the solidvoid equation that architects

strive to achieve. The story of walls in the city began as boundaries between adjacent plots. Screens of some sort had been in use since time eter-

taker government and would,

thus, weaken opposition's

stantly varying the materials and the motifs. From choosing between brick and concrete or both, to deciding the height the thief can jump. the house-owner and his designer are losing a lot of hair. There are many variables and



nal for preventing theft by visual means. As the security problem accelerated, so did the height of the boundary wall. More permanent materials became necessary for the wall as well as the pur-

Dhakaites have shown abundant dexterity in the design of their walls by con-

the whole is disguised with as many types of plasters and motifs. But, the thief and the more desperate Romeo has always risen to the occasion.

Security measures have included nails and glass pieces on top of a wall to prevent climbers who did not make the Everest expedition. But, the blundering moun-

taineer was bright enough to lay a paater chhaala over glass and nail, and once atop repeated the victorious Tensing smile to the dismay of the owner or the joy of his

amenable scion. But, these walls do have other uses besides testing the climbing skills of burglars and romantics. I shudder to think what some of our politicians would do without them. After all, their political lives were born and brought up on these vertical, plain and whitewashed bastions. often confused as their personal billboards by their overzealous workers.

I don't totally blame these wall-climbing champions. What other decent, civilised way is there to enter a premise. The mochua darwan will grill you thoroughly before he lets you through the grill. Apnar porichoy? Whom do you want? Where have you come from? What brand of rice do you take? They are not home.

The introduction of this unique man who can (with authority) ask you . more questions than Richard Nixon was asked at the Watergate enquiry has seriously jeopardised the romance of dropping by. By the time you press the doorbell of the apartment on seventh floor. the inmates know your name, the colour of your shirt, the size of your stubble, etc.

Land-owners are very particular about putting up walls to the extent that they do not care much about how much road width remains. They are in a trance, and walls to protect their property and family is all they care to know about. The resulting narrow roads have grievously affected the smooth plying of vehicles in almost all the areas of the

So, this city is now an array of endless walls of varying sizes and shapes, design and colour with narrow roads inbetween. In fact, if we turn Dhaka upside down, we might see an egg-crate. Indicative, that at the end of the narrow road life is actually a ghorar dim.

OPINION

Post Poll Thoughts Election 1996, a Reference Case by Abu Imran

man said that if Princess "Di" was cleared, A meaning if her separation with the Prince was legally established then he would marry her. And that would be a success story. He was a commoner, how could he expect that, the other observed. In reply he said it was a simple matter provided one was courageous and hell-bent to do so. He further explained that in any deal in general and marriage in particular, two parties are involved. In the case under reference, he was fully agreeable i.e. 50% chances were established. Now it was "Di's" affair if she agreed or not, in case the latter happened, he would take the matter to the court of law for seeking justice. On what ground the court would give justice in his favour and how far it would attain legal status. the other observed. To this he replied that he would give the reference of Bangladesh Election 1996. He added that this election was participated by only around less than 25% people leaving out the mainstream opposition and the bulk of the people who constitute nearly 75-80% of the total electorates. Now if the election rather one party election (since other parties taking part constitute the least minority, many of whom perhaps never have been to the parliament building even as observers) with around 25% followings could have a legal status and people under such election could be considered as legally elected and sit in the sacred parliament as legislators, then why could not he (commanding 50% of the will of the two parties combined) win the contest and marry "Di"? The other one was still not convinced and said, how a Bangladeshi reference could be cited in a foreign court of law for influencing decision. He

were quoted, it was a practice. In support, he quoted a reference from the prestigious Reader's Digest, which is as below: "In India, an advocate. who was arguing a case in the supreme court cited an English authority to support a proposition. "How can you refer to an English case in an indian court", one of the judges asked the lawyer. "The difference between English law and Indian law is as great as the difference between trousers

and dhotis. The advocate taken aback for the moment, retorted, "But your lordship will appreciate that the underlying principles of both is the same". (Reader's Digest, April, 1980, page 57).

To his convincing argu-

ments, the other one did not argue further and concluded saving, "I just don't know how far you'd be-successful in marrying "Di", but I have strong conviction that professionally you can be able to make yourself a good lawyer and in this practice you can make roaring business". The story above may seem irrelevant to any context. but the purpose of telling the story is that sometimes we may win over an issue by arguments and unyielding, and uncompromising attitudes. But such "wins" are short lived since these are devoid of reality and based on falsehood and fabricated arguments. Ultimately the cloud will be cleared, lies wiped out and truth dawned. It is proved by time. The autocracy here and elsewhere after short-run failed and so in future too it would do. Therefore the leadership here should now calmly think as to whether the election held on 15th Feb, 1996 without participated by the mainstream opposition and the people by and large should be taken as valid, acceptable both in and outside or scrapped in the greater national interest to avoid future foreseeable uncertainty and chaos.

pointer. The decisions of the

meeting and the meeting itself

were abruptly brought to zero

when a DUCSU representative

voiced his objection to the de-

liberations. And so the vice-

chancellor closed the meeting

We should not be surprised to

see a news item in the near fu-

ture about his appointment as

an ambassador or high com-

missioner. But we request him

to make a better bargain this

time. The country of his post-

ing must be among the big five.

say that this is condemnable.

After all, they also have liabili-

ties to look after. So what can

be done? Well, raise the salary

of the VCs. Their pensions are

also to be raised so that they

can refuse any allurement

when they retire. They are in

charge of our children. They

Similarly, their appoint-

ment procedure needs revi-

sion. In future, let a VC secure

50 votes more than his near-

est contestant and the gov-

ernment appoint him. The

government will not have any

option but to appoint him.

Thus we can prevent our intel-

lectuals not to become

cannot be poor.

By the above we must not

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

The wrong culture

Sir, Nowadays among the middle-class, it is gaining ground to entertain the guests with wine during a party. This culture has been imported from the West. As it a good one? Surely not, we tend to like the bad sides of western culture. We, on the contrary, have little effort to develop our science and technology like those of the developed countries.

As a medical student I have not learnt anything good in wine but serious hazardous effect on health. Our students and youths are gradually becoming accustomed to this culture. Please, remember the incidents that took place on 31 December night — 3 persons were killed by drunk car drivers.

This culture which is alien to our traditional Bengali one is spreading alarmingly in our society at the time when guardians, different GO and NGOs are trying to keep the young generation aloof from various drugs. So I must urge everybody not to exercise this culture for the sake of a better society. Sohel Ahmed Dhaka Medical College Dhaka-1000

Making a point

Sir, I was highly disappointed to read the article Why the Talks Failed: A Psychological Analysis," by Prof. MR Ali, published in The Daily Star of February 2. I have been avidly reading the write-ups pertaining to the current political crisis to understand the situation. So, the title of the article immediately attracted my attention and I started reading it. But soon disappointment and annoyance gripped me when I found the article to be partisan. Such an article would have been all right if written by a politically committed person. But for a person whose introduction has been published as "a former professor and chairman of the Department of Psychology of Dhaka University". to give such a layman's and partisan analysis is ludicrous and unconvincing,

to say the least. Just consider a professor of Psychology saying "with certainty" that the PM was far away from taking the tough but "realistic" decision to shift the date of election. The professor was giving the judgement about what was "realistic."

The Daily Star has got the reputation of publishing balanced editorials and views on national issues. I request you not allow this reputation to be diminished by such articles. Tarek Shamim Dhaka.

Destitute tourists?

Sir, Every year on the occasion of each Shab-e-Barat, Eidul-Fitr and Eid-ul-Azha, lakhs of destitute women and children arrive in Dhaka from farlung areas and distant villages. They have no home to live in the city, no food to eat, no place to sleep, no public bathroom or toilet to use. They move from one locality to another, one place to another to collect alms. They sleep in open air on the public roads, foot-paths or they spend their nights in the railway, river stations or bus terminals. They lead a life below the poverty line and live in sub-human

condition. What action have our authorities concerned including the Social Welfare Department, Zakat Board, Department of

Relief and Rehabilitation. Bangladesh Parjatan Corporation, the national tourist organisation and Dhaka City Corporation taken so far with a view to looking after the welfare of the floating destitute women and children domestic tourists who flock into the metropolitan city of Dhaka every year like millions of Siberian guest birds who visit Bangladesh every winter? O H Kabir 6, Hare Street

If words not watched, war is waged

Wari, Dhaka-1203.

Sir, We've learnt since childhood that in a complicated disagreement among two (in good earnest) a third party's good office works well. In such cases, however, the third party's suggestion/ decision may not be binding upon the involved parties unless a precondition is agreed by both. But, in any case, no party can question the integrity of the third party, as they've preferred the third party to be their intermediary for their own benefit.

So, an impulsive utterance of one political leader on national matters, involving ultranational personalities, has surprised me. I strongly feel. while meddling into the national in itiers, one should not morelle the fall of dienal som

pathy we have with us. It may be unsavory to many, but it's a reality that we are surviving on the international sympathy (to be on the modest side). Good sense should prevail, as all emotional statements are not accepted by all cynics alike.

then said that though it was

not mandatory, yet in many

cases international references

A R Choudhry Uttara, Dhaka

Intellectual bankruptcy

Sir, When the top educationists seem to become bankrupt there is real danger for a country. This is being observed in the case of the Dhaka University for quite some time. The recent case in point was the appointment of a vicechancellor as a high commissioner of a country which does not need an intellectual. There are instances for academics to be appointed as ambassadors. But these are either New Delhi, London, Paris or Washington. May be Moscow. Behind such appointment the primary motivation is to enhance the image of the country by the academic feats and deliberations of the ambassador. But in our case the primary motivation seems to be favouritism on the part of the government and an apparent intellectual bankruptty on the part of the incumbent. The DU state meeting

held on 28th Campary is a

Khairuzzaman Chowdhury Section 5, Mirpur, Dhaka

bankrupt.