

## An Excellent Team

A full-fledged neutral caretaker government is in place. The appointment of ten advisers to it in less than a week of the historic transfer of power from the then Prime Minister to the Chief Adviser has been both relieving and reassuring. Public confidence has grown in the constitutional process culminating in the creation of a dispensation for free and fair polls. That is the big domestic gain, and internationally, we appear in better light after the gruelling political crisis. The stock of our goodwill overseas should start rising now.

We congratulate Chief Adviser Habibur Rahman on his thoughtful selection of a team of advisers. Let us express at the same time, our gratitude to the incumbents for their decision to work with him on a difficult but historic national mission. They bring to bear on their jobs not merely political neutrality coupled with the credibility they personally enjoy in society but also a considerable fund of professional experience and finesse. They are successful persons with good track records in the fields of innovative development work, banking, economic planning, industry, commerce, teaching, technology and administration. Although the team looks broadbased enough in terms of professional representation, it is heavily weighted towards economic management for anyone to see. The concentration of advisers with economic credentials speaks for itself.

The economy has taken quite a tumble. Its wheels have to move again. The discontinued aid disbursements need to be freed up and consultations with the donor community re-started with an eye to development financing for the coming year through the timely courtesy of an aid consortium meet. The three-fold agenda before the interim government are law and order, economy and polls.

The team of advisers seems to have been so carefully selected that it should be readily acceptable to all political quarters. Yet they need to consciously let the non-party administration work unencumbered by any overt or covert political dictates. The bureaucracy and the public at large are only expected to cooperate with the new administration in the discharge of its onerous responsibilities.

## BGMEA's SOS Call

President of the Garments Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA) Redwan Ahmed has strongly pleaded for critical financing of the readymade garments factories. About 1,000 factories have been closed down and the rest have suffered losses from which recovery will be extremely difficult. All the productive sectors have been badly hurt through the months of political unrest and movement but it is the garments industry that has suffered the most. The reason is quite obvious: an export-oriented industry depending almost 80 per cent on imported raw materials must fulfil its contractual obligations or court disaster. Our garments factories were hard-put to meet their obligations.

Now that the neutral caretaker government has taken over, we should do everything possible to salvage the sector from an impending ruination. The BGMEA president's plea deserves sympathetic consideration. The interim government must need to address the problems facing the industry so that it does not fall by the wayside after all the success and promise it had shown. Both economic and social costs, in case of our failure to revive the industry, so long ranking as the number one foreign exchange earner for the country, will be far too heavy to be hazarded.

A rough estimate by the BGMEA puts the working capital for an average-size factory at Tk 10 lakh per month. We think this can provide a basis for a plan to help the factories over a certain period. The new administration can work out a recovery programme for the sector on a priority basis. A daunting task it will be to persuade the foreign buyers, who have already moved away, to reconnect with us. The BGMEA and the government can work together for launching a promotional campaign to regain the access into markets abroad.

## Free Media

The Daily Star's persistent campaign for the electronic media's autonomy stands strengthened by Sheikh Hasina's demand of Wednesday. She has demanded the formulation of a policy for ensuring objective and impartial news coverage by radio and television. For all practical purposes that is what the electronic media's role should be in a democratic society.

What is most encouraging is the fact that there is virtually a national consensus on this issue. Just before the fall of Ershad regime the three-party agreement on the issue emerged as a landmark development that has since been left in the cold storage most regrettably. We now plead for pushing ahead with this because neutrality of the electronic media is the *sine qua non* for holding a free and fair election. The caretaker government can indeed facilitate the process during its short tenure by treating this subject as part of the electoral code of conduct.

What we ask for is setting the tone for autonomy while it is finalised eventually through an elected representative parliament. Let all political parties make an election pledge for autonomy in the electronic media.

# Politics and the Corruption of Language

by Dr Saleemul Huq

**O**NE fall-out of the present political turmoil which will have long term impact for the future of political discourse in Bangladesh is the corruption of language by our political leaders. While some are more guilty than others, none of the mainstream political leaders is without blame in imposing new meanings to existing words as well as in adding new words to the English language. Some examples are examined below.

**"Illegal government":** Even before the February 15 election the opposition leaders accused the government of being "illegal" due to the fact that a substantial number of members of parliament had resigned. The fact that the BNP government continued to hold parliamentary sessions despite the absence of the opposition members certainly brings in to question their democratic credentials and even their legitimacy. However, there is no

question of its being "illegal" since the remaining BNP members had been validly elected for a full-term and were therefore legally entitled to hold sessions. After the February 15 elections the cry of "illegal government" is based on a new accusation of "vote dacoity". Again, it is extremely difficult and indeed non-credible for the BNP to claim that such "vote dacoity" did not take place or even more ludicrous to blame the opposition if it did occur. Nevertheless the question of "legality" of the government is an issue that must be determined through either a court ruling or by the Chief Election Commissioner declaring the polls null and void. Merely by some opposition leaders proclaiming it "illegal" does not confer "illegality" on the government.

**"Free and fair elections":** The BNP government has perhaps done itself the greatest disservice in its five-year history by allowing its candidates for parliament and their mas-

ters to stuff ballot boxes in order to inflate the number of votes they received. This destroyed any notion of the election having been "free and fair". Indeed one Returning Officer aptly described the polling on 15 February as having started out in the morning being "fair" but by the afternoon it became "free" (for the ballot stuffers). Historically it is also true that apart from the 1991 elections none of the elections held since independence can claim to have been truly free and fair. The last election has only strengthened the argument in favour of a neutral caretaker government which even the BNP has now conceded.

**"Democracy":** This word is perhaps one of the most abused ones in Bangladesh with all parties claiming to fight for its cause. The greatest hypocrisy is that none of the political parties actually prac-

tice democracy within their own parties. After all there is no one to stop them being democratic within their own parties but their love for democracy seems to end when it comes to applying it to themselves. The lack of democracy also manifests itself in the imposition by force of political programmes like hartals.

**"Non-cooperation":** This normally entails the voluntary withdrawal of allegiance to a government. In this country we have a glorious example which took place exactly twenty-five years ago when the people, including government officials, professionals, bankers, factory workers and even the law enforcement agencies "non-cooperated" with the government in Islamabad and transferred their allegiance to Road 32, Dhamondi. This glorious episode in our history (which has been aptly described by Prof.

Rehman Sobhan in this paper recently) did not entail the break down of law and order or the non-functioning of economic life (such as banks, ports, transport, etc). Unfortunately the present form of "non-cooperation" is but a pale imitation of 1971 which the opposition parties have to enforce by physical intimidation and more importantly, is attacking the economic lifeblood of the country.

**"Hartal":** This word is new but has so frequently been used in Bangladesh that it has been made universally known abroad. Many garment buyers in Europe and America have, by now, become very familiar with this dreaded word. They are not the only ones however.

On a recent visit to Manila, I was chatting with the Filipino secretary of a friend and mentioned, in passing, political troubles in Bangladesh. Her immediate response was "oh, you mean Hartals?". Perhaps we should take perverse pride in making the word famous beyond our borders.

The misuse of language reflects not only muddled thinking on the part of our political leaders but also devalues their credibility which will have a lasting impact on the political process in Bangladesh.

## A Futile Exercise on Kashmir

*A government spokesman has said that the ice has been broken. This cliche has no meaning because the government is as distant from persons who count as before. Young popular leaders like Yasin Malik and Shabir Shah are nowhere in the picture.*

### BETWEEN THE LINES

Kuldip Nayar writes from New Delhi

**A** dialogue on Kashmir at any level at any time is a welcome development. But I have not been able to make out what the Narasimha Rao government has proved or achieved by holding a 45-minute-long talk with a few militants if that is their apt description. Persons who met home minister S. B. Chavan have themselves said that they lost their faith in the culture of gun some time ago.

Presuming that they still represent part of militancy, they are still a part. There are reportedly 50 odd such groups operating in the Valley. Although the incidence of militancy has declined, yet those who came to Delhi do not belong to the shrinking number. Their only plus point is that they dared to meet the home minister despite warnings and threats.

Even if their representative character is not debated, the representative character of the government talking to them is doubtful. Elections to parliament are only a few weeks away. Not even the most optimist see the Rao government returning to power. So, how important is the dialogue or, for that matter, the committee which has been entrusted with the follow-up job is questionable.

In fact, it is rather odd that a government, which is practically at the end of its five-year tenure, should think of finding a solution to the problem, which is the knottiest. But then a party clutching at every straw is under-standingly looking for some slogans on the eve of the polls. That the print media should become a victim to the gimmick is amazing.

using a group of surrendered militants over a period of time. The government would have made more sense if it had declared a unilateral ceasefire, ordered general amnesty and released all detainees numbering more than 4,000. Such a gesture would have created proper climate for meaningful talks. Meetings like the one held in New Delhi only lull the country into complacency, the impression that goes round is that the situation in Kashmir is on the mend.

A government spokesman has said that the ice has been broken. This cliche has no meaning because the government is as distant from persons who count as before. Young popular leaders like Yasin Malik and Shabir Shah are nowhere in the picture. Nor has the government any contact with any viable organisation, not even the umbrella organisation, the Hurriyat, however divided. And the chasm between the administration and people has not lessened.

Indeed, the treatment meted out to real Kashmiri leaders smacks of hostility. Not long ago, Abdul Gani Lone was so mercilessly beaten by police

that he struggled for life for a long time. Recently, Yasin Malik received injuries at the hands of police. He had to be flown to Delhi for treatment. (The government-owned All India Institute of Medical Sciences refused to admit him). Shabir Shah has been detained once again. What message does all this give?

Still, State Governor Krishna Rao has the cheek to say that he has delivered Kashmir to democracy. His statement that more militants and separatists are willing to surrender may hit the headlines but does not change things on the ground. True, the Kashmiris are tired of uneasy uncertain life. They want a way out. But their exasperation does not show lessening of alienation.

The status quo has been forced upon them. But they want to administer their own affairs.

What kind of autonomy will be acceptable to them should be the topic of talks. I think that elections should be held in Kashmir, not to revive the state assembly but to choose representatives. Once that is determined, the government should hold a dialogue with them. Otherwise, it means that the government is on the

lookout for such militants as are convenient for it. (Similar efforts are afoot in Nagaland also).

The meeting at New Delhi should, however, awaken the Hurriyat leaders from their slumber. They live in a world of their own as if some foreign nation is going to deliver them Kashmir. People want peace and normalcy. If today a small group can talk to the government of India, tomorrow a bigger group will do so. Hurriyat has to face the fact that the status of Kashmir cannot be changed forcibly. Nor can there be a solution which is not acceptable to the people of India. The Hurriyat has to bring them round, and it is possible to do so because most Indians are on the defensive whenever this topic is discussed. They want a solution.

When the Hurriyat opened its office in New Delhi more than six months ago, I imagined that its leaders had realised that they had to win over people in different parts of the country. But they refuse to go beyond Delhi. Even their first meeting in Delhi made me feel that their appeal was directed to foreign countries. Otherwise, what was the purpose of inviting the diplomatic corps? What I thought should have been a good beginning for a dialogue turned out to be a publicity gimmick.

The rehabilitation of Kashmiri Pandits, who migrated to Jammu, Delhi and elsewhere in the past few years, should be now on the top of Hurriyat's agenda. True, a new formation will have to be worked out. The Rao government has talked only in vague terms — sometimes suggesting near Azad and sometimes going back to a limited accession to India. The new government, when it assumes power at New Delhi, should avail a formula which satisfies, as far as possible, the people of Jammu and Kashmir on one side and the people of Pakistan on the other. In the meanwhile, no purpose will be served in getting some militants here for talks and arming some there for countering defiance.

### Crucifixion, Resurrection — Eternal Love

## A Message, Timeless and Profound

by Hubert Francis Sarkar

**L**OVE is the touchstone, the alchemy — the precious mystic element that makes our earthly existence meaningful and our search for alter-ego all the more worthwhile. Love is not merely a commercially charming million-dollar smile; it is not a commodity to possess. Often we are disillusioned by reality that love is not the boulevard we dream of to walk through in the evenings. Our conscience, time and again, awaken us to the fact that love is 'one thing that the most powerful money cannot buy. Only love can beget love. It is often mistaken for chalk-bar ice cream available in the stores to talk of and cherish for love, but given a serious try, it is the hardest-found. Again, it is our inner-self, insight, whole band of feelings that says that it is love which is the driving force, felt or unfelt. And, Resurrection is a promise of endless love for a Christian.

The Christians had thought that this man would one day bring the collapse of the Roman Empire. The ruling people and the then religious leaders became anxious that this man would take away the power and pomp from their hands and there would be a great upheaval that would bring the doomsday to their control mechanism.

They had been leading materialistically gorgeous life and had been Hippocratic enough to interpret Laws according to their own wishes so that their interests were served and they were regarded the demi-gods. So they had hatched plots to hand over Jesus to the representatives of the Roman Emperor. As the Bible says, Jesus knew all these but he did not give up his conviction to love, love of humanity, because he came to give us love.

He was then falsely convicted and the religious leaders brought charges of anti-regime activities, then considered sacrilege. In the face of all the charges, Jesus stood silent. He did not make any vain attempt to defend himself. He knew that it would happen as was decided by God. He was then awarded the most painful and most inglorious death by crucifixion.

Jesus Christ said that he had not come to be served, but to serve. And, his love became universal when he convoked all of us irrespective of any band of identity to feel and care for our neighbour, in the same vein of the biblical good Samaritan. We the humans become bonded to him, at least — whenever we try to realise our true selves, the inner concept is all the same as is believed by others, only in an other form and expression.

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us sacrificed himself to establish the eternal message of love. Of course, for us, the common people, it seems quite impossible to make such a great sacrifice. We are more or less confined to our own narrow circle, wherefrom we can hardly make a passage out to reach out to others. Of course, people like Mother Teresa has given up everything for the sake of other people. It is manifestation of godliness in us. And in a world where the most of the people are driven by materialistic persuasions, if not by hedonistic crazes, these are very much extraordinary. However, it has to be seen that love is not entirely uncommon in this common life-spectrum. As we are more-or-less concentrated to our selfish beings, we rarely dare to trudge beyond our family clan, friend circles, the party, etc.

If love had not been sown in the heart of human beings, who would have thought of extending a hand to a leper, a handicapped man, who would have felt sadness for near and dear ones? There had never been dearth of opportunists, there had always been some Pharisees, pretentious religious personalities, who had made it their trade to manipulate almost everything; who would even prefer to pretend like a lover; who would contrive everything to serve lusts, that locust of human greed that threaten to obliterate everything on its path. Love when comes out like an ever-swinging force, incurring sacrifices as huge as to be comparable to the whole universe, we feel it is time to rejoice for the Creator of the universe, the Almighty. He glorifies love so highly that he dedicates the whole of the universe for love.

Our noblemen lay their lives for noble causes, our missionaries sacrifice to pick the uncared from the road-side, giving up their own comforts.

In the routine of life, many of them go unnoticed. But, the humanity has been lucky that Jesus has been appearing again and again in the course of the history of mankind. We become exultant to feel the greatness of these people, reaching out across all identities and boundaries. The message of Easter thus has been the humanity's Resurrection, which rises above the apparently disgraceful death, glorifying our otherwise mindless racing to spiritual awakening time and again.

The Christians believe Jesus to be the Son of God. He incarnated to teach the great lesson that the earthly death in the name of love is a promise of an immortal life. And that the King himself kissed the dust for the universal love for his people, his creation.

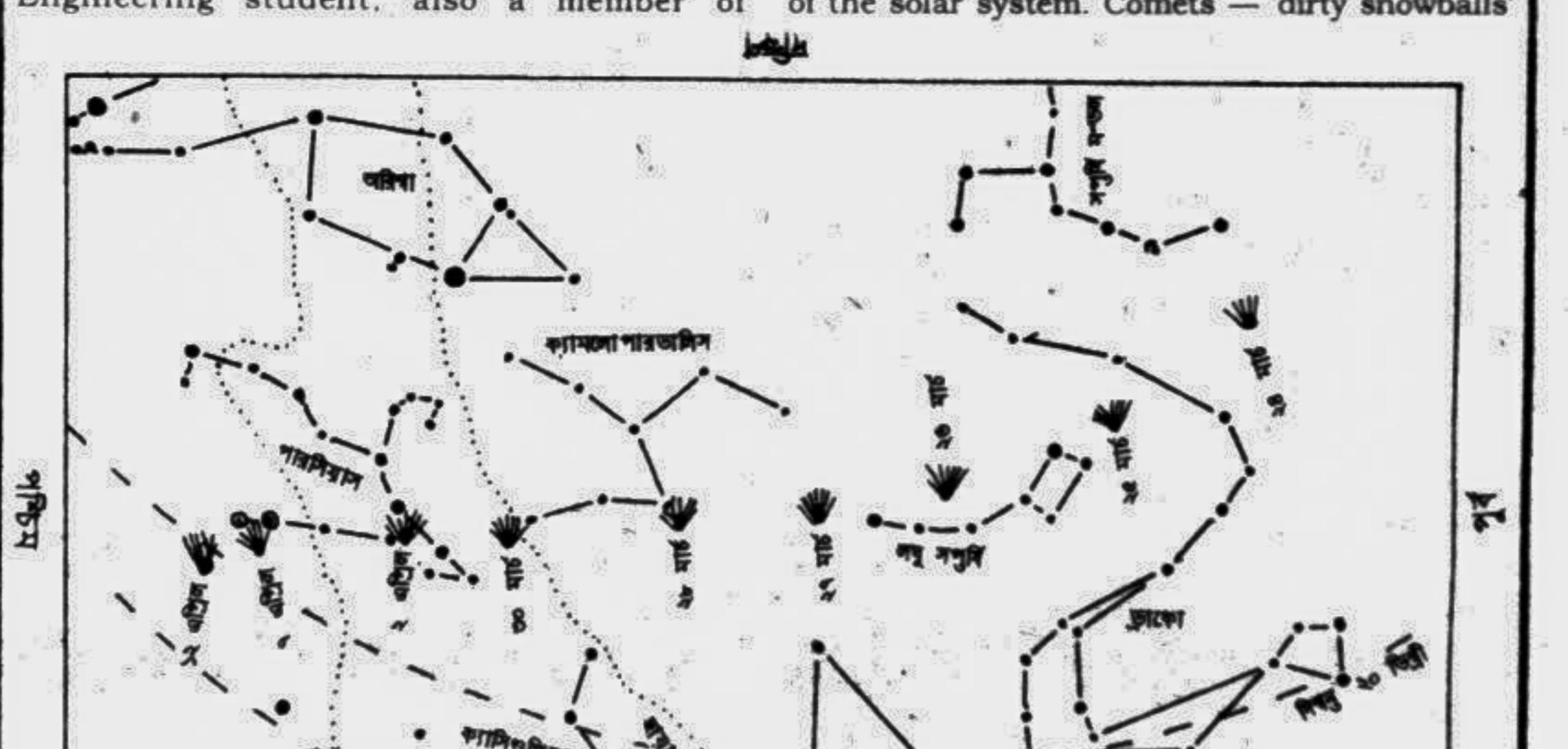
We know that a lover can go to any length of sacrifice for his inamorata. The Almighty who loves each and everyone of

Every one, to some extent, is enthusiastic about heavenly bodies and their behaviour. You may not be an avid sci-fi (science fiction) reader, but when it comes to sci-facts or sci-objects your interest is infinite. Only recently your passion for 'sci-happenings' took you as far as Sundarbans and now this blazing discovery of the century, Hyakutake comet, is occupying most of your absent mind (or conscious mind). Hyakutake was discovered only this January 30 by a Japanese amateur astronomer U G Hyakutake. Interestingly this comet was last seen on our earth's sky some 10,000 to 20,000 years ago. A time, when possibly man didn't even discover himself.

This sort of comets are called long period comets, which appear after a gap of thousands of years," says Shuvo, a first-year Mechanical Engineering student, also a member of

the western direction. Hyakutake is unusually bright and can be seen with bare eyes, provided you can concentrate enough. However people of Azores to Australia are seeing it without the help of any binoculars or telescope. This latest obsession has made the scientists around the world to reach to various conclusions — some hypothetical while some are factual. While calculating its path of rotation scientists believe it to be the comet (after the one seen in the year 1983), to come most nearest to earth, some one and half crore kilometres closer. (Haley's comet was six crore thirty lakh kilometre away from earth.)

Hyakutake, officially known as C/1996B2 (C for comet, the year discovered, B2 for category), will be the fifth closest comet to earth to pass by this century. Scientists are closely examining the comet for clues about the origins of the solar system. Comets — 'dirty snowballs'



Bangladesh Astronomical Association. The association, intrigued as it is with any space object, has set up a Hyakutake observation camp in Dhanmondi club premises for the general public to experience the unusual event. This is open to public from 7.00 pm till 11.00 pm.

"We were not able to see it clearly for the last two days because of the full moon, but observers here at Dhaka will get a distinct view later this week, 4th to 6th," says Md Mash-Hu-Rul Amin, General Secretary of the Association. "It is now traveling towards the sun, and while it returns to mid sky again it will be very clear," says Shuvo. Adding further that it will be seen on the earth sky for approximately six months, however, people of the Northern Hemisphere are observing it quite distinctly now.

The comet is seen over the northern Dhaka sky just beside the Evening star. It is going to be visible throughout this month as it moves in

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