The Baily Star

Founder-Editor: Late S. M. Ali

Dhaka, Saturday, April 27, 1996

Habibur's Challenge

Chief Adviser's address to the District Commissioners (DCs) and Police Superintendents(SPs), held last Thursday, was timely, and perhaps critical for the successful holding of a free and fair election. The DCs and SPs, along with the secretaries and other senior members of bureaucratic echelon present in the gathering constitute the most vital elements of our administration. Frankly, if those present sincerely, and in a most determined fashion, try to deliver a free and fair election then, and only then, will the objective of the caretaker government become achievable.

So the question is will or will not our DCs and SPs do their best to give the nation the grand prize of a free and fair election? They did once in '91, and we think they definitely will again if we can give them the type of support - both moral and material - that they need. The Chief Adviser's speech was of the highest standard in terms of principles and norms. It correctly brought out the nation's expectation from our administration and focused on the enormity of the task ahead. The speech appropriately laid emphasis on the supremacy of law. But, at the same time, the speech did not answer some of the real questions of the DCs and SPs. The foremost among them was how to prevent post-election victimisation by parties coming to power for justifiable pre-election stern action against it? This is particularly true for political parties who are known to harbour armed cadres and whose arrest and confinement is a precondition for peaceful polls. Then there is the real question of criminals coming out on bail within days, if not hours, of arrest, making a mockery of the hard work of police. The Law Ministry is learnt to have compiled a huge list of such bail granting instances even when criminals were caught with lethal weapons on their own persons. Then there are logistical questions of inadequate human and material resource - especially for Ansars and other lower level law enforcers who need to be deployed at this stage.

There has to be some additional allocation of funds. As for the morale of our administrators, we think that the caretaker government should undertake a massive publicity campaign - through radio and TV - seeking public cooperation for the tasks of the DCs and SPs. Village level and, in the cities, local (para) level citizens' committees may be envisaged to help the law enforcers. In other words, public participation will have to be ensured. This, coupled with sincere dialogue with all political parties on the need to help the DCs and SPs, may provide the magic answer.

When will Aricha Jam End?

There is no doubt this time Dhaka will have its greatest Eid-holiday exodus. It is going to be a long long holiday even for the banks who do not close on many of usual holidays. This is what would allure many to head for a mini-vacation.

That prospect, however, has largely been dampened at the very outset. For one thing, there is an unbroken squally spell in Dhaka and adjoining districts that not only has marred the reputations of Eid jollity and mirthful anticipations of an outing. this has as well contributed viciously to the growing traffic jam at Aricha Ghat. The jam is spreading and its stretch has blocked approach to the ghat for four kilometres on the highway. And this was so an the 25th evening, three clear days ahead of Eid. What will happen today, tomorrow or the day after? The bulk of the people going at Eid time are ones who go to their ancestral homes as dutybound, there being for them no choice of putting the journey off. So the jam will grow, so the people will suffer.

Must ferries need to be fixed now and must some of them hit some chars now? There must be something very gravely wrong somewhere. If a nation cannot pool its resources to ensure smooth passage for the lakhs that routinely take these holiday journeys — why is it there?

Such occasions put inhuman loads on the personnel manning the ferries. It is elevating to see them work unsparingly without a minute's respite. All this goes waste may be for lack of preparedness and planning on some upper level. We are a poor nation, for sure, but who has ever grudged putting a hundred core here or there? It is sad to see government's carelessness — even cruelty — directly affect masses of people whenever there is a meeting of the two. It was in the interest of the government that they be seen to be caring when lakhs come to them seeking service. The Aricha jams teach us amply of the lack of a sense of service in the government establishments. When will it change?

DCC's Drive

It is heartening to hear about DCC's decision to launch drive against all unauthorised structures including those set up by political parties in the name of temporary election camps. Along with this the DCC must also clear up the roads of illegal occupants. City roads are now under severe strain from occupation by hawkers and street side sellers. Local mastaans and the police are known to be doing brisk business taking rent from these hawkers in exchange for allowing them the use of sidewalks and road-sides for their business. This has become such an acute problem that in many areas 50 to 60 per cent road-space has come under their occupation. DCC must stop this, and do so immediately.

There are other illegal occupants of road space - those who are constructing houses and flats. The first thing that these people do is to occupy the road in front to stack their supply of construction material - such as bricks, rod, cement, etc. In some residential areas the roads are literally taken over by these people. Appropriate DCC notice should be served against all those who block public thoroughfare. DCC should also put warning notices in newspapers giving a few days time for voluntary

clearing of all such road blocks. DCC must translate its words into stern action. The city is falling to pieces due to lack of governance. The drive against illegal structures could

not have come at a better time. But it must be carried out fairly, without favouring any person, group or party. Only then will DCC get the wholehearted support of the city inhabitants that it needs to accomplish this huge task.

Election Promises: Few Should be Fine

We would like to urge upon our learned politicians to jack all the issues they consider fit to allure voters but to

master the few that may make a dent in people's mind. During the last general election, we heard

much but, actually, got few. This time we want to hear few but get much.

S the day of the general election of the country A draws closer, Political parties seem to be in the race to win voters' hearts. The think-tanks of the parties concerned are, possibly, busy in giving a final touch to the election manifestos to manifest their offerings to the nation in case they are elected by the voters for a five-year term. Historical records tend to show that election promises. usually assume tall-talks with. allegedly, little relevance to the premises pertaining to the nation and also having feeble relationships with the capacity of a government that sits only for a five-year term. We therefore, need not have to have a long list of promises that would survive short Rather, we want to have a short list of promises that would live long.

What could be the most important issues that political parties need to focus in the upcoming general election campaign? The editor of The Daily Star Mr Mahfuz Anam asked us to suggest something and I take the liberty of placing these through this article. It should be noted here that the following observations belong to personal after-thoughts and any individual can argue against them.

The most important general issue — an issue that seemingly concerns citizens in general is the deteriorating law and order situation. There is a strong feeling that our society is being held hostage to a handful of guns and goons Unfortunately, the nation witnesses that the sooner an

elected government is voted to power, the sooner the law and order situation gravitates towards deterioration assuming that the situation under a caretaker government is a benchmark level. What specific methods or rules would be pursued to make the society relatively "mastan free"? Quite closely following is the issue of student-politics. Should there be a moratorium for a specified period or are there any other ways to arrest the flow of arms to innocent students? It is very unfortunate that the armed gangsters find the residential Beneath the Surface halls as places of their safest existence. Or should student-

society The second most important concern in the society seems to be the rampant growth of corruption. There is a general feeling, as it is elsewhere, that from the top to the bottom. only bribes and gifts determine access to the claims. How to deal with it? By merely saying that "once voted to power we will wage war against corruption" tells nothing in fact but helps with a cliche to over-

politics be delinked from

political parties? We would

like to have announced stand

on this issue. It is very

heartening to note that all the

political parties now agree on

the importance of separation

of the executive from the

judiciary. Hopefully, the bill

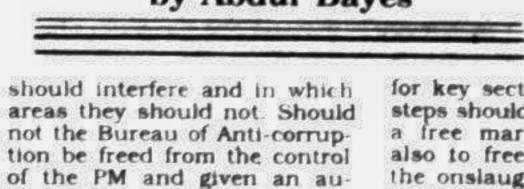
will be passed soon to help

establish rule of law in the

come the election. Corruption is argued to have a vital link with controls and controls are said to bring forth rent-seek ing. The government that governs least is the government which is least corrupt, so goes the saying In other words, the bigger the size of the government, the more corruption is likely to occur. Would our political parties like to support a big or a small government? We would like to hear in which of the areas the government

end. Within few years of its rule, the government stalled all the reform agenda. We would like to get answers to the following questions: (a) Are economic reforms necessary for the economy? (b) If yes should there be attempts to build up consensus around it? (c) If, yes, should the programmes be continued despite short run pains" and opposition from vested interest groups? (d) Should reforms and adjustments be applicable

by Abdul Bayes



The on-going economic reforms should breed clear-cut commitments from the political parties. The last government in power was not much vocal about reforms till it was throned to power. Once in power, the government, especially its FM, emerged as the vanguard of economic reforms and admittedly initiated some

important steps towards that

tonomous status like ombuds

for key sectors only? (e) What steps should be taken to set up a free market economy and also to free the market from the onslaughts of regulations. hooliganism etc.?

It should be mentioned here that the degree of reforms is said to determine the degree of corruption in the society (a negative correlation) and the degree of reforms towards free market is determined by the degree of a favourable law and order situa tion/rule of law (a positive cor

We therefore feel that these three issues e.g. law and

order situation, corruption and economic reforms should draw immediate attention of the political parties and warrant specific proposals to address them.

Moving on to particular or

sectoral issues, it is our view that stagnancy in agricultural production, food deficit and fertilizer crisis should capture important places in election agenda. What specific recommendations can politicians make to overcome the overall stagnancy in agricultural production in Bangladesh? Is agricultural subsidy the "right step" or are there any other ways to help farmers other than subsidy in agricultural production? If voted to power. would political parties continue to accept privatisation of fertilizer distribution? If yes. what particular steps are needed to face the crisis of a sort that the farmers faced in the last two consecutive boro seasons? What kind of policies are needed to boost and encourage the growth of other sub-sectors like livestock/poultry fisheries etc.

There is also a sluggish trend in the industrial sector. Should public sector enterprises (PSE) be gradually transferred to the private sector? There are generally two arguments in these respects First, privatising the public sector corporations and second, encouraging private investments but at the same

sector efficient? The other important question relates to trade liberalisation. The political parties are, allegedly, being fueled by vested interest groups who tend to oppose trade liberalisation schemes schemes which are considered necessary for the economy How to reconcile the doctrine of political and economic necessities? Bangladesh is one of the poorest recipients of FDI in this region. What policies would be adopted to encourage FDI to this country? Bear in mind. FDI is a function of stability of policies, better infrastructural facilities and good governance.

time allowing PSE to run effi-

ciently. How to make public

Women comprises about half of the population but allegedly, seems to reap very marginal policy advantages. In fact, the NGOs seem to be the sole agencies to take steps in empowering women. What policies need to be adopted -legal, ethical and economic to do justice to the other half of the population?

In fact there are also host of other important issues which need to be addressed by the political parties on the eve of the election. We have picked up just only a few that we deemed suffice to a majority of the political constituencies. We would like to urge upon our learned politicians to jack all the issues they consider fit to allure voters but to master the few that may make a dent in people's mind. During the last general election, we heard much but, actually, got few. This time we want to hear few but get much.

The Caretaker Virus

by Mohiuddin Ahmed

HE West becomes awa re of the turmoil in third world countries only the "caretaker virus". The when there in a coup or a caretaker virus is taking its rebellion, or a civil war in toll. Even local government these countries. All this has to and elected public bodies like change now. Bravo Bangladesh! the National Sports Council We have made contribution to have put forth their demand democratic culture. We have for elections under Caretaker given a new direction to Election Committees' I hear fairness in people's franchise. reports that a marriage had Some even say that we have been solemnised in the city enriched democracy. under caretaker parents be Just when TN Seshan was cause the respective parents of running away with credits for the bride and the groom to be

electoral reforms in the neighwere against the union and had bouring Indian Union, little resorted to belligerency. Bangladesh stunned the world Fairness is an adorable first, with the grand display of quality. It helps to examine ispeople's power" which brought sues objectively. It means: the country to grinding above broad, even handed. standstill and, then, by instituhonest, impartial, just, lawful, tionalising the concept of unprejudiced, and unbiased. It holding all future elections in also means coming clean and I the country under caretaker think in any society it would be governments. While political a tall order for any group of scientists, anthropologists, and people to remain totally imparpractitioners of parliamentary tial. Our problem starts here. democracies will continue to debate the issue of elections Where do we find these 'fair' under caretaker government people to man the caretaker for some time to come. I would governments every five years

> in his opinion, could deliver impartial decisions. Those finally put in the

if not earlier? It took the pre-

sent Chief Adviser quite a

while to find the people who,

chair had to be seived out of a thin panel of potential aspirants. This has made the prospect of a job in this area very interesting. While some of my friends have made it to the present slots others have decided to practice the caretaker culture for the next five years to enhance their chances for getting on the boat of temporary power

Meanwhile, I have looked up some very interesting and appropriate synonyms for neutrality such as disinterested. indifferent, non-committal sitting on the fence, uncommitted, undecided, colourless, dull, expressionless, and undefined. Unfortunately all these words have negative connotations. However, there are probably other positive aspects of neutrality. This is no reflection on the present setup. What can one say after the three main opposition parties have accepted the change and the constitutional amendment enacted by the so called 'illegal' Sixth Sangsad.'

I notice with apprehension the interesting changes that have come about in the lifestyles and behaviour of my

friends with the prospect of a job in the future caretaker governments. My journalist friend who is regarded as an intellectual by all and sundry was known for his outspoke and thoroughly straight-forward character. He always propped out his head for what he believed to be right, even if the majority stood against him He has lost the outstanding character since being afflicted by the caretaker virus. The only word he ever utters now is "No Comment" whenever he is asked to give an opinion.

I will be accused for making it sound like a killer discase, but see what this virus has done to my friend the former Vice-chancellor. He has even stopped going to family weddings to 'maintain' his neutrality. But my powerful friend, a former secretary and now figure-head of many socio-business' houses, has found a better way to handle weddings. This innovation was necessary because he loves good food. He makes sure that he attends weddings of couples whose parents had loyalties' to competing political parties. He does one more

trick. He makes sure he is always invited to a wedding which is likely to be aftended by senior judges of the Supreme Court. This, he does to increase his visibility and hence improve the prospect for the coveted job. The worst casualty of the

caretaker 'fever' has been the culture of collecting signatures by various desirable and sometimes undesirable campaign makers. There has been a sharp drop in the members of 'intellectuals' signing in for campaigners. In order to appear neutral, my intellectual friends have now decided to remain uncommitted to issues (both controversial and noncontroversial). What a change! Before the passage of the Caretaker Bill, the same friends were seen hunting for signature seekers.

By far the most unkindest cut of all' came from the aunt of a distant cousin of mine who tricked us all in her attempt to get into the bandwagon. She was to be the recipient of an important state award. As the award ceremony fell on a date which was on the waning side of the moon, the

aunt decided not to collect the award from a particular person because such an act on her part could jeopardise her position. She imagined that there was a good chance for her to be called to join the luminar les. She, however, never turned down the award money and the award itself, although the proposal and the final approval for the award was made by the ministers and functionaries of the person giving away the awards.

The caretaker 'virus' has af fected different sections of our national and private life in different ways. Its effect on the marriage market has been quite amusing. Gone are the days of young civil servants and young army officers. People now look to the academia for prospective in-laws. For a more appropriate analysis of the situation, I would strongly Showkat Hossain that has ap-

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.

"Allegation of corruption against BNP"

like to talk about the lighter

side of the issue which has

given birth to a new culture in

Bangladesh. Namely, the Tatta-

bodhyak or the 'caretaker' cul-

ture now popularly known as

Sir I refer to the news tem on "Allegation of corruption against BNP" wherein it was said that BNP chairperson had brushed aside the Awami League's allegation of corruption against her and her party leaders and added that those were intended to malign them. She further said: "They had brought similar charges in the Fifth Parliament but failed to provide documents." (The Independent, dated 6.4.1996.)

It is not surprising that the ex-PM has defended herself and the party as is done by almost everybody against whom charges are brought.

In most cases wrongdoers plead not-guilty. Only a few perhaps with high moral courage or simply unable to plead not-guilty anyway confess their guilt. In line with this, the allegations have to be viewed, and people should not be misled by mere denial of the person/persons accused. The due process at the court of law should be followed to mete out justice.

Apart from those legally proved over a period of time, there are certain cases of corruption which prima facie establish themselves to be treated as proven cases of corruption since attested by selfconfession, circumstantial evidences, etc. Few instances of such corruptions are noted here for information and necessary action of the authorities concerned:

In February 1992, hundreds of junior officers were promoted to the posts of deputy and joint secretaries to the government, superseding large number of seniors in violation of promotion practices and constitutional provision. This was then contested. And at a meeting in Feb. 1992, the then State Minister for Establishment, Mr Nurul Huda, had confessed the irregularity before the then PM herself. He also assured to review the superseded cases but did not. The matter was taken to the

court of law which, though late, in its judgement termed the appointment made in Feb 1992 as 'illegal'

It was then presumed that justice would be done by promoting all the deprived officers and taking action against those who committed irregularities. But nothing was done i.e. neither justice provided to the deprived seniors, nor action taken against those who had committed irregularities in giving promotion illegally to the juniors. This appears to be a case of 'sustaining' corrup-

The fertiliser crisis that took place during BNP rule was proved by the fact that the then minister concerned, owning the responsibility, resigned his coveted position. Wasn't the crisis a creation of corruption?

The statement that corruption charges brought in 5th Parliament could not be proved for want of documents. was rather a lame excuse. Because in all cases of corruption, documentary proofs can seldom be furnished impromptu. For instance, bribes and kickbacks are not taken against receipts or vouchers. How can one produce documents? Well there can be a probe and may be proofs found, but that takes time. The allegation made in the Fifth Parliament ended in fiasco, because the time ran out, as the then Opposition resigned and so could not take the case

Abu Imran Sutrapur, Dhaka

WASA water

Sir, I was totally puzzled to find that a few centimetre of WASA water had accumulated during one night in this hot summer of 'Baishakh' in the underground water reservoir.

Immediately, I rushed to WASA service centre, located a few hundred metres west of Ramna police station. The WASA official advised me to find a WASA water carrier lorry

driver, and to my utter surprise, he demanded a sum of Tk 500 for an 1800-gallon water carrier against Tk 150 WASA tariff. There is no need to write about requirement of water for human survival, but I had to pay the amount and no receipt for even Tk 150 was

Under these circumstances, should the caretaker government look into this matter and act as per law. It reminds me that at least 27 task forces were set up in 1991 during the caretaker government in which water, electricity, industrialisation, etc. were also included.

Ahmadul Alam 14 Eskaton Garden Road,

The name of the game

Sir, The agitation, blockade, hartal and non-cooperation launched by the opposition parties apparently had one objective as far as Awami League was concerned - to capture power immediately. However, no amount of tall talks about struggle for 'democracy' and for 'vote and food' could fool anyone. Unfortunately, AL made miscalculation about its strength and underestimated

the intelligence of the people. BNP reacted rather rashly by being inflexible and took shelter behind 'constitution' to hold on to power till the end of the term. So both the par ties, BNP and AL, were playing the same game and the name of the game was power.

It is generally believed that after the next election none of the major parties will get clear majority in the 7th parliament and smaller parties like JP and Jamaat will be the kingmakers and gain out of proportion to their sizes

But if we look closely, we will find that BNP and AL have more in common than the other two players. Both are committed to democracy. market economy, private enterprise and promotion of foreign investment. Whoever is in power may have to toe the line set by WB, IMF, ADB etc.

Apart from the personal dislikes of the two ladies, BNP and AL are practically the same. In politics there is no permanent enemy and there is no last word. The very recent example of this is the 'entente' AL had with their arch enemy

Therefore, why not go a little further? In the next Parliament BNP and AL should form a coalition government with rotating Prime Ministership and Home Ministry. If the two ladies cannot stand each other then they can stay outside the government as party leaders while others in the parties will be permitted to participate in 'business'. We have two good examples around us namely Israel and Turkey, where such coalition

have worked. The prospect of sharing power on equal footing should be very lucrative to AL as they had been political 'have-nots' for the last 21 years and this will be the last chance for the old guards.

In case of a coalition between BNP and AL, there will be no effective Opposition in the Parliament. Corruption and nepotism, unchecked as such. may descended on us like thick fog but it will still be better than frequent hartals, barricades and port closures.

Iskander Meah Gulshan North, Dhaka

Consolation for the

Springboks Sir, It's amazing how a country deprived of years of international cricket can come back so gallantly into the arena by outsmarting cricketing giants like India and Pakistan. The team I am speaking of is South Africa. Their recent victory at Sarjah has proved the consistency of the team, as well as has dumbfounded their critics, who rebuked the team's defeat to the West Indies at the quarter-final of the World Cup after a series of continuous victory by the team

in the first round. Many consider that the final match should have been between Sri Lanka and South Africa: the only two consistent teams, and the two teams with efficiency in opposite aspects of the game — one in fielding and the other in batting. The West Indians (with the worst form of stability this time) were a little unprecedented after their sloppy start. But altogether, it wasn't their day; everything, even their fielding went wrong. But undeniably the South Africans are still

favourites and they are sure to

prove it in the coming events.

One of the best coaches of

the game, their coach, Bob Woolmer is working on the team since 1994 with his "total cricket" theory. He intends to produce not seven batsmen and four bowlers, but all specialist batsmen and bowlers, ready to confront any troublesome situation. Instead of one Jonty Rhodes, he is bent on creating seven of them and accordingly has made a "catching group". He plans to materialise this evidently impossible task with time, patience and the full cooperation of the players. And this has resulted in a very much balanced team. They are a team that lacks superstars like Jayasuriya and Waqar but every one of them contribute in equally for the team. Of course, the everagile Jonty Rhodes, the unorthodox Paul Adams and Allan

Donald are very much useful. They lost a place in the finals of the last World Cup because of the rain, and again a place in the semi-finals this time. They are thirsty for a real victory — and they are prepar-

ing themselves for it. hope our players learn from them that if a team works with confidence and perseverance, they are sure to turn out indomitable. Accordingly, the BCCB should take steps to lift the standard of the game which is very popular in this part of the continent. It would be good to see Bangladesh in 1999 in England.

Dhanmondi, Dhaka

The Mayor and the 'janata'

Sir. The Dhaka Mayor, finished with his 'Janatar Mancha' may now please give attention to his Janata of the city. As a city father, no doubt, he seems to be very kind and concerned for the poor. Because, forgetting 86 lacs citizens he seems to have given so much attention to a few thousand hawkers, not only giving them the footpath but almost half of the main roads as well. Considering the hardship of his janata he has allowed 'kachabazar' to grow on almost all the footpaths so that the janata don't have to walk further for their shopping.

He is also so kind to the animals that he has set aside few footpaths for cows too, the janata of the respective areas

recommend readers to read 'A School for Advisers by peared in the Friday, 19th April, issue of The Daily Star. This excellent article provides

good tips to prospective investors in a new sector: "Coaching classes for future advisers.

Condition of the roads, lanes and by-lanes needs no mention as his janata have become accustomed to this.

even if unfortunately. Poor and inefficient garbage collection and management absence of proper road marking for traffic movement and control perhaps speak of his concern for those plagued by chaotic traffic jams. Better not to mention about mosquito menace.

But, 86 lac citizens should be more valuable to him than only a few thousand many of whom are not voters either. The janata have by now grown wiser and they know that only action', not 'acting', is more to be counted in any election. And I am sure his goodself

also knows this. So. Mr Mayor may please pay attention to the city and the city dwellers. Please ease the traffic jam and arrest at least a few of the menaces

M A Rashid 95 Lake View Shahjahanpur, Dhaka

Mosquito menace

Sir, I am very much thankful to Mr Mohammad Hanif first elected Mayor of Dhaka City Corporation; for erecting the 'Janatar Mancha' in order to achieve the right cause of

the people. Further, I will be very grateful if the honourable Mayor feels concerned about the plight of several lakhs of people of Sheikher Tek and Adabar areas (Mohammadi Pisciculture, Baitul Aman and several other housing estates) those who are held as hostage of trillions of mosquitoes. The mosquito menace is so great that one cannot read a newspaper peacefully even in the morning without being beaten by them not to speak of what happens at night. The students are particularly the worst sufferers and they have to go under a mosquito net even for

I would, therefore, request the honourable Mayor to come forward this time to rescue at least a few lakh people from small but menacing mosquitoes.

M Shamsuzzoha 2/2A (KHAW). Pisciculture Housing. Mohammadpur. Dhaka

study.