

## Nomination Seeking

With all major parties inviting prospective candidates to seek party nomination, the long awaited free and fair election appears to be finally at hand.

While the election spirit is certainly welcome, we are forced to express our concern about the scramble for winners that all major parties are now involved in. Leaders of both BNP and AL are on record to have said that they will nominate only those people who have a good chance of winning from their respective constituencies. The argument is that loyalty to the party and to ideals are fine, but at the end of the day the party must win. In a candid moment Begum Zia commented a few days back that her party must win because it is only behind winners that people flock. Sheikh Hasina was reported to have warned her party colleagues not to expect nomination just because they have been party loyalists through thick and thin. What the party needs are winners.

This all out drive to bring prospective winners into the party fold may lead to welcoming people with dubious background over the head of leaders of character, integrity and conviction. Take for example the welcoming of the Thief of Baghdad or 'Street sweeper of Ershad' into the BNP fold. This shattered the morale of a large section of BNP loyalists for whom people such as these are the worst examples of corrupt and opportunistic politicians. It is our view that taking in such people harms political party of any standing, leave alone one of BNP's. Similar open door policy may bring in people whose company AL would be far better off avoiding.

The reason we are concerned about this trend is because we are witnessing a wholesale 're-cycling' of politicians many of whom are shifting loyalties for the 4th, 5th, or God knows how many times. Spirit to win is good, but not by sacrificing principles and good and deserving people from one's own fold. Such 'open door' policy also increases the influences of people with money and muscle power, because they also can deliver victory — of sorts. Do we want such 'victors'? Is that what free and fair election will ultimately give us? So, big parties, watch your steps. We, the voters, are watching.

## Strange Facts

Very strange facts are coming to light from Khulna. A girl student of the Khulna University was molested inside the campus by known local mastans way back in October 1994. The University authority mainly in the person of the Vice-Chancellor, on receipt of the complaint and a request for action allegedly asked the father of the victim not to make a splash over the incident and promised to act himself. When nothing followed for nine months, the general students of the university gave the mastans a chase and catching three of them, handed them over to police. The university authority did not like it and served show-cause notices on 16 students it thought to be behind the student resistance. The authority topped this incredible action by expelling 13 of those students from the university for varying periods. Imagine who tops the list of the punished students! The girl who was molested. Yes, the VC has kept the word he is said to have given the father of the girl. He has acted.

We do not say that the bizarre action and its antecedent developments had any communal angle as such the doubly victimised girl being a Brahmin — but there is no escaping the fact that denominations other than Muslim will not be heartened by such gross display of injustice, and also that the wrong doers had an easy day over their prey's being a non-Muslim.

Read this along with a Rangpur kidnap where there is still no trace of Sandhya Rani of Pargachha after a gang of six known miscreants had carried her away breaking into her brother's residence a month ago. The gang is moving about freely and threatening her brothers with wiping their whole family off if cases against them were not withdrawn. Because of the strange inaction of police, the claims of the criminals about minorities being violable at will would appear to stick specially to those at the wrong end of the rub.

The crimes must be stopped and only then their communal underpinnings — very dangerous to the society — would also disappear.

## Press Freedom Day

Thanks to Unesco, we now have a World Press Freedom day, observed internationally on 3 May every year. Bangladesh marked the occasion with a function of sorts at the Press Club yesterday. It is our view that the need and importance of press freedom as an integral part of democracy is not fully understood by both our leaders and the general people. The reason for it is our failure to demonstrate to the public the need for it. The press in Bangladesh today enjoys far more freedom than it did in the past. Yet a lot of fetters still remain. The government policy on advertisement and newspaper quota, VAT on imported newsprint, arresting editors for their political views — all hamper the growth of a free press.

But a case can also be made that the press so far has not been able to give a very matured account of the use of the extent of freedom that it now enjoys. In the absence of an acceptable and credible media watch body, there is a free for all attitude in certain section of the print media. There is no question that often politics overtakes our objectivity and the difference between reporting and editorialising — a difference which is a fundamental aspect of our professional ethics — is blurred. We often seem to forget that what we sell are "newspapers" and not "views papers", that a reader pays Tk 5 first and foremost to get news of the day. Of course every paper must have an editorial position, and put forward multiplicity of views in its post-editorial section. But under no circumstances can the vital difference between commenting and reporting be given a secondary position. Because some of us play down this fundamental requirement of good journalism, many people feel that we take advantage of our press freedom and peddle our own political line instead of looking after the interest of the public at large. We think it is for this vital failure of ours that the notion of press freedom, while being accepted by all, is not so forcefully pushed forward as it needs to be. We must put our own house in order before we can expect the type of public support for press freedom that we see in matured democracies.

# Adjustment and Reform: When Succeed, When Fail?

*The most important determinant of success in the journey towards adjustment and reform seems to be a total commitment for the reforms not from the government alone (if at all) but also from the population and its different constituencies. Consensus is the key to the success.*

FACED with prolonged economic stagnation, mounting poverty and accumulating debt, many countries of the world leaped to a series of structural adjustment programmes during the 1980s. The main purpose of such adjustment programmes was to revamp economic growth through resource shifts from unproductive and inefficient sectors to the productive and efficient ones. Out of many experiments with adjustments and reforms made so far, few success stories are found on record. On the other hand, a number of frustrating experiences tend to put the whole adjustment process into serious question and indictment. Resurgence of growth occurred in some countries part passu adjustments but disappointing performance in many raised annoying questions about the virtues of the whole adjustment and reform programmes. The perennial question is: why some performed well while others performed worse despite having faced identical circumstances and similar constraints? Israel Hussain of the World Bank attempted to succinctly present some of the factors adducible to good or bad performance. The researcher thought it foolhardy to draw any broad generalization but, nevertheless, posited to give few answers. Given that Bangladesh is also one of those wearing 'adjustment and reform' caps, the experiences

of others might provide her with some lessons. The success stories tended to display 'the ownership and commitment of the government and the population of the country to the programme, including the willingness to sustain the policies in the face of pains and transitional costs.' Such a consensus is believed to have positive correlation with successful outcomes. 'Any amount of side interferences, coercing or coaxing by foreign donors and international financial institutions will not help in the absence of internal consensus.' As far as Bangladesh is concerned, the adjustment programmes and reforms, allegedly have been imposed by aid conditionalities. Successive governments made little attempt to popularize the virtues of the programmes and build up consensus on these vital issues. In the name of 'state secrecy', the adjustment and reform agenda have never been placed in the parliament for discussion or for public debate. Thus, people at large felt alienated from, but not aligned with, the reforms. This half-hearted and haphazard implementation of reforms without having arrived at a broad internal consensus is not likely to create any positive durable effects. Adjustment programmes should be owned by the adopting

government and not perceived to be imposed by outsiders. Since adjustment and reforms appear to impose some transitional costs, many governments, faced with pressures from vested interest groups within the economy try to reverse or switch gears in mid-term. This constitutes an important impediment to the success by tarnishing credibility and continuity of

displayed, some success over the years in attaining a praiseworthy macro economic stability. But the success seems to have fallen flat due to various economic and non-economic factors. Most important of them, perhaps is the command of political considerations over economic imperatives. Again, well implemented adjustment policies may be a

adjustment and reforms. Those countries provided, according to the researcher, automatic access to imported foreign exchange, eliminated export bans, and facilitated access to intermediate inputs. As far as Bangladesh is concerned, a number of steps have been taken to encourage export oriented industries. Substantial departure has also been made from the import substitution strategy of development. But still incentive schemes are alleged to be anti-export. Besides, exporters face insurmountable disadvantages with respect to power, telecommunication or other infrastructural facilities with cost reducing devices so much so that they tend to lose their competitive edge.

The success stories also tell us that the environment for private-sector development is better than those unsuccessful cases where 'preferential treatment for parastatals, labour market rigidities, regulatory barriers, financial sector inefficiency and the hostile attitude of the government towards private profit maximization have not changed significantly. The credibility and continuity of macro economic policies are seriously questioned and therefore do not provide much comfort to prospective investors. In the context of Bangladesh, private

sector process started since 1975 but till today, allegedly, not much is said to have been achieved. According to one study, despite massive denationalization and privatization programme of the early 1980s, public sector domination could be seen in evidence from the fact that in 1989-90, government-owned enterprises accounted for 25 per cent of employment, 60 per cent of fixed assets and 29 per cent of gross value added within the large and medium industry category.

From the deliberations made above, it follows that the most important determinant of success in the journey towards adjustment and reform seems to be a total commitment for the reforms not from the government alone (if at all) but also from the population and its different constituencies. Consensus is the key to the success. The second important determinant seems to be the institutional and administrative changes that are necessary to suit the changed conditions in the society. And the third important determinant appear to be an enabling environment for business, trade and investment. The main elements of such an environment, needless to mention perhaps, are political stability, continuity of policies, a proper legal system etc. It is hoped that whoever holds state power after the ensuing general election would take these issues in due cognizance and take up necessary steps in this regard.

## Beneath the Surface

by Abdul Bayes



politics. We strongly feel that half a reform is better than no reform. If the patient needs a heart surgery, it is better that all is done at once and at one stroke. Delays and discontinuity would only add to the pains of the patient.

Macro economic stability came out as one of the keys to successful cases. To attract investments and revive growth nothing seems to succeed like undervalued exchange rate, low inflation and low budget deficits. Another important element of success is to raise the savings rate. Bangladesh

necessary but not sufficient condition for accelerating growth in the economy. The level and efficiency of investment and changes in institutions and administrative capacity should improve substantially either accompanying or closely following the policy changes. As far as Bangladesh is concerned institutional and administrative changes are shelved for a distinct future thus causing investment to shy away.

Export promotion has been given sufficient attention in countries that succeeded with

# Caretaker Government — Uphill Task

by Md. Asadullah Khan

*As situation exists today, it will not be healthy to have this country governed by just one party. Moderates now claim that there should be other political families taking part in government allowing a spirit of accommodation, tolerance and respect for each other's views and fostering development of the country.*

WITH the national election looming up in mid June, voters' mood after two years of exhausting experiences of chaos and clashes, violence and orgy of destruction still seems to be quite irritable and difficult to fathom. Some of the political parties, pointing a finger to suspected biasness of the caretaker government are seemingly in a bid to create confusion about the polls process. As it turns out, national reconciliation that permeated through the formation of a caretaker government, is rather fading fast. But this could mean a dangerous symptom and may spell disaster that the country has somehow averted. The caretaker government installed through consensus comprising persons of eminence and with reputation of integrity has supposedly been working relentlessly towards creating a climate favourable for fair election. Transfer of officials from one district to another which has hardly to do anything in influencing 'the polls' verdict in favour of any of the contending parties is being questioned and has sparked criticism from some of the political parties. An ex-Chief Justice of the Supreme Court and temperamental sober and mild-mannered with a reputation of honesty throughout his life, Chief Adviser Habibur Rahman might often feel dejected, at such postures, in his move to cleanse the debris accumulated over the years.

Some political parties out of desperation even now talk about boycotting election of the President that eventually short circuit the legislature. Election victory in our country even if the election is fair, sometimes, gives rise to hatred and bad blood that only speak of a lack of democratic culture. Encouragingly, in many countries of the world, election victory did not spark such clash and violence. In France, in 1988 election, Chirac conceded minutes after the dimension of his setback had been made public. Subdued but smiling he went on national television to say, 'In a democracy it is the people who are masters and I bow to their choice. I wish France and the French good luck.' People want that we could foster a democratic culture in that way. As situation exists today, it will not be healthy to have this country governed by just one party. Moderates now claim that there should be other political families taking part in government allowing a spirit of accommodation, tolerance and respect for each other's views and fostering development of the country.

Even if the election ends up with no serious skirmishes, policies and authoritarian dictates and can interfere with the decree making powers of the President that eventually short circuit the legislature. Election victory in our country even if the election is fair, sometimes, gives rise to hatred and bad blood that only speak of a lack of democratic culture. Encouragingly, in many countries of the world, election victory did not spark such clash and violence. In France, in 1988 election, Chirac conceded minutes after the dimension of his setback had been made public. Subdued but smiling he went on national television to say, 'In a democracy it is the people who are masters and I bow to their choice. I wish France and the French good luck.' People want that we could foster a democratic culture in that way. As situation exists today, it will not be healthy to have this country governed by just one party. Moderates now claim that there should be other political families taking part in government allowing a spirit of accommodation, tolerance and respect for each other's views and fostering development of the country.

and one of the contending political parties is installed in the seat of power, that hardly signals an end of sorrows and hardship of the people. The stubborn country that managed to defeat the military might of Pakistan and then hold other extremist forces at bay and now waging a war against hunger and unemployment appears to be losing the battle to internal crises and primarily to economic mismanagement. The economy virtually is in dire straits. Newspaper reports have it that only the garments sector has sustained a loss of Tk. 7000 crores during the last two years, jute and textile sectors present no better prospect. Growth remains low by all measures available. Inflation can hardly be tamed and is likely to mount up further because of the funny money to be funneled on the eve of election for wooing the voters.

The country's mounting problem of violence and crime pose a serious threat to peaceful election prospect. It is impossible to hold a free and fair election without total recovery of illegal arms from different parts of the country which necessitates complete neutrality of the law enforcing agencies, and co-operation of the political parties. On the other hand, unless field level officials who would be entrusted with the polls process act with complete neutrality and honesty, the whole exercise will again fall in a fiasco. None should knowingly invite such prospect for the country.

In the country's most noticeable and genuine election fever looming up after such a long hush and tussle, people want to see a fair election free from the caprices of gun-toting goons of any political parties. The effectiveness or success of arms recovery campaign has been far below people's expectation. Shots are still being exchanged between the contending factions in the campuses and elsewhere but, unfortunately, law enforcement personnel fail to recover these arms. CEC has expressed his dismay over the arms-recovery process while the people's feelings are also not anything better. As things turn out, the best thing that the administration could do was to take a device like Geiger-muller Counter over the campuses and suspected areas as is usually done for detecting radioactive leakage and contamination beyond human sight. Law enforcement personnel imbued with the zeal and mission to

rid the country of the festering malaise and catastrophe can work here as the Geiger-muller Counter. It should be emphasized that in the event of the poll being disrupted by violence, the future may, again send hundreds and perhaps thousands of angry people into the streets. People as such urge the caretaker government to mobilise all forces at its disposal to ride out the storm much before it has intensified. The best thing would be to keep the armed forces on guard at every centre. At the same time Election Commission must consider it a vital necessity about enlisting some responsible citizens as poll-watchers in different areas of the country.

Historically true, elections in the country tend to be dominated by personalities holding cash rather than by policies, and are often beset with violence, fraud and rigging. Without contradiction, the need for credibility has never been greater. People are muttering that after so much hue and cry if this is not a clean and honest election, then 'democracy' itself may be in jeopardy. If we can't decide the important matters through the ballot, then inevitably there would be a tendency to settle them through the gun. But that is not the cure and we shouldn't allow that to happen. People want and need a credible election that will restore people's faith in democracy. Let us all make it so.

## 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.

## Non-cooperation, and rise in price of food stuffs

Sir, The non-cooperation was observed in the spirit of a movement all over the country and it brought the much sought-after caretaker government in to reality. But it has also caused tremendous imbalance in the economic infrastructure of Bangladesh. During the non-cooperation movement, the price of food stuff became sky high due mainly to lack of transport facilities.

It is believed that after the tempest, calm prevails. But in our case, the non-cooperation movement is over, yet still the price of necessary commodities has not come down to the original level. What would happen to those whose income has not increased with the increase in the case of food stuff? If such trend continues, I apprehend to the grave concern of the whole nation, the country would be a place of only for a fortunate few and that also for a while. So please arrest the trend now.

Md Ramzan Ali  
B/4-402, Eastern Point  
Shantinagar, Dhaka.

## Water shortage: Pump with WASA supply line

Sir, Dhaka WASA has been advertising on TV, Radio and in newspapers etc. for economic use of water and at the same time, cautioning the consumers not to construct very big under-ground water tank to reserve huge quantity of water. Of course, there is no mention what should be the ideal capacity under-ground water tank. If the consumption of water per person per day is taken as 45 IG, to my mind, the reserve tank should be of 90 IG, keeping a permanent

reserve of 45 IG to meet any abnormal situation fire accident etc.

There are people who are drawing water by fixing pump with WASA line directly, causing extra-ordinary problem to others of the area. This is unlawful. But necessity knows no law, as in Dhaka city there is no other alternative arrangement for the water consumers. Of course, the rational use of available water, sharing with all consumers of the area may minimise the acute shortage to some extent.

The Dhaka WASA has been spending lot of money for advertisement without any tangible result. I think not a single consumer has abandoned using pump with WASA line. They are to be lawfully forced. And for this the WASA needs to check each and every consumer's line from time to time, by combing operation. I hope the Dhaka WASA will do the same soon, not to antagonise consumers, rather to please more of them.

M S Haq  
Mohammadpur, Dhaka.

## Martyr Dudayev of Chechnya

Sir, Dudayev has been killed in Russian rocket attack. Long live Chechen freedom fighter Dudayev.

Chechnya is a part and parcel of Russia and no territory has the right to secede, 'said Russian President Boris Yeltsin. We wonder how Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania seceded from former Soviet Union and how the former Soviet Union itself splitted into fifteen separate independent and sovereign countries?

And how the former Yugoslavia broke into six pieces, how former Pakistan was divided into two and how former Czechoslovakia was made into two separate states? There is no trace, no

record, no document available in Russian history that Chechnya is a Russian territory. The fact is that in the 18th and 19th centuries when the British Imperial forces were colonising the Indian subcontinent, the Russian Czar's hordes were invading and annexing Muslim territories in the Central Asia and Caucasus regions one after another.

The martyrdom of Dudayev will not stop the struggle of the Chechens for their independence. Indeed the world history has recorded yet another tragedy in its pages. The freedom struggle of the people of Chechnya would go on with renewed valour and infusion of new blood till the independence of Chechnya is achieved. We in Bangladesh who have achieved our independence through a sea of blood and tears, pay our highest respect to Shahid Dudayev. We pray to God that may his soul rest in peace and the people of Chechnya may have the courage to bear the great loss.

We also call upon the world conscience, the freedom lovers and the human rights activists all over the world to stand by the side of the innocent people of Chechnya.

O H Kabir  
6, Hare Street  
Wari, Dhaka-1203

## Polythene menace

Sir, Polythene bags and other waste have become a serious threat to the people who are living in cities and towns. Now, gradually this menace is affecting the village people. These bags have blocked the drains of the towns and there is hardly any open field without polythene bags, strewn over there.

In the past, the government was about to stop the production of these bags, but only because a number of people would have lost employment, it did not take any action to stop its production.

Now, if the government do not stop its production, it should at least take some steps to improve the ecology situation. There is nothing like polythene that is polluting our environment.

I think government should observe a week-long programme to collect the bags

from every nook and corner of the towns and cities. If we ignore this polythene menace, then at time will come when polythene bags will cover all the drains, pipes and open fields of the country.

So clearing off these bags is of utmost importance for a healthy life in the country. I request the authority concerned to take immediate steps in this regard.

D A K Choudhury  
136/Housing Estate, Sylhet

## BIRDEM

Sir, I made an application to the BIRDEM for the post of Scientific Assistant on the basis of an advertisement that was printed in *The Daily Star* on the 13th of August '95. Our viva voce was duly held on the 20th of November '95. But we did not receive any result. Since BIRDEM has a good-will of sincere and genuine recruiting system, it could have informed me whatever the result.

I hope the authority would take note of the matter and intimate us, even if it is late seemingly.

Md Mobaraz Karim  
266, Zahurul Haque Hall  
Dhaka University.

## Fire in Forest

Sir, Your editorial captioned "Fire in Forest" mentioned that two square kilometers of deep forest had been burnt down in the Sundarbans in a bushfire. But another paper mentioned that the fire might have been taken place from the thrown away torch of the honey collectors. There couldn't be any bushfire, because the temperature of Khulna was not so high on 19th April.

Moreover we have never heard about any bushfire in any jungle of Bangladesh. I do not understand why any big enquiry committee has not yet been constituted to pinpoint the reason of the fire? Why wasn't any chopper used to fly over the place? We have our army aviation team. They could have helped to reach the place. No picture has been shown on the BTV. This clearly indicates poor handling of our important affairs.

Mahbubul Haque Chowdhury  
153, Lake Circus, Kalabagan  
Dhaka

## The President

Sir, If there is anything wrong with portfolio of ministry of defence lying with the President of the country (as per 13th amendment of the Constitution), I think it is to be corrected through legislature (next elected Parliament). But our politicians, perhaps in their effort to make it an issue outside the Parliament once again, are trying to make the task of the caretaker government difficult.

But we know that as per Article 61 of the Constitution, President is the supreme commander of our defence services and whoever may be holding the charge of the defence ministry. Regarding the deployment of army during national crisis, it is the President who issues the formal order. Our politicians are rather tainting the image of the institution of the head of the state.

Md Iqbal  
Balubari, Dinajpur

## Space for public meeting

Sir, Readers must have noticed and appreciated the editorial "space for Public Meeting" in the DS (April 8). Politicians usually block and use city roads to entrap pedestrians to listen to their speeches. For this, they hold most meetings at 3-30pm, a time, one and half hours away from the both office pack-up times. For the same reason, at prominent traffic intersections of the public/private "office para", venues are chosen. As offices pack-up, most people get trapped in their road block. Besides, personal safety is another minus point. For instance, no shopkeeper of the New Market attends Paltan meetings, but all at Paltan area have to do it (for their own safety and security).

The unorthodox growth of Dhaka city is another reason, why public meetings should not be held inside the city. The densely populated capital city, developed by the RAJUK, has the most unplanned and uncontrolled distribution of public/private offices/commercial complexes/campuses/dwelling areas/open spaces/roads etc. Thus in this

scenario, any public meeting held at any spot in the city seriously affects the business, road traffic and all other related activities of the city.

DS's recommendation, of using space of Army Museum and its surrounding, would have been better, if in the vicinity, the following were not there. Existence of clumsiest traffic intersections, Farm Gate on one side and Mahakkhal on the other (besides M/V Avenue and Bijoy Sarani ones), will create jam for blocking and diverting traffic of various routes. Very often, the PM's Office, CSD-Godown, Airport Terminal, Tejgaon PS and offices of Dhaka Cantt will face the public meeting related difficulties.

So, instead of that, if we select the space of Bishwa Jyeta Maidan as the permanent site for all future public meetings, then we will get a vast open space at a safe distance, but not too much away from main road and Dhaka city. For more than two decades, interested followers are gathering there every year. This Maidan should be further developed and maintained as a permanent venue for public meetings. Sooner it is done, the better will be for all.

A R Choudhury  
House#39, Road#11  
Sect#4, Uttara,  
Dhaka-1230

## Marketing of sunflower oil

Sir, Press reports regularly encourage the virtues of sunflower oil. The cultivation of sunflower is also being encouraged. But there seems no marketing network at the national level.

The agricultural extension service in the public sector may start a promotion campaign, and make the oil available at retail level through prominent outlets.

It has been searching for sunflower oil in the local shops for the last five years; the local product is not available, and the imported brands are too expensive. We used this oil while living abroad.

Less talk, more action, please.

A Husnain  
Dhaka.