

Suggestions to Heed

The CEC's first workshop session with divisional commissioners and top district officials has proved useful in a significant way. It has signalled the emergence of an effective election machinery. A check-list for ensuring fair voting is in hand and coordination between agencies has been given a fairly good start.

What is more, after taking the weather from a select group of DCs and SPs, the Chief Election Commissioner, who seemed to have some reservations about the law and order status at one stage, is now convinced that it has 'improved considerably.' His rather upbeat mood is caught in these concluding remarks he made: "My anxiety is gone, I feel very much inspired now (by the good prospect of a fair election)". We share the CEC's new confidence.

We also have a good deal of appreciation for the guidelines the chief Election Commissioner has given to the DCs and SPs. He has urged them to get in touch with social and opinion leaders, including UP chairmen and members, and devise the ways and means of ensuring an atmosphere congenial to fair polls. This effort can neither be perfunctory nor routine; it has to click this time. The law enforcers' boldness to arrest terrorists and recover illegal arms will not be enough of a clincher. This has to be underwritten by the political parties who need publicly to disown the hoodlums.

Some DCs and SPs have made a few concrete suggestions. These deserve to be heeded because they are the crystallised opinions of weather-beaten and election-veteran officials of the government. It is their experience with the previous polls that has wizened them in a perspective where as the CEC himself has said, "There is no alternative to making the election totally acceptable to all."

Let's pick up three of their brain-waves. The proposed restriction on movement of motorised vehicles on the election day is a good idea because a thing like a Pajero jeep has become a symbolic purveyor of muscleman and perhaps of weapons. Zonings would need to be done there — we guess. Yes, we believe, even the licensed arms need to be deposited with the thana authorities temporarily given the stigma some of these have taken on. Up to a point, we would like the elections to wear a festive look, subject to expenditure control.

Israel on Wrong Foot

Israel's mortar attack on a United Nations base in Lebanon — in which more than 100 civilians got killed and another 100 were wounded — has come under serious scrutiny at the UN Security Council. Neutral analysis of the incident shows that the attack was deliberately carried out on the UN installation. The Israeli positioning on the incident indicates that there was indeed a foul play. At first, Tel Aviv flatly denied its part in the raid and put the blame on Hezbollah Guerrillas against whom Israel's wrath is public knowledge. Now she admits her involvement but blames it on wrong mapping for the action.

Experts at the UN, however, are convinced that Israel could not have made a hay-wire choice of target, for its sophisticated radar system was capable of giving a clear and precise picture of the location — unless of course the weather was unusually foul.

What is more significant is that at the time of the attack an unmanned reconnaissance plane was detected flying nearby. So the conclusion about the motive of Israeli attack leaves little scope for doubt.

Prime Minister Shimon Peres has had his reasons to give an impression of toughness against the Hezbollah Guerrillas after their bomb attacks inside Israel, particularly before a general election. But extending the offensive to Lebanon, an independent state, and targeting the UN base at Cana have no justifications whatsoever. Consider the Palestinian Liberation Organisation's earlier gesture of goodwill to Tel Aviv whereby it had dropped the 'destruction of Israel' clause from its charter. What an Israeli response now to that most conciliatory Palestinian move!

Does Israel want to subvert the peace process? If it does not, it must give up its old ways of aggression.

Of City Vermin

A Reuter report says that the Rumanian capital Bucharest, once known as the Paris of East Europe, is now being pestered all over by stray dogs, there being one such for every ten residents of the city.

That isn't why the city has hit the headlines. The human population there has been very badly outstripped by that of the rats — 10:1, to be precise. Bucharest's enemies seem to be strangely metric-oriented — the cockroaches there number 200 for each Bucharestian. And mosquito half that at 100:1. To be so grossly outnumbered by vermin certainly pushes that place out of the world's most fancied cities.

The strength of Dhaka vermin has not been computed and no one has thought of doing so till now. Without any chance of being controversial let us assume both cockroaches and mosquitoes to be only ten times over the Bucharest ratio with two thousand of the former and 1000 of the latter being there in Dhaka for every man. That would give us 16 billion cockroaches and 8 billion mosquitoes.

The Dhaka populace has been pining for the arrival of a messiah who would deliver them from the bites of the flying menace. They do not mind the cockroaches perhaps because these do not bite. But these are equally unwholesome as neighbours as are the mosquitoes — if not more. There are places where a cockroach dish is a sought-after delicacy. One could get rich quickly by exporting whole cockroaches or dried ones or powdered cockroach juices and flavours.

Dhaka, to be a city and a worthy capital at that, must be free of all vermin.

Politics and Economics: Stay Apart, for God's Sake

Since we have established a democratic system, to sustain and promote this cherished institution both people and political parties must cooperate. All political parties, specially the major ones, may come to an understanding among themselves so as not to make any political movement, which will cause heavy loss to the economy on a national scale.

It is evident that politics and economics are highly interdependent. Without one, the other is hard to flourish. Politics and politicians provide the necessary guidance as to how to run the economy. In the absence of some measure of economic prosperity, on the other hand, politics cannot flourish. Again, without political stability, no economic progress can be achieved.

In this light, one may analyse the political and economic developments in our country during the past two years. In this period, due to certain political movement the country's economy received a serious setback. The total loss, only in the garment industry was estimated at around Taka 7,000 crore. Irrespective of the veracity of the estimate, all agree to the fact that the loss to the economy was immense in the short run and almost enthralling in the history of Bangladesh. At the same time, they also agree to the fact that the loss was avoidable, only if the other party agreed to its political demand.

It is not the purpose of this article to apportion blame on one political party or another for the staggering loss to the economy. Both sides can and have advanced apparently cogent arguments in support of their claim that the other side is to blame. Only history will tell who is right. One thing is, however, certain that the general mass of people do not wish to undergo again such suffering and sustain so much social and material loss as they did in the past two years.

A political objective has been attained, no doubt. Both sides claim victory. The former opposition leaders assert that the changeover to the caretaker government was, in fact, a fall of the government precipitated by a mass upsurge for realisation of a popular demand. The former ruling party contends that their victory lay in their completion of the normal tenure of five years before handing over power as ordained by the constitution, to a legally constituted caretaker government. They had no intention to stay in power more or less than five years, as provided in the constitution, before the next parliamentary election. And so they did.

Whoever may have won, the people — the general public — were the ones who lost. This is gauged in terms of loss of income, employment, business, industry, investment and so on and so forth. The first two may perhaps be overcome by effecting a short-term recovery. But loss in the fields of trade, industry and investment have a long-term effect not only on the national domain, but more so in the form of loss of confidence, in particular of our economic and financial partners from abroad. The garment industry, the principal foreign exchange earner for the na-

tion for example, has not only sustained enormous loss and remained thousands of its members, but cast heavy doubt on its ability to induce its lost clients back into their folds. To regain their lost confidence would be a herculean and time-consuming task.

Even in the medium term, due to dislocation and forcible snapping of inter-city communication during the non-cooperation movement, fertiliser and other useful items could not be transported easily to end-users and in time. The result is a food deficit which may range up to 2.5 millions tons, whereas about two years ago we came almost to the brink of self-sufficiency in food grains production. The loss in customs duty, the main revenue source of income for the government, during the same period, caused a gnawing gap between government's revenue and expenditure. This will land the government in great difficulty to fend for the cost of foodgrains out of a bankrupt economy, which the newly elected government is going to inherit.

Again, never in the history of Bangladesh even during the liberation war and the preceding all-out and a really voluntary non-cooperation movement Chittagong port was closed or kept non-operational. This time it happened not only causing revenue loss for the government but also by completely shattering faith and confidence of international shipping in us. It blocked exports and also essential im-

ports. Similarly, the fear of assault, broken cars and damaged public transport kept the general public home and contributed to the 'success' of hartals, seizures and the non-cooperation movement. One cannot, on the other hand, deny that some were indeed motivated by ideals to participate in such activities, but the number of such activists and otherwise uninvolved persons were quite small.

Anyway, we try to draw a parallel, erroneously though, of the recent movement with those which took place during

their doors. petrified during the rule of both the Awami League and the Jatiya Party. The state of the economy was, in fact, much worse than during the last BNP rule. People now ask, and legitimately so, whether the magnitude of the BNP misrule was so grotesque as to justify a self-inflicted movement designed to bring about its downfall by way of causing people so much of misery and by crippling the economy. It was too high a price the people had to pay for a doubtful benefit.

Despite efforts by all concerned, the danger of violence

the major ones, may come to an understanding among themselves so as not to make any political movement, which will cause heavy loss to the economy on a national scale.

the merit of the formula lies in providing the much needed political stability in the country as sine qua non for economic prosperity by way of building confidence and establishing credibility both at home and abroad for our industry and business houses.

In support of the suggestions outlined above, one may look at other countries. These need not be the highly politically stable and rich nations like USA, UK etc. Let us look at some of the industrially developed countries but with a substantially long history of political instability. Since the second World War, Italy witnessed a turnover of about 55 governments formed precariously, mostly in coalition. Till the commencement of the 5th republic in 1958, France had so many changeovers in government that it gave rise to a joke that every French man would cherish the hope of becoming Prime Minister at least once in his life-time. The reports of frequent fall of government in Japan even now is quite intriguing.

Despite all these political crises, political parties in those countries conducted their movements in a purely democratic manner. They did not take it to the streets and certainly committed themselves to no action which had ill-effects on their economy. They kept politics and economics apart and prudently did so. Even in our neighbouring country like India, political rivalry and movements did not cause economic loss on a national scale. We therefore, have a lot to learn from them for our own use and benefit.

The big question now poses itself as to who is to bell the cat. The political parties are currently engrossed in their legitimate pre-election activities. The caretaker government may consider this task outside the purview of its legal and constitutional mandate. Even then, the government can indeed contribute a lot from behind the scene. The general public have no forum as such, except some liberal minded parties as well as social and non-political organisations. These, along with this business community, are the organisations which can take some bold initiatives. Besides, the most important of all who can play a decisive role in moulding and expressing public opinion is our media, especially newspapers and journals.

They are capable of preparing the ground well, if they will, and some good Samaritan may then come forward to act as the catalyst for promoting a worthwhile cause in genuine public interest.

At any moment of time, the government party will glibly agree to such an arrangement.

and the opposition will reject it outright claiming it to be a violation of their inalienable human and democratic rights. The latter will also be tempted to designate one or more occasions as crisis-points justifying launching a national movement or some protest.

In order to avoid such a situation, it may be prudent to consider worthwhile for the political parties to take a decision on this issue before the election is held. Everyone knows it well, once the new parliament is elected the opposition of the day will never agree to such an arrangement. This is the most opportune time for taking action since no political party can, with a measure of certainty, predict who is going to form the government and who will be in the opposition.

Since we have established a democratic system, to sustain and promote this cherished institution both people and political parties must cooperate. All political parties are willing and able to get over their influence, and

in the coming election looms large in the minds of people. What most politicians are unable to fathom is how much their political parties are held hostage by terrorists, mafias and possessors of unauthorised arms. During the past two decades such persons have grouped themselves into such a formidable force that obliged the political parties to be highly dependent upon them for their future and also for success in the election. Until and unless the political parties are willing and able to get over their influence, and

in the coming election looms large in the minds of people. What most politicians are unable to fathom is how much their political parties are held hostage by terrorists, mafias and possessors of unauthorised arms. During the past two decades such persons have grouped themselves into such a formidable force that obliged the political parties to be highly dependent upon them for their future and also for success in the election. Until and unless the political parties are willing and able to get over their influence, and

in the coming election looms large in the minds of people. What most politicians are unable to fathom is how much their political parties are held hostage by terrorists, mafias and possessors of unauthorised arms. During the past two decades such persons have grouped themselves into such a formidable force that obliged the political parties to be highly dependent upon them for their future and also for success in the election. Until and unless the political parties are willing and able to get over their influence, and

in the coming election looms large in the minds of people. What most politicians are unable to fathom is how much their political parties are held hostage by terrorists, mafias and possessors of unauthorised arms. During the past two decades such persons have grouped themselves into such a formidable force that obliged the political parties to be highly dependent upon them for their future and also for success in the election. Until and unless the political parties are willing and able to get over their influence, and

in the coming election looms large in the minds of people. What most politicians are unable to fathom is how much their political parties are held hostage by terrorists, mafias and possessors of unauthorised arms. During the past two decades such persons have grouped themselves into such a formidable force that obliged the political parties to be highly dependent upon them for their future and also for success in the election. Until and unless the political parties are willing and able to get over their influence, and

in the coming election looms large in the minds of people. What most politicians are unable to fathom is how much their political parties are held hostage by terrorists, mafias and possessors of unauthorised arms. During the past two decades such persons have grouped themselves into such a formidable force that obliged the political parties to be highly dependent upon them for their future and also for success in the election. Until and unless the political parties are willing and able to get over their influence, and

in the coming election looms large in the minds of people. What most politicians are unable to fathom is how much their political parties are held hostage by terrorists, mafias and possessors of unauthorised arms. During the past two decades such persons have grouped themselves into such a formidable force that obliged the political parties to be highly dependent upon them for their future and also for success in the election. Until and unless the political parties are willing and able to get over their influence, and

in the coming election looms large in the minds of people. What most politicians are unable to fathom is how much their political parties are held hostage by terrorists, mafias and possessors of unauthorised arms. During the past two decades such persons have grouped themselves into such a formidable force that obliged the political parties to be highly dependent upon them for their future and also for success in the election. Until and unless the political parties are willing and able to get over their influence, and

in the coming election looms large in the minds of people. What most politicians are unable to fathom is how much their political parties are held hostage by terrorists, mafias and possessors of unauthorised arms. During the past two decades such persons have grouped themselves into such a formidable force that obliged the political parties to be highly dependent upon them for their future and also for success in the election. Until and unless the political parties are willing and able to get over their influence, and

in the coming election looms large in the minds of people. What most politicians are unable to fathom is how much their political parties are held hostage by terrorists, mafias and possessors of unauthorised arms. During the past two decades such persons have grouped themselves into such a formidable force that obliged the political parties to be highly dependent upon them for their future and also for success in the election. Until and unless the political parties are willing and able to get over their influence, and

in the coming election looms large in the minds of people. What most politicians are unable to fathom is how much their political parties are held hostage by terrorists, mafias and possessors of unauthorised arms. During the past two decades such persons have grouped themselves into such a formidable force that obliged the political parties to be highly dependent upon them for their future and also for success in the election. Until and unless the political parties are willing and able to get over their influence, and

in the coming election looms large in the minds of people. What most politicians are unable to fathom is how much their political parties are held hostage by terrorists, mafias and possessors of unauthorised arms. During the past two decades such persons have grouped themselves into such a formidable force that obliged the political parties to be highly dependent upon them for their future and also for success in the election. Until and unless the political parties are willing and able to get over their influence, and

in the coming election looms large in the minds of people. What most politicians are unable to fathom is how much their political parties are held hostage by terrorists, mafias and possessors of unauthorised arms. During the past two decades such persons have grouped themselves into such a formidable force that obliged the political parties to be highly dependent upon them for their future and also for success in the election. Until and unless the political parties are willing and able to get over their influence, and

in the coming election looms large in the minds of people. What most politicians are unable to fathom is how much their political parties are held hostage by terrorists, mafias and possessors of unauthorised arms. During the past two decades such persons have grouped themselves into such a formidable force that obliged the political parties to be highly dependent upon them for their future and also for success in the election. Until and unless the political parties are willing and able to get over their influence, and

in the coming election looms large in the minds of people. What most politicians are unable to fathom is how much their political parties are held hostage by terrorists, mafias and possessors of unauthorised arms. During the past two decades such persons have grouped themselves into such a formidable force that obliged the political parties to be highly dependent upon them for their future and also for success in the election. Until and unless the political parties are willing and able to get over their influence, and

in the coming election looms large in the minds of people. What most politicians are unable to fathom is how much their political parties are held hostage by terrorists, mafias and possessors of unauthorised arms. During the past two decades such persons have grouped themselves into such a formidable force that obliged the political parties to be highly dependent upon them for their future and also for success in the election. Until and unless the political parties are willing and able to get over their influence, and

in the coming election looms large in the minds of people. What most politicians are unable to fathom is how much their political parties are held hostage by terrorists, mafias and possessors of unauthorised arms. During the past two decades such persons have grouped themselves into such a formidable force that obliged the political parties to be highly dependent upon them for their future and also for success in the election. Until and unless the political parties are willing and able to get over their influence, and

in the coming election looms large in the minds of people. What most politicians are unable to fathom is how much their political parties are held hostage by terrorists, mafias and possessors of unauthorised arms. During the past two decades such persons have grouped themselves into such a formidable force that obliged the political parties to be highly dependent upon them for their future and also for success in the election. Until and unless the political parties are willing and able to get over their influence, and

in the coming election looms large in the minds of people. What most politicians are unable to fathom is how much their political parties are held hostage by terrorists, mafias and possessors of unauthorised arms. During the past two decades such persons have grouped themselves into such a formidable force that obliged the political parties to be highly dependent upon them for their future and also for success in the election. Until and unless the political parties are willing and able to get over their influence, and

in the coming election looms large in the minds of people. What most politicians are unable to fathom is how much their political parties are held hostage by terrorists, mafias and possessors of unauthorised arms. During the past two decades such persons have grouped themselves into such a formidable force that obliged the political parties to be highly dependent upon them for their future and also for success in the election. Until and unless the political parties are willing and able to get over their influence, and

in the coming election looms large in the minds of people. What most politicians are unable to fathom is how much their political parties are held hostage by terrorists, mafias and possessors of unauthorised arms. During the past two decades such persons have grouped themselves into such a formidable force that obliged the political parties to be highly dependent upon them for their future and also for success in the election. Until and unless the political parties are willing and able to get over their influence, and

in the coming election looms large in the minds of people. What most politicians are unable to fathom is how much their political parties are held hostage by terrorists, mafias and possessors of unauthorised arms. During the past two decades such persons have grouped themselves into such a formidable force that obliged the political parties to be highly dependent upon them for their future and also for success in the election. Until and unless the political parties are willing and able to get over their influence, and

in the coming election looms large in the minds of people. What most politicians are unable to fathom is how much their political parties are held hostage by terrorists, mafias and possessors of unauthorised arms. During the past two decades such persons have grouped themselves into such a formidable force that obliged the political parties to be highly dependent upon them for their future and also for success in the election. Until and unless the political parties are willing and able to get over their influence, and

in the coming election looms large in the minds of people. What most politicians are unable to fathom is how much their political parties are held hostage by terrorists, mafias and possessors of unauthorised arms. During the past two decades such persons have grouped themselves into such a formidable force that obliged the political parties to be highly dependent upon them for their future and also for success in the election. Until and unless the political parties are willing and able to get over their influence, and

in the coming election looms large in the minds of people. What most politicians are unable to fathom is how much their political parties are held hostage by terrorists, mafias and possessors of unauthorised arms. During the past two decades such persons have grouped themselves into such a formidable force that obliged the political parties to be highly dependent upon them for their future and also for success in the election. Until and unless the political parties are willing and able to get over their influence, and