Founder-Editor: Late S. M. Ali

**Public Commitment Due** 

### Dhaka, Wednesday, June 5, 1996

Chief Election Commissioner Mohammad Abu Hena's meeting on Monday with the representatives of BNP. Awami League, Jamaat and Jatiya Party proved useful against the backdrop of eruptive violence of rabidly political nature. He has succeeded in obtaining a 'positive response' to his suggestion that political parties issue from their central offices statements to their activists requiring them to refrain from any terrorist activity in particular and to abide by the electoral Code of Conduct in general.

By 'positive response' we understand a commitment having been made by the political parties to the whole nation via the CEC that they would promptly issue the directives in the form of public statements through the electronic and

print media.

Those who met the CEC informed him of having already instructed their activists along the desired lines; but we don't regard this as being sufficiently pre-emptive against tendencious violence itching all the time to erupt on the edge of taut nerves. This was done through the respective party channels and, quite obviously internally, with a limited prospect for keeping them on leash. That's why we want universally obligatory public commitments from all the political parties towards disciplining their cadres and abjuring the use of force - right through the run-up to the poll-day and its aftermath.

The party leaders might hasten to point out that they have been urging their workers to keep from terrorism anyway; so where is the big need for making a separate appeal publicly on the question? What render the current political ambience so impelling for them to issue public commitments to fighting violence from inside their party organisations are: (a) intimidations and arms-brandishing are being heard of; and (b) terrorists being terrorists may indulge in satisfying personal vendetta knowing full well they can palm it off with a political colour.

## **Quality of Candidates**

Candidates for the June 12 national election have some common characteristics that make interesting reading. According to the Power and Participation Research Centre (PPRC), an overwhelming majority of the candidates belong to the upper segment of society. The middle class and the lower class are conspicuously absent from the contestants' list. One obvious conclusion from this is that national politics has now become costly and other political basics are relegated to the back-burner.

If the money power is there, muscle-power cannot be far behind. Compared with the 91 election; the June one has a far greater share of candidates who patronise mastans. In Awami League, the number of candidates said to be giving protection to mastans has almost doubled - from 18 per cent to 34 per cent. The BNP has beaten everyone in the race by increasing its share more than four-fold — from 11 per cent in '91 to 49 per cent in '96. Only the number of Jatiya Party's patrons for mastans has gone down from 56 per cent to 36 per cent.

So here is a case for serious concern. The increasing infiltration of bad blood into politics has the potential to vitiate the whole process of a civil society's struggle for consolidating democracy. The trend is towards a monopolisation of politics and power in the hands of the privileged class not many will be there to fight for the poor and the underprivileged in our parliament.

Now look at the contradiction: the candidates, if elected, pledge to eradicate mastanism from their respective constituencies but a large percentage of them are known to have direct links with the mastans themselves. There is no reason to think that the major parties did not know whom they were granting the nominations to.

It is too early to say how the perceived elitist and strong financial bias behind selecting the candidates will influence the quality of our politics. But about one thing there is no doubt: politics has definitely started charting a new course.

The silver-lining amidst the gathering clouds though is that a large number of the nominees are at least graduates. The best we can hope is that they will, given their strong financial background, not give in to easy temptation of making money by using their position and power.

Party Stakes The arrest of a young man wanted in a murder case and accused in six other cases led on Monday to clashes between BNP activists and the police culminating in the gherao of Mirpur thana. The arrested youth has been identified as the general secretary of the Mirpur thana unit of the JCD. Why should the police and the thana come under attack when the law enforcers were simply performing their duty? Since the wanted man belongs to a party that was only recently in power and furthermore holds a party position, he cannot be touched whatever may be the crime. Is that

the reasoning? No one has the right to take law into his hands. But the arrogance and defiance of law as displayed by the BNP activists in Mirpur once again prove how disrespectful our political party followers can be of the rule of law. If murderers and anti-social goons enjoy political patronage and shelter, it is futile to expect the country's law and order to improve. Let the BNP come out with a public statement depreciating the Mirpur incident and its perpetrators.

Does it prove that the man the BNP activists are standing in support of is a criminal who could not be defended in the court? What then is the stake in defending him out of legal ways? The crux of the problem lies here. Political parties have developed a tremendous stake in defending men of ill reputation. If they fail to consider such elements a liability, there is little chance of politics here emerging clean and accountable to people.

ELECTIONS IN ISRAEL.

# No Dove Nor Hawk in Leadership

Shimon Peres, while following the Peace Process has not shied away from ma ssive bombing raids of Lebanon - south and north - in order to exterminate Israel's current mort of enemy 'Hezbollah'. Nobody expects Netanyahu to do any less.

conflict and war between the Arabs and Israel. Receiving unconditional backing of the most important superpower USA, Israel proceeded with conquest and expansion at the expense of her Arab neighbours. 1967 saw the climax when Israel conquered the vast Sinai desert from Egypt Golan Heights from Syria and later added South Lebanon.

HIS is election season in many parts of the

world. It is attracting

attention, thanks largely to the media, which in our times has

invaded living rooms of a very

The media hype that we have witnessed during the

Israeli elections has been to-

tally dispreportionate with the

importance of the event. The

result of the election - a paper

thin majority for either

Shimon Peres, the incumbent

Prime Minister or Benjamin

Netanyahu, the challenger

could be predicted way ahead of the elections. Israeli elec-

torate has traditionally given a

small edge to one or the other.

In the present case it is

Netanyahu, who has emerged

the victor by a whisker.

ment of surprise. Yet it was

Israel and the Jews around the

world have a great hold on the

media. This is very well known

to the Arabs and particularly

Chairman Yasir Arafat, who

very wisely has put a blanket

ban on all Palestinian leaders

from commenting on the

ally no impact on internal mat-

ters. The focus thus is entirely

on the Peace Process with the

Arabs. Does the arrival on the

scene of Netanyahu herald any

important change in policy

with the Arab neighbours of

erned by likud as in the pre-

sent case or Labour, as was the

case with Shimon Peres, has

followed a steady national for-

since its bloody birth in 1948

with the help of Britain, mas-

ter of the region at the time

and more with the US, where

tionately large role compared

the displacement of a large

number of Arabs and particu-

larly Palestinians. This was the

beginning of half a century of

come a serious problem in many cities in the world. Increase in the urban

population, rapid urbanisation

and industrialisation have

resulted in a drop in the air

quality of the cities and a

decrease in the quality of ur-

ban environment. In this back-

drop the World Environment

Day is being observed today.

June 5, obviously with a hope

to contain the causes of degra-

of the country is centred

mostly in Dhaka. As a centre of

economic activities and as a

densely populated city. Dhaka

has experienced degradation

of the environment on a larger

scale than the other cities of

There are limited informa-

tion on the air quality of

Bangladesh since air quality is

not monitored on a regular

basis. Attempt has been made

by the Department of Envi-

ronment (DOE) to monitor

the air quality of Dhaka and

Chittagong at a very small

scale. Total Suspended Parti-

culate (TSP) has been found to

be the major contributor to air

pollution. Other important

the country.

In Bangladesh, the economy

IR pollution has be-

The birth of Israel meant

the Jews played a dispropor-

Israel has had a stormy past

Israel, whether it is gov-

Israel? Certainly not.

to their population.

eign policy.

Israeli elections have virtu-

One reason of course is that

Therefor, there was no ele-

presented as big news.

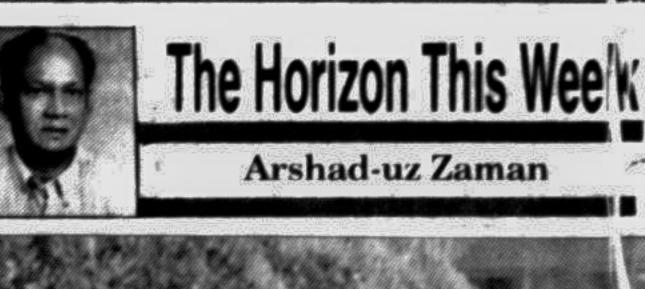
Israeli election

large segment of humanity,

It is the Palestinians, who had lost their territories and had become refugees. They mounted an energetic and successful campaign against Israel and became more than a thorn on her side. Almost half the population of present Jordan are Palestinians and they made Jordan their base for murderous attacks against Israel. Jordan finally pushed them out and Lebanon became the battleground between Palestinians and the Israelis. Meanwhile an event of far reaching importance took place in 1973

The Arabs turned the tables on Israel by mounting a surprise attack and driving the Israeli soldiers out of Sinai, The US intervened directly to bail out Israel. It is then the Israelis came to the negotiat ing table for serious talks. As the new Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu celebrates his wafer thin victory, he would do well to recall the events of 1973 and after.

It is land for peace that became the new slogan. Anwar Sadat, the President of Egypt became the first Arab leader to go to Jerusalem, the holy city for the three monotheistic faiths. He signed a deal with Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin and the first Israeli Embassy in an Arab capital was opened. I was Bangladesh Ambassador in





Benjamin Netanyahu

They have followed policies as they have seen them in their national interest

restored

prehensive peace treaty. These

negotiations started in

Alexandria in Egypt but led to

nothing. It has been well

known that the heart and soul

of the Arab-Israel conflict has

been the Palestinian question.

The Palestinians have carried

on a relentless campaign and

even managed the amazing

diplomatic feat of obtaining

recognition of more than a

hundred states, without exer-

cising sovereignty over

Palestine. In fact even today

more states recognize

The Peace Process received

dramatie breakthrough dur-

ing the Clinton administration

first in Madrid, then in Oslo

and finally the historic hand-

shake between Chairman Yasir

Arafat and Prime Minister

Yitzhak Rabin as a beaming

President Bill Clinton looked

on. This is a handshake that

has shaken the world. The

mortal enemies of at least past

a century not to speak of a

hoary past, decided to bury the

the Peace Process received a

mighty boost and has gone

sovereignty over the West Bank

and Gaza is being progressively

e stablished and no sane person

cloubts that a Palestinian state

with all the trappings of

I srael has gone ahead with

signing a peace treaty with

ordan Israel is in the final

itages of her negotiations with

Syria and the deal is territory

for peace - return of

Sitatehood is well on its way

forward.

With this giant leap forward

Palestinian

Palestine than Israel.

Shimon Peres, while following the Peace Process has not Cairo and saw these momenshied away from massive tous events. Egyptian bombing raids of Lebanon sovereignty over Sinai was fully south and north - in order to exterminate Israel's current The second part of the deal mortal enemy 'Hezbollah' was negotiations with the Nobody expects Netanyahu to Palestinians leading to a com-

the Arabs.

do any less. Ever since her flery birth in 1948. Israel has been tormented by the idea of security. She sought it through expansion at the expense of Arab terrifory. This led her to nowhere. After the debacle of 1973 war she has sought it through accommodation with

sovereignty over Golan to Syria in exchange for diplomatic ties

hawk in Israeli leadership.

There has been no dove nor

between the two.

This has brought genuine relief on the faces of Israelis. The Palestine-Israel accord has brought about a sea change in the Middle East situation. which no force will be able to reverse. This is why the post Israeli election hype is grossly exaggerated. The reality is that the comprehensive Arab-Israeli Peace Process is truly engaged and cannot be reversed. There will be obstacles on the path as we have seen in the recent past but they will not be able to deflect the majestic march towards peace.

Since the birth of Israel through the midwifery of the US, we have witnessed here ever-growing role on the world stage and today she alone calls all the shots in the Middle East. In her global strategy it is the US who launched the Peace Process and is committed to bring it to a successful conclusion. As Benjamin Netanyahu, the new Prime Minister of Israel, goes to Washington as his first foreign place of visit, as has been the case with all former Israeli heads of government, he will no doubt find out the depth of US commitment to the Peace Process.

## WORLD ENVIRONMENT DAY

# Air Pollution in Banglackesh

### by Dr Fahmida Akter

pollutants are - Sulphur Dioxide (SO<sub>2</sub>) and Nitrogen Oxide (NO<sub>2</sub>). The DOE found that the level of TSP concentration in most of the areas under observation exceeded the national standard for ambient air quality in Bangladesh. For example, the allowable level of TSP concentration in residential area is 140 microgram per cubic metre. But in Lalmatia residential area it was found to be as high as 287 microgram per cubic metre in the month January, 1990.

One of the most important sources of air pollution in Bangladesh is the emission from vehicles. A survey done by the DOE in 1990 showed that the emission from 86 per cent vehicles in Dhaka city exceeded the acceptance level of emission in terms of Bangladesh standard Out of 908 vehicles which were surveyed. 77 per cent were found to be highly polluting. The reasons for increasing emissions from vehicles are, firstly, the number of vehicles are increasing

which is partially a result of the reduction of import duty on vehicles. During 1983 to 1992 total number of vehicles in Bangladesh has increased at the rate of about 8 per cent per year. The second reason for vehicular emission is the poor maintenance of gasoline fuelled. Scooters, three wheelers and motor cycles which are major contributors of SO2. NO9 and carbon emissions. The gasoline contains lead so that vehicles emit lead as well. Diesel powered vehicles — bus. minibus and trucks - emit

Particulate matter is widely recognised as having severe health effect in urban areas. It is emitted into the atmosphere from numerous sources such as transportation, fuel combustion, industrial process and solid waste disposal. It has natural sources as well such as soil dust, forest fires, sea salt, soil and rock debris and volcanic eruption. TSP persists in

the atmosphere longer than larger particles. They are small enough to be inhaled and to penetrate deeply into the respiratory tract after absorption in the blood. The mortality and morbidity effects of a pollution on human health are many including acute sickness or death, insidious or chronic disease, shortening of life or impairment of growth or development, diminishing performance, untoward symptoms such as sensory irritation, discomfort and impairment of visibility. Lately, development of asthma, chronic bronchitis, lung cancer and reductions in intelligence quotient (19) have also been associated with air pollution.

A number of studies have been carried out both in de veloped and developing countries such as USA, Canada, UK, China, Brazil, Chile and Indonesia, showing a positive relationship between high

could avoid a large-scale

sponses to HIV/AIDS are car-

ried out by communities with

the support of non-govern-

mental organisations' (NGOs)

and community organisations.

NGOs and community organi-

sations can learn about and

understand what issues al-

fected and concern local peo-

community members to be-

come involved in learning

about and taking local action

on HIV/AIDS. However, the

NGOs and community organi-

sations cannot do this work

on their own. They need the

support of the government and

as other sectors of society such

as businesses and the medical

profession. We must fight

Fair election

against AIDS together.

Ring Road, Shyamoli

38/1. Block- F

Dhaka-1207

international donors, as well

They can then encourage

The most effective re-

HIV/AIDS epidemic.

ievels of pollution and mortality and morbidity. It is likely what the results of an epidemiological study for Bangladesh would be similar to those of the other countries.

Air pollution damage is a huge social burden on the country. If one tries to put a

monetary value on the health impact of air pollution the figure could be very large. Enforcement of regulations and monitoring are required to control emissions from vehicles, industries and other sources. A complete scenario of the extent and sources of air pollution is a prerequisite for

policy formulation. The writer is an environmental economis

## OPINION

## Politics, Democracy and Bureaucracy

Shamsher A Chowhdury

Politics in one form or the other constitutes an essential part of human nature. Bangladeshis and Bengalees aire no exception. What is rather disconcerting to-day in the context of Bangladesh is its current trend. One of the essential pre-requisites for development of healthy politics rneaning the development of the institution of democracy has been the participation of the people at large.

As much as this is true the act remains that in enactment Of democracy, partisan politics has been the traditional tool for its development at all

On the other hand, partisan politics has traditionally been kept away, on purpose, from the civil bureaucracy. As much as democratic conventions are essential to the socio-economic development of a nation for the sake of good governance, a healthy institution of bureaucracy is of no less importance. Bureaucracy is the principal tool through which the fruits of democracy are carried forward. It is therefore essential that this vehicle be kept above all partisan and

specific 'group-thinking'. In the context of the above let us analyze the recent political events that took place in Bangladesh. To say the least the nation as a whole has very little to be proud of. The trends and the legacy cannot but raise serious concerns in the minds of any responsible

citizen of this country. We have seen how proudly in the name of democracy a whole lot of bureaucrats allongside others took to open politicking including partisan politics. To my estimation this has set a dangerous trend and at some point may even prove to be suicidal both for the c ountry and the 'institution of democracy itself. Step by step we are engaging ourselves in weakening our handful effective independent development i nstitutional infrastructures. Of late we have dragged the Army

It has been frequently argued by various shades of polit-Ical opinion that they were sstruggling in advancing the cause of democracy following the spirit of independence. Till date I do fail to see the relevance to the context. There may be a remote relevance to the overall spirit. However, whatever happened e an one find a similarity beit ween the War of by dependence in terms, of its genesis, its cause and purposes, its perspective then and the long and protracted strug-

tale which ensued recently. Yes

the entire nation stood up as

one in our struggle for inde-

pendence. The question then

too in the arena.

remains, is the present political debacle is of the same dimension and perspective like that of the struggle for independence? The last political upsurge was that of party in terests first and of those of the others second. How then our respected and wise bureaucrats got entangled in all this? The struggle for independence in 1971 was for freeing a nation from the shackles of an occupation army, a movement which signified a nation's struggle for independence and nationhood. The participation of all cadres of the people including the bureaucrats was

then the need of the hour.

Whatever happened in the recent past can any one of us as a citizen of one of the poorest nations of the world be proud of? Can our political Godfathers assure us of anything positive that has come out of what they call 'the long struggle'? Has it paved the way for any measure of positive thinking for the general masses at large? Has it given the people a direction for the future? Has it enhanced our image in the Committee of Nations across the world? Hence the question remains as to what has really been achieved! On the contrary this 'struggle' and the 'movement have merely set the clock backwards for Bangladesh by at least ten years.

People often argue that democracy works slow through a process of trial and error before it is able to attain an institutional frame. Be that as it may, have we really made any honest effort towards that direction? Have we really put democracy in this country to a test in any degree of fairness? Have we even tried to make an honest beginning? Bangladesh though a young country twenty-five years have passed by and we are yet to see a proper thrust in the right di-

Step by step it appears that the few institutional infrastructures that exist in the country with any degree of heritage are also being made questionable in their objective and purpose Bureaucracy is certainly one such institution among these

Our culture and motto should be to work as honest professionals in our respective calling and matters will automatically fall into places - the country will progress so shall we. Let us exercise tolerance and at the same time, have the courage and the will to see the right from wrong. Let us make work our culture and not strife. hatred or jealously Surely we can and we must if this nation of ours is to survive with dignity and self-respect.

## Neutrality and BTV

Sir, BTV, now under the control of the present caretaker government, is supposed to be neutral in its political news-casting. But I was surprised to find that it was not so, while presenting the 8 pm news on June 2, 1996. While presenting the news of a political meeting addressed by the Awami League chief Sheikh Hasina that evening, the pictures of the meeting showing the AL president addressing the audience were given.

But a close look showed that those pictures were obviously of a previous meeting addressed by her, as it showed Sheikh Hasina without wearing the "Hejab" - which is not the case since she returned from her last Hajj perfor-

Side by side, the above news. while referring to the meeting addressed by the BNP chairperson Begum Khaleda Zia on the same day did not present any picture of the same meeting

Is this neutrality of the BTV in its news-easting of a political meeting addressed by the head of one of the two largest political parties in the coun-

Dhanmondi R/A, Dhaka

## Responsive press?

Sir, The country has been passing through a difficult time recently. The past government resigned at the height of a popular movement. The press in Bangladesh, when they are free, have always played a very significant and patriotic role in the mass movements. At a time when the electronic media was under the full control of the party in power, it was the print media (and also the foreign radios) which kept the people informed about developments in the national political and other fronts. But the general public want to be kept informed about the develop-

ments everyday. Unfortunately, the national print media here have recently been very much nonresponsive to this. Let me give

the example of 27 March 1996. It was at the height of the anti-BNP movement but the newspapers in Bangladesh decided not to be in the news stand that day. The same thing was repeated during the Eidul-Azha and we were deprived of the newspapers for four consecutive days. And again it happened on the 30th May. The public was kept out of touch of the happenings in the country and outside for all those days because of the non-

publication of the newspaper. We acknowledge the fact that the people connected with the newspaper industry are not super humanbeings and they do need breaks. But we (and they) should not forget that they have chosen for themselves a very responsible position in the society.

It is not uncommon in our history that newspapers in such situation of national emergency were published under special arrangements (often in reduced size). It is unthinkable in countries like Britain or India that newspapers and closed for four days in a row! May we expect some responsive behaviour from our newspaper workers for whom we are proud of?

NR Chowdhury Uttara, Dhaka,

## Establishment of

private universities Sir. Mushroom growth of private universities is symbolic to the development rate of education of a country especially in a poor country like Bangladesh. We welcome those educationists and philanthropists whose thoughts have been highly acclaimed by the nation for establishment of universities in the private sec-

These universities should be the substitutes of the public universities of the country. But in case of these universities. what do we see? These universities are established in the name of the "Well known" and "Reputed" universities of United States of America and Britain and charging the same fees like foreign countries. As

a result the poor but meritorious students cannot avail the opportunities for higher studies in those universities. Only few affluent students can afford

to get admitted in to these. Il so, these universities in real sense do not serve the nation. Or they are not substitutes to the government-based universities of the country. The private universities are charging higher rates of fees which are beyond the means of majority of the students. They are denied the opportunity to pursue higher studies because the limited capacity of the government-financed universities of the country cannot accommodate such a large number of students.

I would request the authority concerned to look into the matter and fix the fees for the students reasonably so that all brilliant students can afford higher studies . I humbly request the benevolent founders of these universities to think over the matter and come forward to help the na tion for increasing the quality of education. The nation will salute for their benign endeavourance.

Jahanara Zaman 15/3 West Rajabazar, Dhaka

## Fight AIDS together

Sir. As the 'Facts and Figures' article on AIDS in the Star magazine (dated 17 May demonstrated. HIV/AIDS is an issue of concern to everyone in Bangladesh. It is not just an issue for sex workers and injecting drug users, but for all people in our country - both men and women, adolescents and adults, rich and poor, and for all professions, including business leaders and policy mak-

Bangladesh has a unique opportunity to respond to the threat of HIV/AIDS. At the moment, few cases of AIDS or HIV (the virus which causes AIDS) have been reported in comparison to other countries such as Thailand and parts of India. With effective awareness and prevention work, there is every chance that Bangladesh

Sir, The address of former prime minister Begum Khaleda Zia which was published on 29th May, 1996 in The Daily Star drew my attention. A public meeting was, held on 28th May in Feni. In that meeting Begum Zia gave the following speech, referring to the arrest of over 30 leaders and workers of her party in Feni district.

"Don't think that you will stay for your lifetime where you are today. You cannot stay any where in Bangladesh ... BNP is not in power now, but we know what is to do.'

Begum Zia warned the local administration against the harassment of her party activists by the above statement. My question to the former prime minister Begum Khaleda Zia is: does not the speech prove that the party wants to use the administration in favour of its advantages? If it is true, how the people of Bangladesh can expect a fair election will be held under the present government?

Sheikh Shahjahan 50/1, West Tejturi bazar Tejgaon, Dhaka 1215