## The Baily Star Founder-Editor : Late S. M. Ali

Dhaka, Saturday, June 22, 1996

## Let BNP set a new standard

The near midnight news that BNP has decided to respect the verdict of the people and join the Sangsad came as a great relief to all. Accepting in good grace the election and its outcome - and on a positive and forward looking note - was what people hoped for. We commend Khaleda Zia for not allowing the dictates of the hardliners, most of whom lost in the polls, to hold sway. All the world is by now satisfied that this has been a particularly good election, better even than the '91's. Not all parties have done well but they have all accepted the results. BNP has not at all done poorly. It is through gains made by AL at the cost of mostly Jamaat and others that BNP finds itself in a position it very pronouncedly dreads. And if a party is incapable of seeing itself in the opposition, great store cannot be set by its protestations of democracy. BNP's continued barrage of denunciation of the caretaker government and the Election Commission and of the foreign observers doesn't do the party's reputation any good. It only isolates the party very gravely.

BNP's obsession with what they feel to be a defeat and with the theory that this has been a result of machinations has so far prevented the party from trying to read the message there is in the people's verdict. If it appears to be too difficult and diffused, try to rationalise the defeat of so many ministers and party stalwarts. BNP must look out for the reasons why so many of its leaders got the boot, while so many others got elected. There are reasons galore that BNP must find for itself, for their good as well as the nation's.

Cut this surfeit of self-righteousness. As a first step in that direction we we are happy that BNP took the poll results graciously as it did last night. Let the BNP set a new standard of what a parliamentary opposition can do for the country and its people.

## **Human Rights Record**

The Amnesty International (AI) paints a disappointing picture of Bangladesh in terms of the country's human rights record. Only last year's record is enough to put us to shame. Torture in jails, death under police custody and extra-judicial execution are a clear sign of a repressive and undemocratic government. In 1995 the government had to its discredit all these excesses which were not negligible in number. The Al estimates that at least a dozen people were kept in captivity without any charge or trial for differing opinions - political or otherwise. Seven deaths in police custody and the extra-judicial execution of nine people bore a clear proof that the administration was averse to seeing an independent judicial system at work and its role was not congenial to the growth of a civil society.

Along with various human rights bodies and organisations we had been demanding the abolition of the SPA. Instead of that demand being met we got a tough anti-terrorism law in virtual extension of the SPA. The country hardly deserved such a harsh treatment from an elected administration. Our long history of struggle for democracy makes it incumbent on the people in power to abolish all such black laws and also to bring in transparency in the governance. When an administration resorts to brutal force and manipulation of laws, it

is bound to be secretive.

Apart from this, the influence it thus leaves on society is of a malevolent kind. It loses the moral authority to punish criminals and forces inimical to a peaceful and progressive civil society. It is simply because of this that the unlawful trials of women by village councils could continue and the administration could not virtually take a tough stand against the practice. The AI laments that violators of human rights were not brought to justice and its delegates were not permitted to visit Bangladesh in July. It is hardly surprising that the government did so.

Let us hope the new government will take up the human rights issue on a priority basis and do away with the SPA and all such black laws as soon as possible. Administration of justice must not only be fair but seen to be fair as well.

## Luminous Remembrance

In the long, lighted highway of life, she has crossed another milestone. Sufia Kamal is 86. On Thursday last, the grand old lady who has been epitomising the luminous consciousness of people in this part of the world and, particularly, the creative psyche of women for a long time, stepped into the sixth year of her octogenarian identity. In the warm assembly of loving, caring admirers many fond thoughts must have swarmed her mind. It could not be otherwise. Because until now it has been a long tale of a life well spent; a life invested with selfless thought of loving people; a life committed to the cause of being always in the forefront of the march with the torch of progress.

Imbued with the principle of the very few women of the subcontinent who broke away from the social legacy of the unhealthy masculine assertion at the cost of the feminine spirit, Sufia Kamal's life lies there as an open book of inspiration and direction for the young generations awaiting their turn of muliebrity. In this rotten time of mutilated history and the cacophony of the concert of rationalising the preference of convenience to conviction, Sufia Kamal remains a

stay against confusion.

She has always been the most vociferous champion of the spirit of our War of Liberation. The other most prominent feature of her life has been the intellectual crusade against the male chauvinistic prejudice that has a history of working against female participation in national development. Both these streaks landed her in controversial circumstances with the fouled political reality of Bangladesh tending to undermine her contribution with a partisan tag. Happily for us, this adverse reality could not dent her conviction one bit.

Sufia Kamal has outgrown the adversities of time to be a beacon to the women of this country. Happy birthday Sufia Kamal, live well and long.

# Prime Concerns of the Prime Minister

The future PM of Bangladesh, Sheikh Hasina, should give a serious thought to the kind of student politics that pervades the highest citadels of learning. The nation awaits her good judgement on this score and expects that she starts the journey as 'Mrs Clean'. tion was that once given scope

CCORDING to the latest available election results. Bangladesh Awami League"(AL) clinched a single majority in the Parliament hagging 146 seats. Waiting on the lence, is also the support from JP and JSD to form government. This victory can be termed as a bounce-back by the AL which has been struggling for the last two decades or so to come to power. Ruling aside the possibility of any more political dusts and horse-trading one can, perhaps, safely conclude that AL is destined to form a government and its leader Sheikh Hasina Wazed is poised for the prime ministership. We would like to extend our heartiest congratulations for the incumbent. In fact, congratulations are due for all of those who marked their presence in the struggle for establishing a democratic process in Bangladesh. Once given the captainship.

what she d be Sheikh Hasina's — thoughts of the moment? The only way that she can survive with political dignity is to choose a new path of ruling this country. Humbly. we would like to suggest her to learn from the mistakes that successive governments in Bangladesh have made in the past and, especially of the immediate past. In fact, the mistakes by the successive governments in Bangladesh have were of the same nature, gravity and ramifications.

Let us cite a few examples. None of the governments so far attempted to free the TV/Radio from the clutches of the ruling party. The assump-

to speak, the opposition would gain political strength. The present caretaker government allowed almost all political par ties to have some say on the TV. How many of them were accepted by the recent verdict? We would suggest that AL does not repeat the past folly and thus give access to others to air their respective views Since our expectation is in consort with AL's election pledge, there should be no room for any suspicion. Second, no government in the past apparently have made earnest endeavour to put law and order under control. A comparison of the scenario under a caretaker government and that of an elected government clearly forestalls the fact

that a non-partisan approach

to terrorism and terrorists

could go a long way to curb

them. We strongly feel that ar

resting the law and order

would become the major and

immediate concern for the upcoming PM To this effect, she can call upon all political parties within or outside the Parliament - to help her minimise the rot. In this connection, the question of the separating judiciary from the executive - as promised by Sheikh Hasina would pave ways for better justice in the society. We hope that her party would take the lead in ushering changes on

these fronts. On the economic front, her of foreign and domestic in-

prime concern should be to continue with the ongoing reform process in Bangladesh There is, perhaps, little shrade of doubt that Bangladesh economy needs some overhauling through structural adjustments and reforms. The best approach towards meeting this end would be to try to build up a national consensus on vital issues. However, the BNP had a modest beginning as far as some of the reform measures

vestments in Bangladesh necris to be evaluated. Our neighbour ing countries are experiencing helty growth of foreign investments. The reasons for which increasing investments tend to flock into those countries are: (i) better incentive schemes: (ii) less regulatory barriers (iii) better physical and social infrastructure: (iii) presence of a conducive legal system; and (iv) credible. transparent government poli-

## Beneath the Surface

by Abdul Bayes

are concerned. Unfortunately, the enthusiasm hovering around such needed changes soon fell flat and the success recoiled in the absence of: (i) a public debate on the main items; (if) a vision as to how to proceed with them; (iii) a situation to accept some political costs for the sake of wider economic betterment of the country; and (iv) political stability. It is expected that the future PM of Bangladesh and her party would learn from the fatlure of the past government and steer the country's economy keeping pace with the changing global economy.

In this connection, the role

cies. To attract more foreign investments into the country there is no other better substitutes than addressing the above issues.

In its election manifesto. AL made commitment to provide subsidy to the farmers. We would not like to initiate any debate on the good and the bad impacts of such subsidy. Suffice it to say here, perhaps that there are more cost-effective ways to helping poor farmers in particular and the farmers in general. For example, provisions for electricity in a village could benefit farmers in that village more than few takas of subsidy. Or a good approach road might help

farmers to market their inputs or outputs. There is an empirical truth that the farmers in Bangladesh are not scared of paying an interest rate of 10 to 15 per cent for borrowed capital. Any pro-people government should target to make agricultural credit available at right price and in right time.

It is well known to all of us that the performance in the agricultural sector was stagnant over the years. Available empirical evidences show that non-agricultural sources of income are emerging as the prime mover of rural household income. The future government should develop strategies and policies keeping in mind that even land-poor households can increase their earnings from non-crop activitjes such as fisheries, livestock and kitchen gardening. The role of NGOs and government institutions in the process of credit delivery the development of these activities should not lose attention

Few words about student politics. We are sure that this issue would, to an extent, seize the concern of the future PM of the country. Over the years, terrorists got hold over student politics. No more are brilliant students available to give it a direction of change. It is simply in the interest of national power politics that few students are groomed to grow up with guns. The violence that cramps campuses has its link with the party in power.

The future PM of Bangladesh. Sheikh Hasina, should give a serious thought to the kind of student politics that pervades the highest citadels of learnmy. The nation awaits her good judgement on this score and expects that she starts the journey as 'Mrs Clean'.

The last but not the least is pervasive corruption - against which roared in her election campaign. We do not expect that corruption from this society would wither within few years. But it would perhaps not be too much to hope that a war against the 'devils' is the need of the hour. In pursuance of her election pledges, she should immediately call upon her partymen, especially the public representatives, to provide statements regarding their source of income and ask other MPs in the parliament to do the same. We shall further expect that the alleged corruption episodes in the last fertiliser crisis and also the other cases are exposed to the public and necessary arrangements are afoot to punish the cul-

It was not the purpose of this note to load our next PM with a volley of problems to solve. In fact, a handful of the issues mentioned have already been aired by her during the election campaign. We would only hope that, to repeat, the AL government would learn from past mistakes not only of others but also of theirs. Let us spend more time and create more space for changing the course of our history rather than sparing them in chewing historical anecdotes.

# The Problem of Election Expenses Still Remains Unresolved

by Nurul Kabir

The system of public scrutiny of the financial statements of the MPs is an effective way of ensuring the legislators' accountability — both political and financial — to the people.

HE remarkably higher percentage of voters turnout in the June 12 national polls clearly indicates that our people, if provided with a peaceful atmosphere are keen to actively participate in the process of building democratic institutions. With similar enthusiasm shown in 1946, 1954, 1970 and 1991 general elections, the people of this land have expressed \* over the last half-century the same commitment to a democratic polity. It is therefore the politicians, together with the civil and military bureaucracy, who are to be blamed for the failures behind the absence of strong democratic institutions in our country.

Despite some specific allegations of vote rigging and manipulation of election results in certain polling centres by some political quarters, the June 12 polls have attained national and international acclaim for being 'generally free and fair'. By our regional standard, it is really difficult for one to reject the elections

as a rigged one. However, the elections have left the conscious segments of the society to ponder over the rather unlovely challenge of how to make the polls free of corruptions, espe-

cially the financial corruptions. By now it's probably an open secret that a large number of candidates in the last polls, especially those belonging to the major political parties, have spent more money in the polls than permitted under the particular provision of the electoral law. There are speculations, both published and unpublished, that some candidates have even spent 10

to 30 times the official ceiling of Taka three lakh set by the Election Commission (EC) while the political parties have spent hundreds of crores of

According to the law, each candidate is legally obliged to send a statement on the source of his or her election expenses to the Returning Officer concerned within a week from the date of withdrawal of candidature. The contesting candidates are also obliged to send a copy of the statement by registered post to the EC. "A person is guilty of corrupt practice punishable with rigorous imprisonment for a term which may extend to seven years and shall not be less than two years, and also with fine," the law further says.

But press reports say that such returns of 706 out of 2574 candidates including political leaders like Khaleda Zia. H M Ershad, Abdus Samad Azad and Matiur Rahman Nizami did not reach the EC until June 13. The EC has so far not taken any effective steps to take the defaulters concerned to task. With the election over, one can hardly expect that the losing persons among the 706 candidates. who did not submit their statements within the stipulated time, would come forward to do so.

Under the same law, a contesting candidate or his/her election agent obliged to open a separate account with a scheduled bank

for the purpose of making payments of the election expenses, and the election agent of a 'returned' candidate is obliged to submit to the Returning Officer a statement of all payments made by him each day together with all the bills and receipts within 15 days after the publication of the name of the returned can didate. Along with it, the agent is obliged to submit a statement certified by the scheduled bank concerned showing the amount deposited in and withdrawn from the account of the candidate.

The candidates' response to the pre-election obligations being very poor, it is presumable that their response to the post-electoral obligations would be poorer. Even if the MPs submit both their preand post-electoral financial statements, the EC has no mechanism of its own to verify either of the documents the statement on the sources of election funds, the bank statement and other related

In all mature democracies of the world the citizens are legally entitled to scrutinise the financial statements sent to the EC by the candidates concerned. The democracies of the west also have legal as well as administrative meehanism for examining the statements. The practice helps considerably in keeping the electoral process free from financial corruptions. The sys-

tem of public scrutiny of the financial statements of the MPs is an effective way of ensuring the legislators' account ability -- both political and fi nancial — to the people.

Meanwhile, a pre-poll comment of the Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) that if he had time at his disposal, he would have sought amendment to the law relating to the ceiling of Taka three lakh as election expenditure for each candidate clearly indicates that the CEC is unhappy with the legal provision concerned. But what is not clear about the statement is that why the CEC is willing to change the law: Is it because the CEC himself is convinced that Taka three lakh is not adequate enough for a candidate to meet election expenses these days, or does he want to incorporate some fool-proof clauses into the law so that none can escape the rule, whatever the ceiling is?

Whatever the case may be. the EC. if really committed to make the contesting candidates fulfil both the pre- and post-electoral obligations, has to think about further amendment of the law to make sure that the candidates are compelled to fulfil both their pre-

**OPINION** 

Please accept my heartfelt

congratulations to you, and to

the members of your party, for

your momentous victory in the

parliamentary elections held

on June 12th. As you should be

congratulated for your victory

we must also mention that the

democratic, fair and peaceful

election we enjoyed this time

was possible because of the

movement for a neutral go-

vernment that you and the

other opposition parties had

started. Although the pro-

longed political battle has

adversely affected the entire

nation we can now say that

there has been some benefit;

the satisfaction of an election

that has been widely accepted

as an accurate representation

of the people's mandate. This

is another step towards demo-

cratic maturity for our rela-

tively infantile state. As the

leader of the next political

party expected to form a

government we do not doubt

your wisdom, but as you step

towards your role as leader of

the nation there are a few

things which we implore you

vital lesson that Bangladeshis

are finally reaching a level of

they can bring down a govern-

ment which doesn't work for

important now to stay in tune

with the needs of your people

and their opinions. The last

government paid no heed to all

that was said and written agai-

nst their policies. There was a

widespread dissatisfaction and

lack of support yet they stea-

Knowing this, it is very

the nation!

This election has been a

to keep in mind.

and post-electoral obligations The EC has to have its own mechanism to see whether the financial statements of the candidates are true or false.

Even if the rule relating to expenditure ceiling on the candidates is effectively implemented, a corruption free election would still remain illusive unless the EC legally imposes a ceiling of expenditure on the political parties. With no such ceiling for

the parties, they are legally free to pour money as much as they can in the elections. The parties, especially the major parties, have extensively exploited the loop-hole of the law. They spent huge amount of money for holding thou sands of railies, bringing out processions and maintaining hundreds of wholetime ac tivists across the country There are allegations that the parties have disbursed money

among the electorate of cer-

tain constituencies. They also

colour posters. But the major

printed, in defiance of certain code of conduct for the parties and candidates, thousands of big-size multi-colour posters. The electoral code of conduct barred the 'contesting political parties and candidates' from printing multi-

parties including Bangladesh Nationalist Party and Awami League have evidently printed. and pasted on city walls, many such posters. Although none of such publications carried the name of the political organisation, the party affiliation was evident from the content and message of the posters.

Having no mechanism of its own to identify the players behind such violations of rules, the EC would never be in a position to punish the law-breaking political parties. such publications involve lot of money, which once again brings the fund of the political parties in question.

However, the problems relating to influence of money in the elections could largely be solved through enactment of a law seeking transparency of the funds of country's political parties. Under such law - it could be termed as political parties act - all the political parties of the country should be obliged to have registration with the EC, and the EC should have the legal authority to audit the funds of the parties on a regular basis, examine the sources of their funds and fix for both the contesting candidates and political parties a reasonable ceiling of

election expenses. On top of all, the EC must develop a mechanism of its own to examine the docu ments sent to it by the political parties and candidates.

Please stop it

Sir. As a citizen of Bangladesh I am anxiously observing inter party allegations and counter allegations to each other in different forms and manners on the ground of recently completed general election which are not at all a good symptom of preserving the democratic culture. There might be some glitch happened in the poll but so far it is clear both nationally and internationally that the election was fair and the turnout of voters in the election was significantly sizeable.

It is a recognized norm in democracy to respect the people's verdict, as people are the only source of all power. It is my request to all parties to respect people's opinion and to engage themselves in activities for the prosperity of the whole nation. Our economic and social position is much more behind from actually what we should deserve. We don't want any more repetitions of undue political disturbances in our daily life. The party which is going to form the government and the other which will be the leader of the opposition have equal duties and responsibilities to throw out all sorts of malpractices prevailing in

politics in real sense. I am hopeful about our future democracy notwithstanding our realistic limitations. Shaikhul Islam.

West Agargaon, Dhaka

### An appeal to HBFC

Sir, The HBFC was set up by the government to help the owners of land in the urban areas to build houses with its loan with a view to easing the housing problem in one hand. and to develop towns and cities of Bangladesh, on the other. Many land-owners took loans from HBFC throughout the country from its very inception and built houses. The contribution of HBFC towards the development of our housing sector is unparalleled. With the rapid increase in our population, housing problem is be-

coming very acute with every coming day in Bangladesh

The Chittagong Development Authority has set out some rules for keeping vacant spaces in the front ranging from eight to eleven feet from the road to avoid congestion and also to maintain a healthy environment in the city. The HBFC had a condition of keep ing six feet of vacant space in the front of the plots selected for granting loans for common passage. If the owner of one plot measuring 2 or 2 kathas has to sacrifice one-third space out of his plot to comply with the above rules, then the balance land available become unqualified as CDA does not pass plans on inadequate land space. As from July 1995. HBFC has introduced a new rule requiring the owner of a plot to keep a vacant space of eight feet in the front area for common passage.

If so much vacant space on all sides are left then it doesn't become economical to build houses on the remaining land. This harsh rule of HBFC has put many plotowners in Chittagong on a great dilemma. They can neither get their plans approved by DCA nor are getting loans from the HBFC for stated reasons. It may be mentioned here that many plotowners had purchased their plots with vacant spaces of six feet in the front for common passages and built boundary walls keeping in line with the HBFC rule, but the sudden change of July 1995 has disqualified many landowners from getting loan from HBFC. This change is not only against the state policy but is also

The number of vacant land for building houses in Chittagong is becoming less and less every day. It is very hard to spare even one inch of land in the developed area of the city as many have built houses keeping a clearance of six feet space as per HBFC rules. As such, the HBFC must change. and revise its rule for developed areas of Chittagong and Dhaka cities where the rate of return of income from house

against humanity.

rent is very high However, in the remote areas where vacant land is available, eight-feet clearance may be enforced. I therefore appeal to HBFC authorities to kindly revise their rule for developed areas of Chittagong and Dhaka cities so that owners of the vacant residential plots could avail of the opportunity of loans being disbursed by HBFC. Mohua Haque Chittagong Government City

College and University

## Disappointed

Sir, I was absolutely disappointed by Mr Mahfuz Anam's attitude in the BTV pro gramme "Sobinaye Jante Chai" which was telecast on the 9th of June, 1996 at 10:30 pm and in which BNP was the invited political party. As far as Mr Anams questions are con cerned, there was nothing objectionable. For one thing, he has got every right to ask any question to any political party. However, his attitude, tone and style of raising questions were impudent, impatient, ag gressive and devoid of mini mum courtesy.

Moreover, his journalistic sense seemed to be blurred with his emotion. Throughout the programme, I was under the impression that he must have personal grudge against that party (BNP) due to the very fact of his liking of another one. To put another way. Mr Anam has compelled me to question his journalistic integrity and neutrality which I was sure of hither to. Mujib Kazipara, Mirpur, Dhaka

### **Felicitations**

Sir, Please allow me to offer It requires great deal of

boldness and bluntness to confront the nation after five years of disgraceful misrule in the history of the sub-conti-Mia Md Alamgir Haider

maturity where they are beginning to exercise their rights in true democratic manner. From the poorest person to the wealthiest industrialist. the people came out to vote in numbers unprecedented in Bangladesh — and the numbers were accurate this time. This means that we are concerned about our country and its future and we know how to exercise our verdict, shape our destiny. It is no longer enough for our leaders to use money. muscle, power and influence. the people will bring the party they think can address the nation's needs and, most importantly - they now know

felicitations to Begum Khaleda Zia and her party BNP for securing 116 seats in the just held parliament election.

346/8. Monipuri Para, Dhaka

## . Open letter to Sheikh Hasina

Wasim Rahman mrollered on and treated this country like their private dominion. Please do not make this mistake, keep your thumb on the vein of opinion and diagnose our complaints with justice. Show care where care is needed, encouragement when we face despair, and strength when we go astray.

Tremendous emphasis has to be given to development of industry, infrastructure and a good environment for industrialisation. If you form a government you will have a very short time to show that you are sincere. We have experienced the empty political claims of the last government and the reality of The lack of development. We were not fooled! Our country has potential in becoming a leading international manufacturing base but fails because of the political instability and lack of infrastructure. For the past few years we have seen only a weak attempt to create cosmetic changes but no time given to actually improve our industry. supporting industries and infrastructure. Most of the roads and communication outside the cities lie in sorry disrepair due to lack of attention from the last government. Any improvement in the Bengali lot can be credited to the effort of individual entrepreneurs in the face of numerous obstacles created by government policy and not due to government encouragement.

In the past we have seen whichever party forms the government, it promptly begins to fill their personal coffers and vigorously enacts projects for their self-advancement. It is an open secret in this country that leaders of the party in government amasses wealth in amounts that are disgustingly high for a country as poor as Bangladesh. We request you to be wary of this trap because the Bengali people might be docile but as you most certainly know they are well-informed and bides their time to teach a lesson. If you wish to continue in power and govern with respect it will be wise to control your people and to ensure they concentrate

on the fate of this country and its people rather than the size of their Swiss bank accounts. Since we have elected you, we

will watch you. During the past years the streets have become increasingly insecure. Terrorists and hijackers now rule the cities and towns with remarkable impudence. Businesses and industries as well as the man on the road are all victims in this war. Foreign investors, who are indispensable to our country's prosperity, are also frequently victimised to official and unofficial extortion. We are also facing serious deterioration in the traffic condition of the cities as well as overpopulation and crowding. These are tall orders to face but your popularity and your position will depend on how and if at all - you tackle these problems.

The people are giving you authority as they had given the last government. We saw them abuse this authority and we saw politics and manipulation so blatantly offensive that even the most peaceful citizen found it hard to swallow. We hope your politics will be more believable, more reasonable. more benevolent and acceptable to our sense of decency Please do not try to take us for a ride because you are liable to fall of yourself. It has been attempted but not successfully. We are aware now and know how to take action. The people are not so willing to have the wool pulled over their eyes.

in conclusion, Ms Wazed. we sincerely wish you luck as you face a most difficult task ahead. It is a thankless and tiring job - if you do it well and your only reward will be the salvation of this country. We also hope that you will get the cooperation needed from your opposition and they will have the good sense to place the benefit of their people ahead of everything, and that they will face the consequences of their mistakes with due propriety. Our country is in dire need of responsible thinking from our leaders as: we forge ahead to econor ic and political maturity.

With optimism and regards.