The Baily Star

Founder-Editor: Late S. M. Ali

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Govt Must Say No

Theoretically there is nothing wrong about employees of the autonomous or semi-autonomous organisations aspiring after pension schemes. But in realistic terms, every enterprise has to generate surplus revenues and get a revolving fund in place before it can qualify for such schemes which have to operate into an endless future. In other words, extended financial security covers do not fall as over-ripe truits on the laps of employees, these have to be earned by the sweat of their brow and that too on a scale beyond the normal range of revenue-earning and financial viability.

Indeed by this basic yardstick, to say nothing of the dire need to curtail the national budget deficit estimated at well over 6 per cent of the GDP, we are flabbergasted that six autonomous bodies have demanded pension for their employees in the wake of the WASA example.

A straight question to their demand would be why ask it of the government, just run the pension schemes on your own strength to do justice to your autonomous status. Why turn to the government for subsidy, or a loan that could mortgage the already uncertain financial health of several organisations? Moreover, the autonomous bodies are not entitled to grants like the semi-autonomous ones.

What we are peeved by is the unfolding prospect of a flood-gate opening to pension demands with 35 other autonomous bodies itching perhaps to join the chorus.

Much as the service associations need to behave responsibly in the protection of their long-term interests, it primarily devolves upon the government not to be populist in financial matters. We know only too well what a ruinous series of things happen when the government starts caving into pressure. The new government better avoid a ride on the angry tiger of demands by rolling the first ones back to the organisations themselves to fulfil. The government can at best determine which of the autonomous bodies are able to run pension schemes all by themselves and which need to put their shoulders to the wheel to attain that capability. The government should accordingly put pressure on the organisations to give pensions to their employees and not vice versa.

Quality of Products

A serialised story on consumer goods in a Bangla daily confirmed the doubts in public mind about the quality of many daily essentials. Even the reputed companies are found to be showing little interest either in seeking approval from the Bangladesh Standards and Testing Institute (BSTI) for their products or renewing their quality control licences. Of the 2174 manufacturing companies, only 694 maintain uptodate licences.

Clearly, there is a general apathy towards maintenance of authorising records and documents on a continuing basis. If the companies are so disrespectful of certain mandatory rules and regulations, the products they market cannot but be suspect. Funnily, the BSTI has no legal power to take action against companies that sell their products without its approval.

It has so far been able to cancel licences of only 142 companies and taken action against 24 more. All of them had defaulted on renewing their licences. However there are as many as 694 companies whose licences had expired one to four years ago, but they remain unscratched.

Once a licence-holder, a company becomes liable to legal measures for any violation of rules; but those manufacturers giving a damn to BSTI approval are going merrily about-uncensored When such is the legal ambivalence, is not it a discouragement for new companies to seek licences from the BSTI? Also the illegal ventures are helped by the fact that production and marketing of consumer items without BSTI approval being unrecorded activities are usually turned a blind eye to. Such violators, many of them just too big to be touched, are seldom punished. They do not carry on their trade in secret and yet the government's legal arm fails to reach them. But why? The report has mentioned the names of a number of violating companies. Can we hope appropriate actions will be taken against them? The task of applying quality control laws for the protection of consumer rights is too important a matter to be left unattended any more. The harm caused by substandard, spurious and adulterated products can have a disastrous impact on the nation's physical and mental health

Protecting Haor

A report from Sunamganj carried in this newspaper yesterday concludes that a higher embankment is the right answer to the yearly loss of Boro paddy — which incidentally is the only crop in the vast haor area. At present embankments are constructed every year but they are not high or strong enough to withstand the onrush of upstream wa-

We do not know if solution to the problem in that district is so simple. Construction of stronger and higher embankments compared with those erected every year is not an impossible proposition. The question is, if that will really address the problem adequately. We would rather suggest that expert opinion's be sought on this matter. It is a huge problem no doubt because it involves the livelihood of so many people depending on agriculture in that district. The yearly crop loss has been estimated at around Tk 100 crore on an average.

Any haor protection scheme must seek expert opinion for yet another reason: the consideration for environment. The Chalan Beel can be a guide in this regard. That famous natural water body was turned into a vast tract for IRRI cultivation. The consequent drastic fall of underground water level followed by an unprecedented aridity in and around the area showed that too much tampering with nature can be disastrous. Certainly we need a proper haor protection scheme based on geomorphology of the area.

Terrorism, Law and Order

Terrorism has to be tackled differently from the normal means employed to maintain law and order. There is vast difference between terrorists and criminals. A criminal's mission in life is profit, as such destruction is a secondary objective, if at all. For a terrorist, destruction of life and property is a primary mission.

the unknown, of animals in the jungle, of spirits in the night. At the fag end of the 20th century, advancement in science and technology has criminal gangs in the city who instilled sophistication into had found their birth in the terror as a deliberate creation drugs and Kalashnikov culture of man to psychologically exploited this vacuum. The gray period between 1988 and 1992 overwhelm with fear the focus was full of dacoities and kidof his adverse attention. Entire nappings for ransom. The city nations' can now be held hostage to terror. More than was in a virtual state of anardrugs and nuclear prolifchy, dominated by criminal el eration, terrorism is the subject ements who had influential supporters in the government to of major attention of civilized provide them protection from society, a potent weapon for the State's Law Enforcement those who lack numbers. weaponry and money. The se-Agencies (LEAs), themselves infiltrated by criminal elements curity environment in a host of The common citizen had no recountries is now bracing itself in anticipation of terrorist course for succour from any strikes. High tech equipment body, the courts were helpless finds itself outdated even as it and prison was just a luxury pit stop as R&R (Rest and Recrecomes on the production line as terrorists find ways to ciration) for the hardened crimi cumvent them Terrorists are nal. The happenings in the first increasingly aiming at soft tar PPP regime may have been gets, the forces of law and order shocking, what followed later are in disarray, finding themwas even worse, reaching its zenith during the Chief Minisselves unable to cope with the variations in the threat perceptership of the weak but garru lous Muzzufar Hussain Shah tion and the level of sophisticawho was a puppet on a string to The Communist led regime his own advisor on Home Afin Kabul countered Pakistan's fairs who ran him as well as a support for the mujahideen in parallel criminal state within a the early 80s by a spate of criminal state. In short, the state, became part of the terror bombings in the major urban cities of Pakistan, targeting it was supposed to counter, it is

HE perception of terror

was once the domain of

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very much in danger of becompublic places like markets. transportation modes and its ing so again The last spasm of terrorism nodal points, a coward's way of inflicting the most damage on in the city which potentially innocent non-combatants. The remains the most dangerous is KGB acting through their the MQM political protest that Afghan surrogates KHAD and turned into a violent reaction believably supported by Indian against the forces of the State RAW, carried out a relentless i.e. Operation Clean UP. Apoloterrorist campaign against gists would have it otherwise. Pakistan. They found willing Operation Clean Up was a nec collaborators among the many essary operation and as it was splinter militant groups of pocarried out initially it served its litical parties inimical to the purpose i.e to establish the rule Zia regime. Al-Zulfikar being of law in this major urban port in the forefront with primary city of Karachi. However some support from Afghanistan and of the military hierarchy in India and secondary bases in control, in particular of those Syria and Libya. Between Al-ISI's Internal Security, deliber Zulfikar's atrocities and the ately set out to focus only on the rise of MQM militancy there MQM while turning a blind eye was hiatus for several years. to the militants of all the other Criminal elements of all the popolitical parties and other

criminal elements including

the drug mafia, not averse to using them where it suited their personal selfish purposes While the uniformed troops under Commander Corps Reserve made considerable progress in winning a war without bloodying swords." their success was severely undermined by the men inmufti led by the then Head of Internal Security in the ISI, a major general who as a Brigadier was directly responsible for the Othri Camp blast that caused more than a 1000 deaths in Islamabad and Rawalpindi. In any other country he would have been held ac

Today the Rangers are still officered by the Army but with the Interior Minister as a strict pointman, the Army has restored its good name somewhat a brilliantly focused anti-terrorism campaign breaking the back of urban terrorism in Karachi, this singular success in so short a time having no parallel in the history of urban guerrilla warfare. However, as we have seen in the brutal murder of 14 innocent activists on their way to a political rally as recently as August 14, less than a week ago and the retaliation less than four days ago, the

AS I SEE IT

Ikram Sehgal writes from Karachi

countable, here he was decorated and promoted. His handpicked ISI Det Comd in Karachi raised, funded, equipped trained and directed the Aagigis, a faction of MQM dissidents from its previous core militant group

How a government can countenance nurturing and protecting a terrorist group escapes logic and belief. The Dr Jackyl and Mr Hyde existence of the State's intelligence functionar ies who even as they carried "Mehrabs" on their forehead indulged in orgies of wine and women in so-called safe houses symbolized affairs which con tinued till their wholesale removal from positions of au thority soon after Gen Waheed took over as COAS, terminating the wild west Dodge City "occupied land" atmosphere prevalent that was giving the Army a bad name. The Army's withdrawal from direct involve ment in Karachi was one of the best decisions of this decade.

forces of terrorism are not en tirely crushed. By the ill-ad vised policy of not targeting all terrorist elements in Karachi. terrorism remains very much alive and well in the city

Another round of urban terrorism is likely if a course cor rection to focus on all terrorists irrespective of political, religious or ethnic colour is not carried out immediately. The Federal Government create conditions conducive for nor maley by launching definitive socio-economic measures in tandem of democratic initia tives: in not doing so they may have lost a golden chance to dangle the carrot. A vacuum has been created by the destruction of the entire MQM middle leadership, it is vitally necessary to immediately hold Local Bodies elections to fill that gap. The masses give short shift to gov ernment-sponsored and im posed political leadership, the Hageegis are a living witness to this. In not filling the vacuum

of leadership at the grassroots level by genuinely free Local Bodies election, the government destroyed the much success it has had in the urban battlefield. Having countered terrorism successfully in the field. why has Gen Babar's team of Ranger and Police lost the battle for the hearts and minds of Karachi's main ethnic populace? All pointers are that entire MQM cadres may have gone to ground in self-contained cells and may be training and consolidating for one single deadly purpose, to rise and strike as a coordinated force with greater results.

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law and order. There is vast difference between terrorists and criminals. A criminal's mission in life is profit, as such destruction is a secondary objective, if at all. For a terrorist, destruction of life and property is a primary mission. Criminals may wary and proliferate through a broad spectrum of activity in pursuit of profit, as opposed terrorists are usually small in number and very dedicated as to their mission. Criminals may fear loss of their lives in accomplishing their mission, terrorists put forward their life as weapon in the success of their objectives. One can go on and on but the important thing is that while criminal activity can alternately lead to anarchy the only objective of the terrorist is to bring about anarchy i.e the collapse of the State. If one adds the counter factor of State terrorism, the resultant mix is a time-bomb waiting to tear the foundations of the State.

The sound governance of the forces and modes of counter terrorism is therefore of vital importance to safeguard the security of the country. The forces of law and order must be kept in check even as they perform a

afoul of the very laws they seek to enforce. The major issue subverting Gen Babar's success is the high-handedness of the LEAs, particularly the Police. Five years ago they had been into the bunkers in fear, holed up in their Police Stations in sincere apprehension of life and limb while Rabin-Hood type militant gangs with wide public support provided rough justice. After all one man's terrorist is the other man's freedom fighter. Emerging from their holes with a burning penchant to make up for lost time. the action of the LEAs tend to be counter-productive. Their special target is the vouth of Karachi and their method of operation is to accost any youth in the street, unless he coughs up money he is branded as potential MQM terrorist. Many poor parents have had to hand over their life-savings to free their children from these vultures. What do you expect these impressionable children to do? Even if one in 100 reacts, a core of effective terrorists is being formed, in essence creating a conducive recreating ground. By failing to control the LEAs, the whole exercise has become counter-productive.

thankless job lest they run

If immediate steps are not taken which are politically mature and economically of substance socially, the city of Karachi will return to another spasm of urban terrorism worse than what we have witnessed till 1985 but the mental alienation of the Mohajir community will never be reversed. The ethnic and religious schisms have still not been successfully exploited by these interested in Pakistan's destruction but they can be unless we birid ourselves together and create conditions where terrorism can never be nurtured let alone have places of sanctuary to operate from. Only sound, mature governance must equally exploit both the carrot and the stick to create a conducive environment that will allow the citizens of this city to breathe the Pakistani air with freedom.

Of Conspiracies, Boats, Paddy Sheaf and "Psychological Itches"

On August 15, the national mourning day, Bangladeshis were joined in their grief by eminent world leaders, including President Nelson Mandela of South Africa. The question is would a personality like President Mandela join any ceremony that would bear the mark of "injustice?"

stead of keeping them shut in ministry's vault, as in the past. People should also know why there were nearly two dozen abortive coups during the tenure of slain president Ziaur

Rahman and who were the key figures behind those attempts. Over the years, specially since 1991. I have come across human reactions about minor

things which I would like to call "psychological itches." Human psychology is a complex matter and psychiatrists

are forced to obtain specialization to understand the subject. Recently I was in Chandpur district to write a story on a subject that got little importance in the Bangladesh press. hope to write about it next time.

accepted an invitation from a local friend before returning to Dhaka that we go to a point where the Dakatia. Meghna and Padma rivers

The waves and the mad whirlpools where the three rivers meet frightened me, but I was overhelmed by the courage of fishermen crying their luck amidst rain in that very dangerous area.

I took some shots for my album as a souvenir that would remind me forever the courage of these fishermea, some of whom waved back at me when they realized the camera lens was focused at them. In Dhaka, as I watched the

IN FOOL'S PARADISE? by Nadeem Qadir

prints, our very helpful office boy Samad pointed to one picture saying, "Sir, this is a nice picture." Encouraged, I asked should I file it for AFP and he replied. "Yes, it is nice."

Off went the picture and eventually released on the AFP network. The day after it was front paged in Dhaka's The Independent newspaper as a matcher for their Hilsa fish story to my great surprise. "Nice picture, but it could be taken as a political one." commented a senior colleague.

"Political", I wondered why and yes — it is the "boat" — the Awami League's election symbol. So, does that mean we abandon all the boats across Bangladesh and opt for ferry service, but then one may find "Koko"(!?) story there too.

In the May 13 tornado in Tangail I found majority of the survivors were injured by "flying rice seeds" which the whirling winds found good use as a weapon against its victims. Around the area rice paddy field were left flattened.

I asked a colleague to take pictures of both the injured and the rice fields. The first one could not be avoided, but my

colleague reasoned the second could be looked upon having "political angle" as the June 12 general elections were not far away. I was dumb founded. He was referring to the paddy sheaf as the election symbol of the Bangladesh Jatiyatabadi Dal

Later, when I put the two incidents together I quickly solved a third puzzle. It's an oil painting by my sister called "The homecoming." The painting, which hangs in my office room, shows paddy fields and Muktijoddhas (freedom fighters) returning home on boats to Jubilant Bangladeshis. Some didn't like it saying it had a pro-Awami League slant.

So they overlooked the paddy fields and only focused themselves on the boats. It is simply an art work by an amateur artist who happens to be a daughter of a martyr.

The question is then what do we do with the "Plough" (Jatiya Party) and "Dari Palla" or scale (Jamaat-e-Islami Party). Replace them with tractors and spring balance?

The last of the psychological itches is supporting the repeal of the Indemnity Act that con-

Their rough delivery and boyish manner to outsmart and outperform each other have hadly dashed the hopes and expectations of the electorates. They are lighting with the styles and not with the substances, commented a Western diplomat. Instead of debating national issues seriously, that confront this one of the poorest and most crowded countries of the world, our irate legislators are busy deciding whom to blame for their own failings.

Government policy to fight fire with fire to contain opposition parties may backfire and ultimately push them to streets. the natural political seed-beds to grow violence and derail democracy and development.

Among the House newcomers, there are many political businessmen. American "pay your wife to stay faithful" policy may work wonder well in our country at this point of time. Our government can introduce a bill in our 7th National Assembly, giving all the 330 Honourable Members of Parliament a luxury tax free car and a king size residential plot at Gulshan or Baridhara in ac cordance with their choices, to ensure healthy and congenial atmosphere in our tastefully decorated Assembly House.

However. I like to remind our honourable members that our vounger generation may no longer endure a political system that does not respond to the needs of the ill-housed, ill-clad and ill-nourished ordinary cit-

Nation needs an extremely clever long-term economic and political strategy for growth. and for its role in the South East Asia. While, the European Union is looking forward to a tederal future and Japan and high growth South Asian nations are trying to globalize economic and corporate activities and favour a border free world, we cannot sit back and keep our borders closed to our neighbours, India and Bangla desh were most important allies during our liberation war and still a love hate relationship exists between India and Bangladesh Thousands of brave Indian soldiers laid down their lives for our freedom Bangladesh needs India as much as India needs Bangla

Land locked eastern states of

and Tripura need free access to our sea ports, road and rail network to reduce shipping time and shipping cost. As economic activities are now mov ing far beyond national borders, thanks to the new found authority of the UN: Bangladesh should gladly provide port and transit facilities to India. In such a case transportation time for Indian goods from factory floors to our sea ports and from eastern states to other parts of India will be reduced from weeks to hours Thousands of new jobs will be created in service industries and whole region will be energised economically. This zone will become low-skill cheap labour manufacturing base of East Asia. Our trade deficit with India is deepening at an alarming rate, and such strategy may turn the tide in our favour. Our Government will also get a badly needed new lease of life. These sorts of regional cooperation for development will help overcome geographical isolation and conse quently bring windfall dividends for both the countries. It will be a win-win situation and there will be no losers. Billions of dollars will be invested to build regional infrastructure Toll roads and toll bridges will be built by private investors to facilitate Indian motor vehicles and lorries to criss-cross

linking France with England According to Western political analysts, if India is to play a larger role in the world and wants to have more say in the world institutions, notably the United Nations, it must come to terms with its small neighbours. If India adopts love-thyneighbour policy. USA, UK. and France, the champions of democracy, will not find it easy to deny India, the largest democracy of the world (with total population of 950 million) its rightful place, a permanent seat in the Security Council.

Bangladesh. Even European in-

vestment banks may be tempted

to take stakes in such ventures.

as they have successfully fi

nanced English channel tunnel

Enough is enough, millions of Hindus, Muslims and Shekhs were brutally killed during the past fifty years in the name of religion. We must come to our senses and try to cultivate the art of political compromise Despite differences in languages and beliefs, we must not forget that we are all born out of the same cultural womb.

"September By-polls" Sir, The above captioned

litical parties as well as various

T was about to happen ag-

ain. But the lack of the

conspirators ran out this

time and the nation was saved

from a possible blood-stained

The sudden arrest of the

three of the 1975 coup leaders is

said to be linked to the anti-

state conspiracy as Bangla-

deshis prepared to mourn the

murder of Bangabandhu Sheikh

conspiracy was unearthed "at

the nick of time and security

has been tightened further for

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina.

câbinet members and her close

lam, Bir Uttam, confirming re-

ports of the plot to assassinate

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina

told this writes on Friday that

action against the three coup

leaders (called by one party

newspaper "freedom fighters!?")

were based on sensitive intelli-

gence report and the whole af-

fair will be made public once

the vigorous investigations.

now underway, was concluded

"I cannot divulge anything

more about the conspiracy now

because the matter is being in-

minister has not changed since

the first time I met him in 1965

in Lahore, Pakistan. My mar-

tyred father and the home min-

ister were close associates in

the days leading to the 1971 in-

dependence war. In the decades

that I have known him, I can

say confidently that he is a man

who gets what he wants and the

conspirators befter be prepared

conspiracy should be made

public as soon as possible in-

The probe reports on the

for the consequences.

The tall and the ever smiling

vestigated," the minister said.

Home Minister Rafigul Is-

Security sources said the

Mujibur Rahman.

tragedy.

relatives.

editorial (DS-6 Aug) is a timely well thought pointer. On this I would like to add that no contesting party will remain saint. Each will contrive (fair/unfair, covertly/overtly ...) to win over others. In the 6th JS poll, a dominant party has amply shown this. Whereas, a restrain would have brought better image for them. Due to that, local/regional/western dignitaries came to observe the fairness of the polls. Now only for 5 per cent seat, we cannot expect them to come as same guests. So in absence of them the contesting parties will have free hands to show might. They will contrive either to win seats or to gain political grounds. "Losing one or two AL vacated seats to opposition would earn some credit" as envisaged by the analyst (DS-Aug 7) may become disastrous

But The DS has rightly mentioned that this time EC will have disadvantage as not being under a neutral government. I think the decision taken to change-over from CTG, before by-polls are completed, is myopic one. Because, it was the by-poll (Magura) episode that obdurately introduced CTG idea. Whereas, no civilised nation has permanently adopted such system anywhere. Besides this, during general polls, EC was more powerful organ of CTG, as polls was prime objective of that government. But under present set-up, by-polls are a routine affair. So, the theme, "fair poll cannot be expected under a party government" will generate much heat/reasonableunreasonable questions. The

government officers once again will likely to be implicated in the polls scene not as a servant of the Republic but agent of government (previously of a neutral government). The issue of voter ID will come up to isolate fake. In a densely populated zone, it is humanly impossible for a polling agent to know all faces with description, more complex in case of female voters. A by-poll makes it more, as people from nonpoll areas can infiltrate.

In such case, ID card is an ideal solution. As per last CEC ID card could be issued to all if 6th JS poll held during April '96 or later. But for some unknown reasons that project has been kept at a low key. It will be better if EC can issue ID cards to all by-poll area voters before poll. Since huge public money has been allocated, the government has a duty in this regard.

Another uncared area is the "Suksma Karchupi" prone antiquated ballot paper. It is blank on its reverse side. Whereas, some detectable security markings should have been there. So that, when folded (in private booth) it can be distinguishable from an ordinary folded paper at the time of dropping. This way a virgin ballot is taken out by interested individual by dropping an ordinary folded paper. Ballots used in other countries, (the same way/type) should be adopted.

Recently, another question of preservation of cast/counted ballots has come up, as recounting needed. Protection against fire, theft or other causes of unforeseen damages will be needed. Otherwise, doubt and suspicion will naturally grow wildly in the public mind. This time, curiousness will also mount up as kins of ministers and ex-ministers are contesting the by-polls.

I hope, someone in the EC and in the government would spare some time to bring public into full confidence about poll matter through this column or by a press release.

A R Choudhury H#39, Rd#11, Sec# 4, Uttara, Dhaka-1230

Bumpers and ghosts

Sir, The Home Ministry has passed a directive to put off all sorts of bumper from car, jeep, microbus, bus etc. To me its illogical but of course to the decision makers in the ministry it's very much

If you take a survey you will find almost all the vehicles having bumpers are owned by the individual or small private company and the vehicles without bumpers are owned by government organisations. corporations, army, navy, air force, police, BDR, and multinational companies. The reason behind this is that, if anything goes wrong, the private owner has to spend money from his or her own pocket to repair the same but incase of others it does not go from the official's pocket rather from the public exchequer or from the company's pocket. That is why you will find, most of the government-owned vehicles are in real shevy condition and private owned vehicles are in better shape and last long.

This decision is a sheer passing the buck technique,

This is also illegal and unlawful as per traffic law, which they are showing us to put off all the bumpers. Will they put off all these nets? Or is law only

for us?

back/side light and get the

pains as we take. We hope, this government at least will follow the logic and will not be guided by the ghosts of ministry who always misguide and pull the trigger keeping the gun on other's shoulder. May Allah bless this country, only Allah can save this country from the ghosts.

M. Zahedul Anwar DOHS, Dhaka

home ministry and traffic department are applying. They cannot implement the traffic rule properly that no rickshaw or baby taxi can break the back/side light of the vehicle rather where we are taking care by ourselves, they are pulling down our legs. Can the police authority explain, why most of their trucks, vans pick-ups are with steel nets?

It shows, government comes and goes and the ghosts are there as always they were. It is something like — as the government does not have vehicles in good condition we also do not have any right to have vehicles in good condition. I don't have anybody in the government hierarchy to save myself from putting off the bumper from my car but what government will do when an MP or a secretary riding a Pajaro or Nissan Petrol with built-in bumper? Will government ask them to put off the bumper? As a general citizen of the country one can only pray that the vehicle of the decision maker lose the

those involved in the 1975 bloody putsch. were surprised when they learned that our constitution

stitutionally bars the trial of

Many of my friends abroad carries such a clause and said it was a shame for Bangladeshis. It is only human and natural

South Africa. The question is would a personality like President Mandela join any ceremony that would bear the mark of "injustice?"

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On August 15, the national

Awami League?

The writer is the special correspondent with Agence France-Presse (AFP), Dhaka.

India. like Assam, Meghalaya

Nagaland. Monipur, Mizoram

OPINION

Perhaps God in His heaven

smiles and the whole nation

turns still to listen the shouting

match of our newly elected

members of the national as-

Democracy in Action— Bangladeshi Style

Anam A Choudhury