

More Wards, More Commissioners

One can see the obvious reason why the Cabinet has decided to amend the Pourashava Ordinance with the objective of splitting each of the present municipal wards into three separate entities. The urban sub-centres are creaking under population pressure, so that if people are to be served in a focused manner then just like in the case of territorial administration the municipalities too need to be reorganised.

We appreciate the spirit and rationale behind the government's pourashava reform initiative; but cannot visualise how even a well-justified proliferation of wards or the glory of nomenclature change will radically improve the municipal services given the precedents being set by the present generation of ward commissioners.

What has been the track-record of ward commissioners as public representatives and operatively the sheet-anchor of the elected Dhaka City Corporation? Dismal. And, this is a question-mark that dangles before our optical disc right beside the non-delivering reputation glued to the leadership image of the elected city mayor himself. The ward commissioners' presence is hardly felt at the local communities except for being besought when somebody needed a certificate to get by. And then there is that hectic activity revolving around grant of contracts for the lucre they hold.

Words have circulated periodically to the effect that ward commissioners have been involved in the law and order or price control committees, but if the test of cooking is in the pudding, then we have had very little of it really. Perhaps we were wrong to be expecting a good dividend from their actions; because, for all practical purposes, they have been toeing their party-lines making a slanging match of their inherently apolitical civic and representative role. In the process, the urban development agenda get swamped by the surge of maintenance backlogs.

Needless to say, better representation of women as ward commissioners holds the key to an improved performance of the pourashavas, let alone their effective urban empowerment. The proposed ratio of one woman ward commissioner to three men commissioners could be bettered after their participatory zeal witnessed at the UP polls.

Lethal Presence

A front page picture in the Ittefaq Tuesday last sent the chilling sensation through the spine once again: an unused ampoule of an injectable drug with an expiry date of October 1997. The frightening discovery came to light when a doctor on duty prepared to break an ampoule to inject the drug into a patient. Reportedly three packets of the said drug, each containing 25 ampoules, were bought by the relevant section of the DMCH from an adjacent pharmacy.

Tuesday's finding is neither unique nor rare. There have been several reports in the past on expired drug being on sale in the market. How these drugs find their way to the druggists' shelves and freezers and in the hospitals is not unknown to the authorities. About hospitals some doctors have suggested an unholy nexus between the lower tier employees of the facility and the unethical businessmen. That is definitely one area where the authorities need to probe but the biggest problem lies elsewhere. It is the weak drug ordinance which has come to dilute all our worries and caution against this enormous crime. The laws of the land are not sufficiently deterrent to scare people away. At the moment if somebody is found to be trading in spurious drugs, he or she simply does not have to pay heavily. The key to any alleviation of the problem lies in planting fear in culprits' minds. The laws have to be firmed up and, more importantly, enforced with unfailing consistency. The lax laws and authorities' blasé attitude over the matter show how infinitesimal is the concern about public health and how much a thin ice we are all skating on.

There was quite a bit of hot air blown around the drug ordinance during the previous government but nothing came out of it. The present government seems to be on the same course although pompous claims of enforcement have been made.

We want to say mere claims and assurances would not do. Spurious and expired drugs were there and they are there. They have to go. The health ministry would do well to remember that it is and it will be held responsible for every ailment or death due to the use of unfit drugs. Let it stir into action to tackle whatever challenges that responsibility might ask for.

BGMEA Bhaban

We are delighted to learn that government has finalised its allotment of land in the heart of the city to the apex body of garments exporters — the BGMEA — for a building of their own. This will no doubt help boost our export trade in garments which is likely to come under far greater international competitive pressure than ever before.

However, as we welcome this decision we would like to make some points that we think should receive priority attention both of the government and the BGMEA. We think before a single taka is spent on the Bhaban both parties must ensure that every step has been taken to provide the garment workers a safe place to work. It will be a mockery of our democratic values and human rights proclamations if, on the one hand, money is poured in the construction of a modern building while, on the other hand, more and more workers meet unnecessary deaths from easily preventable fires in their factories and from stampede that usually follow such incidents. It will be reprehensible and morally unacceptable if garment factory owners shy away from providing the minimum working condition for their workers and at the same time spend money for a modern headquarters.

We cannot express strongly enough our outrage at the fact that even after numerous incidents of fire and so many unnecessary deaths most of the garment factories are still to provide that minimum safety and comfort for their workers which considerations of decency, law and profit should all compel them to.

Uncertain Election Scene

In the absence of institutions, it is not surprising that persons, who seek to make any contribution, want to be in parliament or the state legislature. This atmosphere has affected all activities, politics the most. The media is the real villain. Its obsession with politicians has crowded out the intellectuals, the professionals and even the activists.

BETWEEN THE LINES

Kuldip Nayar writes from New Delhi

have, however, realised that caste identities have eclipsed religious identities. Therefore, the caste factor has become more important than before. Muslims believe that their community will pick the winning candidate of any party against the BJP's. Where they may go wrong is the feeling of resignation, which is overpowering Muslims in certain areas, and which is goading them to try even the BJP. Their argument is that it may not turn out to be worse alternative to other parties for which they have been voting so far.

Therefore, in the face of non-descript options, the election looks like an exercise which the voters, perforce, will go over. They continue to be indifferent and cynical. And whatever enthusiasm was there, it has been squeezed out by the selection of candidates. Some of them have a criminal background. Some have defected from their parent body to get nomination. And some are there by the dint of money. Congress beats them all. It is not bothered about cleanliness. It has adopted the same old faces, which carry the stain of hawala on their khadi.

At the last minute, some parties have changed the names of their candidates because of the diktat by the mafia or the mon-

eybag. Perhaps, India should develop a method whereby a party holds an election, like primaries in the US, to find out who among its candidates has the largest following in a particular constituency. At present, only the party president counts in parties other than the BJP, which is at the beck and call of RSS, and Congress, which is dictated by Sonia Gandhi. Such being the material, the structure that may emerge cannot be but faulty. It is too early to say which party will be part of which structure. But there is no doubting about its ricketiness. It may collapse after one year or so, necessitating a mid-term poll.

One cannot put the blame on the candidates because they reflect the type of leadership a party has. The criterion for political parties is loyalty, not merit. I know of several persons who were not given tickets because they are too bright, too

straightforward, too clean. One party chief has even spelled out his aversion: "The educated create problems and it is better to leave them out."

Yet, this does not explain why there has been so much splitting in parties this time. Even the most loyal have taken no time to cross over to other side or form their own group. The units have broken and re-broken. There is no sanctity of the party as such. There are several reasons for it. One, parties are not related to any policy or programme. Two, the quality of leaders or, what is called the high command, has got diluted so much that it does not evoke respect, much less awe. Leaders are not tall enough. Nor have they any base to impress the members. Circumstances seem to have thrown them up and most of them do not deserve the position to which they have reached. Even the most leading ones are connected with dubious business houses or mafia groups. Their word has lost moral authority.

Another reason is the weakening of institutions. Apart from the media, parliament or the state legislatures, there are no other forums which have any clout. Indira Gandhi was

the one who destroyed the institutions because she wanted to wield power all by herself. Rajiv Gandhi, of even lesser mettle, did not understand what the institutions meant. Narasimha Rao knew their importance but did not retrieve them because it would have been at the expense of his own authority.

In the absence of institutions, it is not surprising that persons, who seek to make any contribution, want to be in parliament or the state legislature. This atmosphere has affected all activities, politics the most. The media is the real villain. Its obsession with politicians has crowded out the intellectuals, the professionals and even the activists.

It is not a happy situation. It only adds to confusion. All becomes tentative. But uncertain politics does not mean an unstable system. There will be pulls and pressures, even horse-trading, but all within the precincts of the system. Those who know India will not be unduly perturbed even if the polls do not throw up any single party or person to lead. Italy had 63 coalitions in the last 50 years, India only three or four during the same period. Political stability does not have anything to do with unstable parliament. Indians are beginning to understand it. Foreigners will do so in due course and shed their fear in investing in India.

Dr A R Mallick: A Personal Tribute

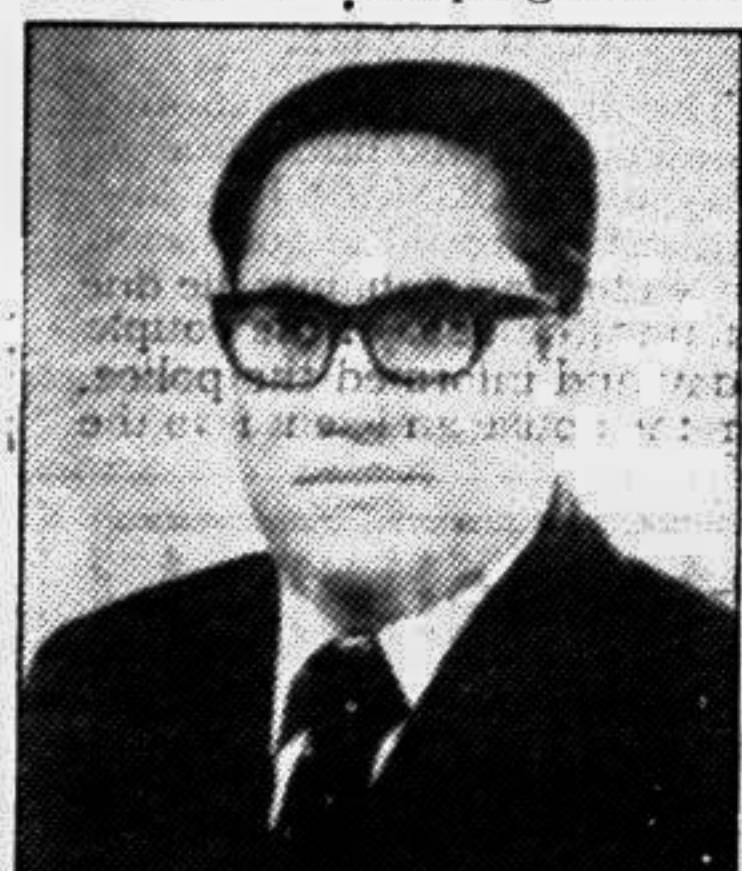
by Zillur Rahman Siddiqui

LATE Dr A R Mallick (1918-1997) died this day a year ago. I am one of those, and they must be counted in hundreds, who deeply mourn his death. In his death we lost a towering man, a noble soul, a natural leader.

As I remember, I first met him in London, early in October 1952, and on my way to Oxford. A R Mallick was in his second year in London, at the School of Oriental and African Studies, working for his Ph.D. A year later he was leaving London, after having obtained his degree, and a small group had assembled at the Charing Cross railway station to say farewell to him. He and his friend Abu Rushd Matinuddin (Exeter College, Oxford) had come by the same boat and were leaving by the same boat. For them, it was a moment of joy, for me, destined to stay on for one more year, of the very opposite. Mallick Bhai, as it became our form of address later on, could read my mind alright and said a few consolatory words. He remembered very well what I had said sometime back that I would even hug the poorest looking street urchin from my homeland, repeated this memorable saying approvingly. This he did to show how well he could share my nostalgic mood.

A little more than a year later, the scene shifts to Rajshahi railway station. Mallick Bhai, now Dr A R Mallick, and a few others, Syed Ali Ashraf among them, who had already joined the newly established university at Rajshahi, were all of them awaiting my arrival. Dr Mallick led the small group of friends and would be colleagues, to meet ten years or so, we were together at Rajshahi because of the university we all served. In many ways it was an exciting time, an exciting experience, all of us joining hands to build it up. The fraternity of teachers was steadily growing in size. Amidst all changes, and the accompanying growth, the small caucus we formed with Dr Mallick as the central figure continued to exist as something of a core of the expanding community.

From 1965 to the time the war of liberation started, Dr Mallick was at Chittagong, first as the Project Director and later as Vice-Chancellor of the University. All his qualities, as a natural leader, as an organiser driven by a robust faith in the mission in hand, came into full play in his new and larger role.



spokesman and an emissary of the Bangladesh government in exile, led by the indefatigable Tajuddin Ahmed, touring through the length and breadth of India. The sole object was to win the assent of our Indian neighbours in favour of our national struggle. In course of time, the same mission took him beyond India, to UK and USA.

The story is well told, both by himself in his memoirs, and by his companion of those days, Dr Anisuzzaman. The one writes in a matter of fact style, and the other, whose narrative is confined strictly to the events of that fateful year, writes equally an account of the mission, without any tall talk. Together with the efforts of Justice Abu Sayeed Chowdhury, those of Dr Mallick forms a distinct and distinguished chapter of the history of our war of independence. Both Justice Chowdhury and Dr Mallick made their separate contribution to our war efforts and they made it in a manner that only men with their individual gifts could

make. It goes to the credit of the government in exile and later on to the government of liberated Bangladesh that Dr Mallick's cardinal qualities and gifts, his courage and wisdom did not go unrecognised at the end of the war. In fact, his services were needed in broader fields of the nation's life. His academic life had to be sacrificed to meet other and more pressing demands of the new nation. In rather quick succession, he was called upon to serve as Secretary, ministry of education, as our first High Commissioner in India, and finally, as Finance Minister, succeeding, much to his embarrassment, Tajuddin Ahmed, a friend to whom he had nothing but admiration. Reading his memoirs, one is left in no doubt about the complete trust and the highest regard in which the father of the nation held him.

For those who came close to him in their smaller world as I did, he was truly a friend, philosopher and guide. It is impossible to forget the warmth of his heart, the hospitality of his table, the magic charm of his conversation, words flowing in cascade, revealing a soul frank in the extreme, sometimes dangerously so. Here was a man born to love, to help, to befriend and above all to guide in all difficulties.

Dr Mallick's last days were sad, sad for him and sad for us who knew him and loved him. Still in possession of a stout body, his memory was failing him, blocking the gusto of his conversation. And there were memories to trouble him, to haunt him, — the killings of August and November, 1975. These were particularly painful memories, and he would often give vent to his bitterness, the bitterness of a man who witnessed the tragedy and was helpless to do anything he would have liked to do. Add to all this was the memory of the circumstances in which, however briefly, he had to be a member of the Mushataf cabinet. His commitment to the war of liberation and its values were total. He disclaimed any political affiliation in the ordinary sense of the word but he would never deny or in any way hesitate affirming his highest regard for Sheikh Mujib. And the regard was mutual.

Dr Mallick lived a full life. He gave his best to his country at a most crucial phase of the nation's life. The country owes him a debt of gratitude.

THE electoral campaign has been practically reduced to Atal Bihari Vajpayee versus Sonia Gandhi. In a way, it is between the Bhartiya Janta Party and Congress. True, regional parties are there, trying to hold their territory. But the real fight is confined to the BJP and Congress for the simple reason that there is no other viable political party in most of the northern India states.

As of today, there is no wave, for or against any party, either in a state or in the country on the whole. Never before. India has witnessed 11 Lok Sabha elections since Independence — has the outcome been so unpredictable. It's more or less a toss-up. Yet, one thing is certain that neither Congress nor the BJP, nor the combination of the Janata Dal, the communists and their allies, will be anywhere near a majority. That it will be a hung parliament as it was in 1989 and 1996 is a foregone conclusion. But this time the members will be more dispersed than before. A coalition will take some time to arrive. The UP may comprise of 20-odd parties, instead of 14 as in its present strength.

In fact, in the last 14 years since 1984 when Congress secured 411 seats in the 543-member house, no party has secured a majority in the Lok Sabha. In the 1991 election, Congress won only 232 seats but it swelled its number through defection and deceit. This time, too, all political parties will be well short of 272, the required strength to form the government. Still, both Congress and the BJP claim 200 each. Arithmetically, this is not possible. Both may not reach the number. While Congress has flimsy existence in UP, Bihar, Maharashtra, Gujarat and Punjab, constituting 226 seats, the BJP

is in not-too-happy position in eastern and southern India, which embrace 155 seats.

Congress, which was at one time ahead of the BJP, suffered a serious jolt in 1996 in the wake of a revolt in Tamil Nadu. This time it will be affected by the stirrings in West Bengal. Congress, despite the Sonia Gandhi factor, is a divided house. Many official candidates will be sabotaged by those who have been denied tickets. The BJP has also its share of dissidence. Gujarat is one example. The intervention by the RSS, the BJP's mentor, has brought about discipline of sorts. But unity is only on surface. Madhya Pradesh still torments the party.

The Janata Dal, once emerging as the third force, is disintegrating. The exit of former Bihar chief minister Laloo Prasad Yadav and the death of Biju Patnaik in Orissa have hit the party beyond redemption. Its expelled stalwart from Karnataka, Ramakrishna Hegde, may not win more than five seats but he will cut into the Janata votes and bring down the party's present Lok Sabha strength of 46.

If ever the political situation is retrieved, the credit will go to the communists, who may string different regional parties together to keep Congress and the BJP out of power. The problem with the third force or the national front is that it has 'primarily existed on paper. It never achieved cohesiveness or credibility. There is wide disillusionment with it.

All the three combinations

BANGABANDHU MURDER CASE

Verbatim Text of Cross Examination of 47th Prosecution Witness

Major General (ret'd) Kalilur Rahman, PW-47, in Bangabandhu murder case, was cross-examined by defense lawyers when the trial proceedings resumed at Dhaka District and Sessions Judge Court on Monday.

Following are the excerpts from his examination by advocate Gazi Zillur Rahman, state defense for absconding accused Lt Col (dismissed) Khandaker Abdur Rashid:

Q: From when the disappointment was prevailing in army?

A: I can't say.

Q: Were you the senior most army personnel after repatriation from Pakistan?

A: In Infantry.

Q: Is the Army Chief made from the Infantry?

A: Usually it is done. But it is not the absolute rule.

Q: Were you disappointed as you, after returning from Pakistan, saw Shafiuallah as the Chief of Army Staff?

A: No.

Q: You became more disappointed after Zia was made the Chief of Army Staff in 1975.

A: This is not true.

Q: Were you a disappointed officer?

A: No.

Q: The CDS post was created to manage you.

A: This is not true.

Q: Did you ask to prepare troops after you became confirmed that Bangabandhu has been killed?

A: Yes.

Q: When did you come to in active politics?

A: In 1978.

Examination by advocate MA Wahed, state defense for absconding accused Major (ret'd) Shariful Haq Dalim:

Q: When you were promoted to Major General?

A: In April, 1975.

Q: The freedom fighter officers were provided two years seniority. For this, there was a conflict between the freedom fighter officers and the repatriated officers.

A: Yes.

Q: He told you that some people captured the radio station or were trying to capture it. He also asked you to do some-

A: I don't know whether there was any conflict or not.

Q: Were Zia and Shafiuallah junior to you?

A: Yes.

Q: Were they promoted to Major General before you?

A: Yes.

Q: You were dissatisfied about Bangabandhu government for your delayed promotion.

A: No, I was not dissatisfied.

Q: Did you contact Vice President after receiving the news that President Bangabandhu has been killed?

A: No.

Examination by advocate Abdur Razzaq Khan, defense lawyer for accused Lt Col (ret'd) Sultan Shariyar Rashid Khan:

Q: Did you contest the parliamentary elections?

A: Yes, in 1979, 86 and 91. I was elected an MP in 1986.

Q: When did you join Gano Forum?

A: When Dr Kamal Hossain formed Gano Forum in 1994.

Q: Who were in Brigadier rank when you returned the country in 1972?

A: Brigadiers Jabbar, Majumdar, and Majed-ul-Haq returned to the country. Among the senior other officers Lt Gen Khwaja Waseuddin and Maj Gen Si Karim also returned.

Q: Who did include Zia in the pay commission?

A: I don't know.

Q: Did any one raise the demand for a separate pay commission for the armed forces?

A: General Shafiuallah along with me went to Bangabandhu and told him about a separate pay commission for the armed forces. Bangabandhu instantly asked Montoranjhan Dhar to take up the matter.

Q: Had Home Minister Mansur Ali make telephone call to you after you woke up from bed on August 15 morning?

A: Yes.

Q: He told you that some people captured the radio station or were trying to capture it. He also asked you to do some-

thing.

A: Perhaps he told me something like that.

Q: Did you ask your force to go to radio station?

A: I opened my radio and listened to Dalim's announcement that Bangabandhu has been killed. I asked my troops to get ready for action.

Q: Did you contact Army Headquarters after talking to the Home Minister?

A: No.

Q: Did you give any interview to Prof Abu Sayeed for his book titled 'Facts and Documents'?

A: No, I didn't give him any interview.

Q: There is an interview of you in the book and you gave it.

A: This is not true.

Q: Were General Zia arrested by the soldiers on November 3?

A: He was arrested, but I don't know by whom.

Q: Did you not try to know that who arrested Zia?

A: I don't feel it's necessary.

Q: Was he freed on November 7?

A: I heard that he was freed on day after November 6 night.

Q: General Osmany had written eight volumes of a book on Liberation War and pre and post-August 15 incidents. The scripts were kept at his Sylhet house 'Noor Manjil'.

A: As a member of General Osmany Trustee Board, you brought the scripts and kept those in a bank.

A: This is not true.

Examination by advocate TM Akbar, defense lawyer for accused Lt Col (LPR) Muhiuddin

Q: Can you remember the names of sector commanders of BDR when you were the chief in 1975?

A: One of those was Major Manjur Rashid Khan, a lieutenant colonel, who was later hanged.

UNB.

Further texts of cross examination will be published as and when received.

To the Editor...

Letters for publication in these columns should be addressed to the Editor and legibly written or typed with double space. For reasons of space, short letters are preferred, and all are subject to editing and cuts. Pseudonyms are accepted. However, all communications must bear the writer's real name, signature and address.

"No Mr Choudhury, no!"

Sir, The subject of the letter by A Citizen titled as above is quite disturbing. The Citizen states that the President of BCB and deputy minister Mr Sabir Hussain Choudhury in his inaugural speech stating 26 years ago India and Pakistan fought a war against each other through which Bangladesh was born... I am not sure where Mr. Choudhury was in 1971, nor do I give a damn. I would like Mr. Choudhury to read the history of the nation and if he doesn't have the time, then a 45-minute walk through the Muktiuddha Jadugar at Segunbagicha will show him the birth of Bangladesh.

I would also like to remind him, such a cricket fan as he is, that on Mar. 1971, when President Yahya Khan postponed the National Assembly there was a cricket match going on at the Dhaka stadium where the Pakistan team was playing the MCC. As soon as the news of this Pakistani treachery

reached the crowd at the stadium, there was a pandemonium and the game was postponed. Bangabandhu was giving his reaction of disgust of Yahya's decision at a press conference at the nearby Purbani Hotel. The rest is history — still vivid in the minds of millions who suffered the atrocities of Pakistan armed forces and the treachery of the Pakistani military, political and bureaucratic leadership.

So Mr. Choudhury I hope you will soon visit the museum where the history of our freedom struggle and Liberation is vividly documented including that period of 1971. You will see the incredible courage suffering and fierceness of the freedom fighters, belonging to all classes and age, belonging to Bangladesh fighting the well trained and armed Pakistan armed forces. You will also see the unprecedented help that was extended to our people by the government and people of India. You will also see the public opinion in support of

Bangladesh the world over once the news of the genocide committee by the Pakistan forces reached the outside world. Nobody can remake history, the past will always haunt us, because it really happened.

Akku Chowdhury
Banani Dhaka

No second Vietnam, please....

Sir, The US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright met with Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince Abdullah on Monday last in her ongoing effort to gather support from Iraq's neighbours to comply with UN resolutions. Some nations, including Jordan and Kuwait, released strong statements after their leaders meet with Albright during the weekend, calling on Iraq to obey the UN demands. However, Saudi Arabia may be a tough sell. One Saudi official said the country will not allow any strikes against Iraq from its territory or bases. Now Madam Albright is in a mighty fix. Somehow the good old obeying countries are showing resentments.

The US is trying everything they can to get them under their control. Already the French have backed off from their anti-US statements. The British are going full steam ahead, trying to rekindle the good old Em-

pire's flame. How long will it take for the English to realise that they are now confined to an island? Being behind the skirts of US will not make them popular and force others to bow their heads either. I just hope that this new anti-Iraq war bells do not turn into a second Vietnam battlefield.

Masroor Ahmed Deepak
Dhaka

"Sudden Splendour"

Sir, In the DS 9 January, 1998 issues Mr Obaidullah Khan's write-up was a fascinating piece of writing depicting a clear picture of BRAC in Bangladesh. We are grateful to the staff of BRAC for their genuine involvement in the economic activities of the poor. It seems to me that the BRAC has been doing an excellent job in eradicating poverty, illiteracy and backwardness of the poor villagers who are "the heart of Bangladesh".

The BRAC has fully realised the evils of rapid industrialisation for a country like Bangladesh. It has started popularising the concept of cottage industry as domestic system of rural life in our country by manual labour, with a small capital and on a small scale.

It has cheered up the minds

even in a cheerless environment. The microcredit system has made the best use of woman labour in our country.

It is now the right time to manufacture laboratory equipment made of glasses and many other items necessary for research work in the educational institutions universities, big research complexes both at home and abroad. Like India, we can also earn foreign exchanges through export of scientific equipment to the western world.

With a view to competing successfully with machine-made goods cottage industries should be given adequate patronage and protection by the government to make use of manpower for the lasting splendour of the dazzling light coming from the unlettered in Bangladesh for the present and future generations.

Abul Ashraf Noor
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Democracy in a coma

Sir, Permit me to begin with a quote from James Russell Lowell (1819-1891): "Democracy is that form of society, no matter what its political classification, in which every man has a chance and know that he

has it." In similar vein Sir Winston Churchill said, "The only guide to a man is his conscience."

We claim to be a democratic society, and we shall also admit that there is something called party discipline. But a membership of a party certainly does not mean servility or servitude. Major (Ret'd) Akhteruzzaman had a constituency and also had a right to make a conscientious objection, in which he believed. He has been disciplined and punished by his party, but possibly not by his constituency, which elected him as an MP.

This culture of abstaining from the Parliament and failing to execute one's assigned responsibility is disturbing situation, to which we have been subjected to for the past few years. This is an unheard of thing in any other part of the world. Real democratic culture has to start from the family unit, and this has not been the case in our society, and this has been reflected in our political culture. All voices cannot be silenced forever. An evolution of political culture based on truth, sincerity and respect of other's opinion, for which there is still time, can save us from self-destruction.

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