

# BJP Has No Easy Choice

Probably, things will not come to a head so long as a liberal person like Vajpayee heads the coalition. He can give the impression of being everything to everybody.

ing act. Vajpayee must have realised that by now.

At present, Congress, more so its president Sonia Gandhi, wants to show that the party can play the role of a 'constructive' opposition. Her belief is that Vajpayee and his allies will fall apart in due course of time. The thinking of United Front is, however, different. It does not want a party with communal credentials to be in power at all or to get an opportunity to entrench itself. Congress leaders like Sharad Pawar share the view but none dares to oppose Sonia Gandhi at present because of the pull of the dynasty she has shown during the elections. Left to him, he would bring down the government because he has already reached 'an understanding' in Mamta Banerjee in West Bengal and Chautala in Haryana.

The BJP realises its shaky position. It does not want to cross swords either with Congress or the United Front. The re-election of Congress MP, P. A. Sangma, as the Speaker shows that the BJP has come to face the reality. Otherwise, the official stand of the BJP, as enunciated by BJP stalwart Madhan Lal Khurana was that his party "cannot give the position of speaker to the Opposition." It appears till Khurana's statement, the BJP had not done its home work. Once it counted the numbers, it found that it had to accept the Opposition. Speaker, Khurana had to change his tune.

Perhaps the BJP or, for that matter, the RSS, has realised that it has to accept the dictates of others till it comes to power on its own. For the first time, it has won in the Lok Sabha election in all the states, except for Kerala. It feels its influence will spread all over as the days go by. But it forgets it has won because the party has diluted its stand. It has publicly shed its anti-Muslim bias. If it goes back to its policy of Hindutva, it will once again alienate the people or the allies it has on its side at present.

Indeed, the BJP has no easy choice. It has to take its pick on the Hindutva. Not only can it revive the contentious issues like the Ram temple, special status to Jammu and Kashmir and common civil code. The first option pushes it back to a square one position with a handful of seats in the Lok Sabha. The second gives it a shaky government, with a new kind of mandate in the shape of National Agenda. Does it leave what the allies have forced on it to stay in power? Probably, things will not come to a head so long as a liberal person like Vajpayee heads the coalition. He can give the impression of being everything to everybody. This, inevitably, postpones the unaccommodating agenda of the RSS, which is the BJP mentor. How long can the RSS wait is the question. For it, Vajpayee is only a means to an end, not the end by itself.

**P**OLITICS is an art of possible. The Bhartiya Janata Party has learnt it the hard way. The reason why its government fell within 13 days in 1996 was the line it had drawn, beyond which it was not willing to go at that time. Now it is power that has motivated the party. It is willing to go to any length to compromise. There are no doubts in its mind, nor are there any full stops. In fact, they were not there even before elections.

Such personalities and parties, which were anathema to it in the past, are welcome allies. Jayalalitha, Chautala,

the cabinet for her lawyer, Ram Jethmalani.

Lok Shakti leader R K Hegde, who is not happy with his portfolio of Commerce, was not given Defence. When George Fernandes asked for it, he was told that it was slated for Hegde. However, loud the BJP's denials, the threat by Subramaniam Swamy, the one-member party leader, has its effect on the eve of the cabinet formation. He said he would vote against the government if it gave Hegde a sensitive ministry like Defence. The BJP did not want to be dictated by Swamy, a red-rag to the party. But it could not af-

will allow the law to take its course." Jayalalitha, too, was happy over Buta Singh's insistence. In fact, it is surprising how the President agreed to administer him the oath of office when there are cases of corruption pending against him.

Maneka Gandhi was one of the state ministers, who was not prepared to be downgraded after having been the Union Minister in the short-lived Chandrasekhar government. She was brought round by the promise of independent charge. The three other persons, who demanded and got independent charge, are Babaguda Patel (Rural Development), Dilip Ray (Coal) and Dalit Ezhilmalai (Health and Family Welfare). What assurances Mamta Banerjee of Trinamool Congress in West Bengal got is not yet public. But her support from outside cannot be taken for granted if there is no quid pro quo. She has, however, said that her only aim was that West Bengal should be saved from the CPI (M). This means she is waiting for some action by the Vajpayee government.

Despite all the compromises, the BJP and its allies are only one vote more than the simple majority. Still, this would not have been possible if the Telugu Desam, which has 12 members, had not decided to stay neutral. "Then there are at least half a dozen one-member parties, which at present support the coalition. If they are ever enticed by the other side, the Vajpayee government would fall then and there. Come to think of it, the Centre is once again ruled by a coalition government. Once again, it is a combination of 13 parties; once again, it is a Front of sorts, comprising of different constituents. Inevitably, the governance will have to be a balance-

ford to take risks. The portfolio, 'Defence', allotted to Hegde on the list, was deleted at the last minute.

Again, Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee was keen on having Jaswant Singh as Finance Minister. But his appointment was a casualty in the cross-firing between the two rival industrial empires, the Reliance of Dhirubhai Ambani and the Bombay Dying of Nusli Wadia. That Jaswant Singh was defeated at the Lok Sabha polls was used as a pretext by the RSS to keep him out. It is opposed to him for his liberal views. Vajpayee was unhappy to recall Jaswant Singh's name from the list sent to Rashtrapati Bhavan.

Even Buta Singh, all by himself, had his way. He got deleted from the National Agenda one sentence: "In respect of all pending cases of corruption, we

## BETWEEN THE LINES

Kuldip Nayar writes from New Delhi

Sukhran and Buta Singh, name anyone with corruption charges, they are there. No price has been considered too high to get anyone. The dirtier the better because he or she will be more reliable. It is not the question of bad conscience, it is the reality, as the BJP leaders argue. If others do not observe the Lakshman Rekha, why should they?

The formation of the cabinet indicates all. AIADMK chief Jayalalitha wanted such portfolio as would help extricate herself from the cases of corruption, grant and misuse of power. She has her partmen, wherever she wanted. Thambi Dural is the Law Minister and R K Kumar, the state minister in charge of Revenue, the two positions which are crucial for the 'clearance' of cases against her. She has also found a berth in

# Is President Suharto Treated Unjustly?

by Barrister Harun ur Rashid

Now that the President Suharto has been re-elected, it is likely that the IMF would soften their prescriptions cutting the hard edges on the social sectors and it is hoped that the worst of Indonesia's financial turbulence is over to the great relief of all.

**S**OUTH-EAST Asia's economic melt-down has particularly hit hard Indonesia, the world's fourth most populous and the largest Muslim country. Concerns were based on a looming recession triggered by financial turmoil and dramatic loss of exchange rate rupiah currency, growing unemployment, social unrest and ethnic tension. Allegations of corruption and nepotism had an adverse impact on the financial crisis.

However, international community admits that it's not an "economic crisis" but a "financial" crisis. This means that the economic fundamentals of the Indonesian Government's monetary policies seem to be in order. The foreign debt of about \$70 billions dollars does not rest with the Government but with the private sector. It is alleged that IMF prescriptions do not address the root causes of the debts of the private sector. Indonesian legal regime of the banking and other financial institutions including the corporations' law lagged behind the economic boom of recent years. IMF by its own charter is unable to deal with the private sector.

The Indonesian hesitancy to comply with the IMF prescriptions emanate, in my view, from two factors: first, the exchange rate of rupiah dipped further down even after IMF's commitment and secondly the pride of Indonesia, in particular Javanese, was hurt when President Suharto was seen to sign the IMF agreement while the IMF Managing Director Michel Campdessus with his arms folded was looking on the President. It was a classic reminder of a scene of the colonial period between the victor and the vanquished. Some al-

lege that the posture of Mr. Campdessus at the signing ceremony was insensitive and not in keeping with the local customs.

President Suharto is 76 and held power for 32 years. He has been elected for another five years. Many credits could be attributed to President Suharto's administration which many people forget easily at this time of crisis.

A country of 13000 islands with 200 million population is consolidated under his administration. Until mid-1997 the economic and social benefits of his administration is well known and earned praise and admiration from international community. Let me cite a few bare statistics. Indonesia had registered high and diversified economic growth for 25 years. Absolute poverty declined from 40 per cent of the population in 1976 to 13.5 per cent in 1993. Average rice yields more than doubled. Infant mortality fell from 132 per 1000 births to 69. The proportion of children without schooling dropped from 68 to 18 per cent. The family planning programmes within the context of Islam has been innovative and successful. Many Islamic countries have followed the Indonesian programmes as their model in this area.

These achievements are now completely ignored. Indonesian farmers will know how to use technology to get higher rice crops, people will not forget literacy skills and the exporting skills of the business people will remain intact. Of course with the benefit of hindsight President Suharto might have adopted policies differently. Corruption and nepotism are inherently human weaknesses and its connotation also differs

from one culture to another. No country can dictate from a high moral ground on this human frailty. (One US Vice President was guilty of taking a petty bribe and the allegations against the former Italian Prime Minister are instances in point).

It is indeed a fact that his family and a few favourites have amassed huge wealth. However, this needs to be kept in proper perspective. Their assets in businesses, infrastructure or properties are located in Indonesia and could be utilised fruitfully. The family's "rent seeking and subsidies" in their enterprises is estimated by some economists at no more than half a percentage point on Indonesia's annual growth.

I would argue that Indonesia does not deserve the treatment now given by the industrialised western nations and international financial institutions. The President of World Bank last year praised the efforts of Indonesian Government. The foreign financiers who competed with one another were only too pleased to pour in funds in the private enterprises belonging to influential section of Indonesians. If there is a fairness in the whole picture, they should also be held accountable for this crisis. It appears that the foreign financiers remain unblemished and no one talks about their greed and negligence of creating a situation where the innocent people in Indonesia are being unjustly punished.

It is deeply concerned about the potential instability in Indonesia because of its size and strategic location. Instability might unleash nationalist or Islamic forces hostile to the US. This could result in the freedom of movement of

US aircraft carriers and other warships through the Malacca Strait which provides the quickest route between the Pacific Ocean and the Indian Ocean. (This Strait runs between the Indonesian island of Sumatra and Singapore). The Commander of US forces in the Pacific Joseph Prueher in early February made candid comments in respect of Indonesia when he at a speech in London at the Royal United Services Institute for Defence Studies said "It is a really tough situation. .... We are trying to work in an economic, political and military way to be as supportive as we can to try to bring this back in line."

It is good to see that Prime Minister of Malaysia persuaded the ASEAN members to agree in principle to his proposal for the use of ASEAN currencies in regional trading in place of US dollar. This action presents a united front in solving the region's economic problems. Malaysia was willing to host a meeting of ASEAN central bank governors to discuss the mechanics of trade payments in ASEAN currencies.

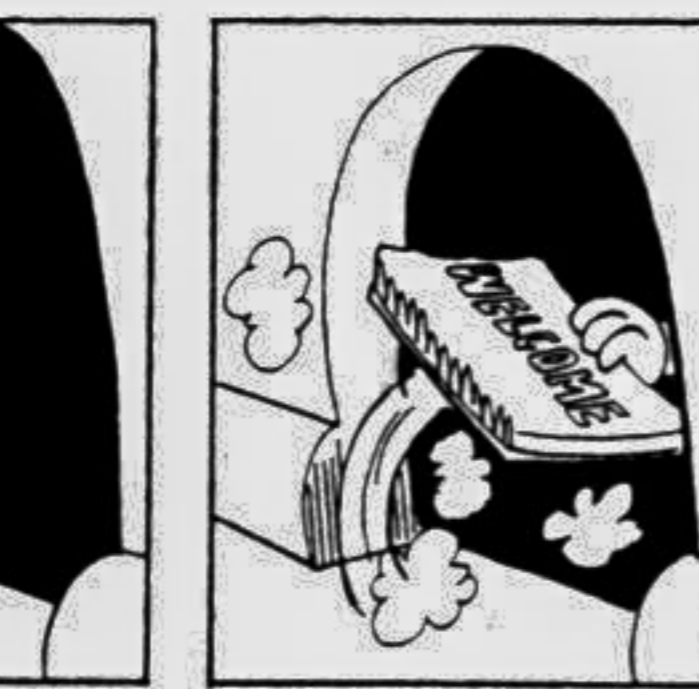
Now that the President Suharto has been re-elected, it is likely that the IMF would soften their prescriptions cutting the hard edges on the social sectors and it is hoped that the worst of Indonesia's financial turbulence is over to the great relief of all. It is not fair to highlight the negatives at a time when many plus points could be cited during Suharto's administration. In our culture one does not forget the good work of some one who is in a distress temporarily.

The writer is former Bangladesh Ambassador to the UN in Geneva.

## Tom and Jerry



## James Bond



## Calling in the Germs



**IAN FLEMING'S** James Bond DRAWN BY JOHN McCLUSKY

AS BOND PREPARES A THOUGHT ON THE CHAIR—THE END BRINGS OUT IN TELEVISION ANIMATED SERIES

THEY GO! SHE'S GOING INSIDE—HE DO BE CAREFUL! JAMES!

THEY HALF SCOP, BUT CAI CANNYVE SUGAN!

TO the Bashir household, the telephone is one of the most important appliances at home. The eldest son Zahir is away, studying in the US. His mother awaits a call from him every weekend. Mr. Bashir often works late at night and calls home to let the missus know if he won't be coming home for dinner. Even little Anita, the youngest member of the household, has started receiving calls from her schoolmates to discuss homework assignments and more important topics like their newest party dresses or their favourite pop stars!

What the Bashirs do not realise, however, is that this very telephone may be endangering the health of their family. This seemingly innocuous device can be a serious health hazard. Unknown to most of us, we are surrounded by innumerable microscopic germs even in our clean homes. In the kitchen, for example, if meat or vegetables

are not washed properly before being chopped, the germs from these can be transferred to the chopping board. Germs have most likely already set up hearth and home in the chopping board, arriving from vegetables and meat chopped earlier on as well as from dust and dirt which have accumulated over time.

Anyway, the germs from the food or the chopping board are transferred to the hand. The hand, when lifting the telephone receiver, then transfers these germs to the instrument. Thus, if you're busy in the kitchen and the phone rings, don't simply rush to grab up the receiver. In the interest of your family's health, wash your hands and dry them first if you don't you'll be communicating a lot more than just a message. You'll be communicating potentially dangerous germs to the next person who uses the phone.

It's not just the kitchen

where you're likely to pick up these germs. You may be working in the garden, you may be dusting the furniture or tidying up your children's room when the phone rings. Even from these areas in your house you may bring germs to the phone. These germs can transfer themselves from the phone to your family.

These germs and dust particles can lead to coughs, colds and even more serious ailments like dysentery or diarrhoea. Thus, the deceptively safe telephone set may imperil the health of the entire household.

Certain rules may be followed to reduce risk in this regard. Washing hands before answering the phone is important. After washing, hands should be dried thoroughly to avoid electric shocks. Contaminated hands means a contaminated telephone, rendering the instrument more perilous than the kitchen chopping block.

The general perception in

Bangladesh is that a clean kitchen and a clean toilet means a clean home. However, one must bear in mind that cleanliness and hygiene are not one and the same. What looks clean may not necessarily be clean or hygienic. Careless practices could endanger your own health and that of your family.

We use the telephone as a means of communication. To prevent it from communicating disease, we must keep it clean at all times. A disinfectant can be used to wipe down the phone regularly. Merely dusting or spraying with a freshener is not enough.

So families like the Bashir household, where the telephone has almost become a member of the home, must be very conscious of the potential dangers created by careless handling of the telephone. The phone should communicate messages, not germs.

Probe News Agency

## Project on water supply facilities in coastal belt launched

The first phase of the project, "water supply facilities in the coastal belt of Bangladesh," aimed at reducing water borne diseases and ensuring better health of the people in the coastal areas through providing safe water was formally launched in the city yesterday, reports BSS.

State Minister for LGRD and Cooperatives Mofazzal Hossain Chowdhury Maya, Bir Bikram, launched the work of the project as the chief guest.

The Islamic Development Bank (IDB) is financing a total of Taka 388.61 million to implement the project in the 14 coastal districts in the country.

The state minister, while inaugurating the project, said that

sustainable and equitable development in the water sector is one of the cardinal objects of the present government.

He said the government is striving hard to ensure equitable supply of safe drinking water in this regard.

"Diarrhoeal and other water-borne diseases break out and turn into epidemics claiming huge death tolls every year in the southern part of the country due to scarcity of safe drinking water," he said.

The state minister thanked the IDB for providing financial support in this sector.

Secretary of Local Government Division A H M Abdul Hye and chief engineer of the Department of Public Health Engineering (DPHE) S A K M Shafigue, among others, addressed the launching session.

Later, a workshop attended by local and foreign experts was held in the DPHE conference room.

## 'Discipline vital element in army'

Chief of Army Staff Lt Gen Muhammad Mustafizur Rahman, Bir Bikram, yesterday said discipline is a vital element in the army which kept the organisation united, reports UNB.

The Chief of Army Staff was addressing the Commanding Officers' conference of the Electrical and Mechanical Engineering Corps of Bangladesh Army at the BME Centre and School at Saidpur Cantonment.

Gen Mustafiz said proper training is needed to build efficient soldiers. Combination of training and administration produces genuine soldiers, he added.

He asked the members of the EME Corps to use their innovative and technical knowledge to compensate the resource constraints.

Paying homage to the members of the corps who had laid their lives in the War of Liberation in 1971, the Chief of Army Staff further said the members of the EME Corps should uphold the glorious traditions of their predecessors for the better cause of the country.

Among others, Principal Staff Officers, Commandant of the EME Centre and School and the Commanding Officers of the EME Corps were present on the occasion.

## BEJA coordination meeting held

The first coordination meeting of the Bangladesh Environment Journalists Association (BEJA) was held at the National Press Club yesterday, reports BSS.

Chaired by Shamsuddin Ahmed the meeting discussed various issues related to environmental degradation in the country and ways and means to overcome it.

The meeting also evaluated the present contribution of journalists to the improvement of the environment and emphasised the need for motivating people to face the alarming situation.

The meeting was addressed, among others, by Shafigur Rahman, Atiqul Mahmud, Akhter Ahmed Khan, Enamul Huq Chowdhury, Khan Mohammad Salek and Ashok Sinha.

The meeting decided to constitute a 12-member committee in the next meeting of the association on April 17.

## Tofail asks DCs Extend overall cooperation to investors

Commerce and Industries Minister Tofail Ahmed asked the deputy commissioners to extend overall cooperation to the investors, reports BSS.

Speaking at the conference of deputy commissioners in the cabinet division conference room the minister said that an excellent investment-friendly atmosphere had been prevailing in the country. A huge number of foreign investors, he said, were coming to Bangladesh to invest.

State Minister for Jute A K M Faezul Huq, State Minister for Textile A K M Jahangir Hossain and Deputy Minister for Industries Hasibur Rahman Swapan spoke on the occasion.

Tofail said that the present government had been providing overall cooperation to the investors under the free-market economic system.

He said there had been sufficient stock of all essentials including oil, sugar, salt and onion. The prices of the daily necessities were also stable, the minister added.

**Westminster Abbey holds special prayer for Bangladesh**

One of the Britain's top churches held a service Monday with a special prayer for the well-being of Bangladesh, a message received in the city yesterday said, reports BSS.

The Westminster Abbey, Britain's historic church, conducted evensong, the evening prayer service, with a special prayer for Bangladesh.

Reverend Barry Fenton conducted the service and prayed for the continued success of the government and people of Bangladesh. In a reference to the Chittagong Hill Tracts accord, the prayer specially asked for "the success of the tribal resettlement process" started in Bangladesh.

The service is an annual tradition for the Commonwealth countries.

Meanwhile, on March 26, the Westminster Abbey flew the flag of Bangladesh on its towers to mark Bangladesh's Independence Day.

## JS body on Ministry of Information held

A meeting of the parliamentary standing committee on the Ministry of Information was held yesterday at the Jatiya Sangsad Bhavan with its president Abul Kalam Azad in the chair, reports BSS.

The meeting discussed in details the activities of Bangladesh Television, budget allocation, matters related to the appointment and promotion of the officers and employees and the progress of the development projects.

It was informed at the meeting that initiatives had been taken to replace the old equipment of television including camera with the cooperation of Japan.

Committee members State Minister for Information Prof Abu Sayeed, State Minister for LGRD and Cooperatives Mofazzal Hossain Chowdhury Maya, Sultan Mohammad Mansur Ahmed, M Mustafizur Rahman, Begum Shahin Monwara Huq and advocate N K Alam Chowdhury attended the meeting.

**Zikir mahfil**

The monthly zikir mahfil will be held today after Magrib prayers at Khanqaya Toajia, 27, Shiddheshwari road in the city, says a press release.

## Hill organisations hold rally

Three hill organisations yesterday brought out a joint procession and held a rally in the city protesting indiscriminate arrest of their leaders in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, reports UNB.

The organisations are Pahari Gano Parishad, Pahari Chhatra Parishad and Hill Women Federation.

Held at Aparajeya Bangla, the rally was presided over by Kabita Chakma.

It was addressed, among others, by Organising Secretary of Pahari Gano Parishad Samiran Chakma, Information and Publicity Secretary of Pahari Chhatra Parishad Dilip Chakma and Convener of Dhaka City Pahari Chhatra Parishad Milton Chakma.

Addressing the rally, they accused police of carrying out repressive acts on the people in the name of implementing the CHT Peace Treaty.

**Jamaat city unit rally tomorrow**

Dhaka city unit of Jamaat-e-Islami will hold a rally at Paltan crossing at 5 pm on Friday, reports UNB.

Jamaat will organise the rally protesting the false campaign against the party and its leaders by Bangladesh Television.

## HERE and THERE

**BUET Officers' Association**

The election of the office-bearers of the Officers' Association, BUET for the term 1405-1406 (BE) was held on Tuesday, says a press release.

Md Asadullah Khan, Controller of Examinations BUET was elected president unopposed and Rafiqul Islam was elected general secretary of the association. Other office-bearers elected are:

Vice-president — Md Azfar Ali, Treasurer — Dewan Md Abdur Rashid, Organising publicity secretary — Md Ali Akbar Khandakar, Members — Md Rahmat Ali Fakir, Md Jahangir Alam, Md Jahangir Alam, Md Tarekul Kader Mirza.

Prof Dr Aminul Haque conducted the election.

**Studio Malik Samity**

The annual general meeting of the Bangladesh Studio Malik Samity was held on Monday at a local hotel. President of the samity Manwar Hossain Manik was in the chair, says a press release.

Members present in the AGM of the samity discussed various issues relating to promotion of photographic sector.

After the AGM, a reception was accorded to renowned distinguished persons from photographic sector. Crests were also handed over to representatives of late Md Idris Miah, late Golan Kashed Dady, and to M A Beg for their outstanding contributions in the field.

**Bangladesh Scouts**

A five-day long "National Programme Exchange Workshop" organised by Bangladesh Scouts held at the National Scout Training Centre, Mouchak, Gazipur from March 27 to 31, says a press release.

One hundred young participants from Bangladesh Red Crescent Society, Swandhani, Bangladesh National Youth Federation, Lec District, Fulkuri Asar, Emergency Support Corps, Bangladesh Girl Guides Association, Chander Hat, Khelegarh, Rotaract and Bangladesh Scouts attended the

workshop.

Habibul Alam, Bir Pratik, National Commissioner (Programme) and member, Asia-Pacific region was the workshop director. Manzoor Ul Karim, Chief National Commissioner, Bangladesh Scouts attended the closing ceremony held on Tuesday as chief guest.

The participants exchanged views and ideas to formulate joint programmes for the development of the youth of the society.

**Plasma Plus**

Plasma Plus, a centre for technology transfer in science and medicine organised an "intensive training on UV-VIS Spectroscopy Applications" recently, says a press release.

The programme jointly organised with A Q Chowdhury & Co. Pvt Ltd. It was attended by a number of pharmacists, chemists and analysts from Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (BUET), Armed Forces Food and Drugs Laboratory, Bangladesh Council of Scientific and Industrial Research, Beximco Pharmaceuticals, Reman Drug Laboratories, Square Pharmaceuticals and the ACME Laboratories.

Renowned scientist, Prof A H Khan of Dept of Chemistry, Dhaka University distributed the certificates to the participants.

**JU inter deptt debate competition**

By JU Correspondent

Department of Business Administration won the first Jahangirnagar University (JU) Inter Department English Debate Championship, says a press release.

Organised by JU Debating Society, the final session of the competition was presided over by Kazi Mahmud Ahmed of North South University.

The topic of the final was "Religion Has No Place in Human Advancement."

Mohammad Razik Mia of English Department was judged at the "Debater of the Final Competition."

## Newspaper holidays

Offices of all newspapers and news agencies will remain closed on April 7, 8 and 9 on the occasion of Holy Eid-ul-Azha, reports UNB.

There will, therefore be no newspapers on April 8, 9 and 10, said a press release of Bangladesh Sangbadpatra Parished yesterday.

It also said all offices of newspaper and news agencies will also remain closed on April 14 on account of Bengali New Year and there will be no newspaper on April 15.

**Justice Muhammad Hussain's death anniversary today**

The 12th death anniversary of Justice Syed Muhammad Hussain will be observed today, says a press release.

Justice Hussain was the eldest son of late Syed Tasodduque Hussain, a District and Sessions Judge in undivided India.

Justice Hussain was an eminent judge of the Supreme Court of Bangladesh who was illegally removed under Martial Law in 1984. His removal from the Supreme Court was largely protested by the Bar Associations.

He was chairman of the International Law Association, Amnesty International, International Commission of Jurist.

Justice Hussain was one of the pioneers of cultural movement in the country and was general secretary of the Bulbul Academy of Fine Arts and Pakistan Arts Council (presently Shilpakala Academy).

In recognition for his contributions, Justice Hussain was awarded Swadhinata Padak (Posthumously).

