The Daily Star
Founder-Editor : Late S. M. Ali
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Institutionalising Democracy

As many as fifteen recommendations came off the first session of the 5-day-long seminar on *Parliament and Good Governance* held in Gazipur on Saturday. The huge interaction of MPs, academics, economists and social workers drawn from the South Asia region has been most auspiciously flagged off in a quest of *New Agenda for Strengthening Accountability in the SAARC Region.* The whole event, when over, is bound to go down as a milestone in pooling the intellectual resources, experiences and expertise of practitioners and researchers in the correlated fields of parliament and governance and utilising the sum-total of their understanding towards enrichment of democracies in South Asia. We extend a very warm welcome to the participants.

The 15 recommendations can be grouped under two broad heads. The first set of suggestions that can and should be adopted without much delay relates to democratising the political parties from within; changing the method of selecting party leadership; making fund raising by political parties transparent, limiting election expenses and auditing those; confining the role of MPs within legislative business without extra-parliamentary distractions; educating the MPs on their due role; and ensuring an effective role for the judiciary. Under the second group fall such recommendations as would require further study: *building awareness among voters, so that they can keep their representatives in Parliament accountable to them; taking public opinions on bills before their passage in parliament* ; and *authorising the MPs to deal with day to day acts of corruption in the administration.*

The ultimate test of transparency in fund-raising by any political party would lie in facing up to a neutral scrutiny and auditing exercise preferably organised by a parliamentary committee. The effective role of the judiciary cannot be ensured so long as it is not separated from the executive in all senses of the phraseology.

We are ready to take up the first set of recommendations for an energetic media campaign so that the pressure of public opinion mounts on the government to act on them sooner than later. As for the second set of suggestions the CPD, other think tanks and election watch bodies like the FEMA need to work out the methods of implementation.

We are all for a curtailment of the excessive lobby power in democracies.

Better Mind Your Business

FBCCI chief Abdul Awal Mintoo's suggestion for electing a new government every two and a half years is devoid of common sense, if not something more. Such an absurd reduction of tenure will only put a government under severe pressure to mess up things and also leave it susceptible to corruption and self-aggrandisement in double quick time. Moreover, frequent changes will result in what the FBCCI chief wants to see disappear — political instability. Besides, does the FBCCI actually know the official expenses of general elections, let alone the campaign expenditures or the other less obvious ones? Does he have the slightest idea as to the enormity of the logistic support needed to stage an election?

Certainly, an ordinary citizen does have the right to speak his mind on matters related to national interest. Perhaps he can be excused for being illogical and for saying things driven more by emotions rather than reasons. But, a person of Mintoo's status cannot afford to be irresponsible, neither in his words nor in his deeds. As the FBCCI president what he says can rightly or wrongly influence a large section of people. Unfortunately, his prescription for reduction of the term of government by half suggests he was being oblivious of his obligation to the society.

Obviously, concern at the culture of political intolerance has induced such a preposterous proposition. We appreciate his concern as we always have but not his suggested remedy. On many occasions, we have endorsed his plea to the politicians to rethink their strategy. This time around, we cannot but react to his irrational and irresponsible suggestion. In our view, it seems he has gone overboard.

It is about time he realised that the country would be better served if he employed his energy and wisdom towards improvement of the country's financial sector. He should direct his efforts to rid the system of the pernicious loan default culture. Recently, he said that it was 'not his business'. Let us remind him that it is his business, and the wave-length he has suddenly hit goes over the head of most people.

Chittagong Groans

Chittagong has been groaning under terrible loadshedding for quite some time now. On occasions the routine becomes so oppressive that it touches many important areas of day-to-day life including supply of drinking water. Strange it may sound but it is very true that the people of this city which is adjacent to where hydroelectric power is generated, and not far away from gas-fired turbines, thermal power and barge-mounted power plants, are having to suffer this ordeal. It only proves that there is always darkness under the lamp. In spite of a rated capacity to generate 766 MW of power combinedly by the units of Chittagong, loadshedding happens to be quite crippling in and around the city. The sudden stoppage of 420 MW power generation by the two units at Rauzan coupled with the flawed maintenance of Shikalbaha and Bargemounted-2 have thrown the normal life of people into total disarray.

The already difficult situation has been further aggravated by the recent incidents. The city-dwellers remain virtually without drinking water since Friday evening and on Saturday a vast area of the city went without water. Add to this the sufferings of the sick at the hospitals and clinics. People are going through terrible times in this hot summer without power supply. We strongly urge upon the Power Development Board and the relevant authority to restore power to Chittagong and relieve the inhabitants of their miseries.

Star War II and its Strategic Fallout

The new missile defence programme in Taiwan and the American role in it would in all likelihood provoke a confrontation proving true China's concern for a dangerous arms race with the Star Warriors going apace with their programme.

PERSPECTIVES

by Brig (Rtd) M Abdul Hafiz

SIXTEEN years before, Ronald Reagan's 'Star War' speech portended a change in the course of history. It rendered in a single stroke Soviet Union's strategic assumptions of the past null and void. Mikhail Gorbachev, on assumption of his presidency two years later, clearly understood the message and was left in no illusion that he would be able to counter his US counterpart's Strategic Defence Initiative (SDI). Reagan virtually paved the way for winning the four decades old cold war simply by holding out the shield of anti-missile missile programme. The US president's multi-billion dollar project was enough to unnerve an economically shattered Soviet Union, then stuck in the quagmire of its Afghan venture and the once dreaded superpower crumbled like a house of cards within years.

Now almost a decade after the fall of Moscow's 'evil empire' the Clinton administration has initiated the production of a new generation of anti-missile missile and renamed it Ballistic Missile Defence Organisation. Reagan planned space lasers and launchers to protect all of America 'the way a roof would protect a house from the rain'. But now there is a departure from that plan. After spending a total of $120b the US seems to be going back to the first anti-missile experiments of the 1960s by abandoning its plan for a space-based laser defence. Because Clinton plans land-and-sea-based rockets to defend the pockets of American troops and allies overseas with the development of super accurate 'hit-to-kill' missiles. That technology is supposed to need a lot more work with much bigger budget than that of the earlier ones.

And these are all directed this time to a spanking new target — North Korea. President Clinton has more than doubled ballistic missile defence spending for this year and much of the $10b in new development funds will go for theatre missile defence including high and low altitude interceptors as well as sea-based interceptors. He justified the spending in the backdrop of growing missile threats from North Korea which is however juxtaposed in the middle of a complex neighbourhood. Although Japan in the east has welcomed Washington's plan to put up an umbrella for her against North Korean missile, China in the west has denounced what the Chinese see as the beginning of a deadly new Asian arms race. She has launched a bitter attack on Washington's renewed Star War scheme. The Chinese also have threatened 'unprecedented tension in Sino-American relation unless Clinton backs off his plan.'

There are speculations why Clinton has to renew the Star War programme after the demise of cold war and more specifically the fall of Soviet Union which was originally America's Star War target. The idea of ballistic missile defences reemerged after 1993 North Korean missile test but really took off past summer when Pyongyang fired three-stage rocket splashing down in the sea of Japan. This immediately set in motion an urgent Tokyo-Washington negotiation on ways to come up with a viable missile defence for the archipelago.

It was revealed by the US intelligence agencies that with her new missile capability North Korea would now be able to hit American troops and allies anywhere in East Asia. It was also revealed that parts of Western America also will be within the range of North Korea's nuclear and chemical warheads. Obviously there is a growing public demand in the US to devise an appropriate response to Pyongyang's threats of possible nuclear terrorism or blackmail in the future. Ostensibly this is what has prompted Bill Clinton to give shape to National Ballistic Missile Defence that would be able to pick off incoming missile from North Korea.

Both for the US troops in Japan and South Korea as well as the countries themselves the US has no problem in providing missile defence umbrella. The US has already coopted support from both of her allies to develop what she calls a 'theatre missile defence' although some hitches with Japan persists with regard to the manner in which it will be done. Both sides are still bogged down in their own sets of arguments: Washington wants Japan to buy US technology and help finance the new Star War scheme — something Japan is reluctant to do. The Japanese on their part want US technological help to develop their own system. After five years of talks Tokyo and Washington are nowhere near an agreement except their common concerns of North Korean missile and their mutual suspicion of Pyongyang.

But the main problem emanates from Beijing. The Star War schemes have already sparked sharp reaction in China. She views the American plan as hostile and unfriendly. It is argued that the plans are not in keeping with the spirit generated by Clinton's China visit in 1998 when both considered each other's interests lying within the same strategic perimeter. China's apprehension is not without justification. After having clipped the wings of new Russia, the American and Japanese hawks see China as the 'new evil empire'. In Washington some of the conservative senators openly talk of intercepting accidental, if not deliberate, launches from Beijing. They also voice concern about China's new generation of Inter-Continental Ballistic Missiles and emphasise need for neutralising them. The Chinese consider American move to push China for an inevitable arms race with the hope that it would crush China economically.

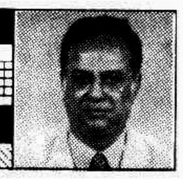
China worries more because American Star War programme in East Asia would ultimately include Taiwan making the latter's return to the mainland more difficult. After her failed attempt to intimidate Taiwan in 1996 China is believed to have deployed more than 100 M-9 and M-11 missiles along the coast nearest to Taiwan. Within next five years she would deploy more missiles facing Taiwan. But they all will be rendered ineffective if Taiwan is subsumed in US' theatre missile defence in East Asia. The Star War programme covering Taiwan will certainly bolster the island for a final breakup from China.

Indeed, a tiny Taiwan living in the shadow of a giant like China has a special attraction for anti-missile missile defence particularly in the context of China's large-scale missile deployment along Taiwanese shore and her repeated threat to reunite Taiwan, if required, by force. It is not thus surprising that apart from the United States Taiwan is perhaps the only other country to develop its own anti-missile missiles. Since 1996, Taiwan has purchased 200 anti-aircraft missile from the United States. Her next move will be determined by the nature and intensity of threats from the mainland.

In the meantime there seems to be a mini cold war in the region with the US and her allies on one side and China on the other. Since 1972 China visit of Nixon every American administration has encouraged Taiwan's peaceful reunification with the mainland but the current military and diplomatic alacrity on the part of the US smacks of foul intention. The new missile defence programme in Taiwan and the American role in it would in all likelihood provoke a confrontation proving true China's concern for a dangerous arms race with the Star Warriors going apace with their programme. Although Clinton's Star War II may still take long to be fully developed, it has already raised political storm with its reverberation felt far and wide.

Vajpayee's Topsy-turvy First Year

The Vajpayee government shook the world last May by detonating nuclear devices, inducing immediate riposte from its fierce regional rival Pakistan and, in the process, inspiring apprehension world-wide of an imminent disaster.



MATTERS AROUND US

Zaglul Ahmed Chowdhury

WHEN Mr. Atal Bihari Vajpayee's government took over on March 19 last year, the key question was, how long would the multi-party coalition will survive? Now, just over a year later, such scepticism still lingers. The Vajpayee government is a melange of divergent political parties. In between, it has weathered many a storm, and although, at times, it appeared to be falling apart, it survived. Its survival was due to not its success but rather a popular antipathy towards another mid-term election. Whatever the case may have been, the fact remains that the Bharatiya Janata Party-led coalition is still at the helm. Despite its in-built vulnerability, the government seems under no immediate threat of disintegration.

On the other hand, since coming to power, it has enjoyed reasonable success and its track-record over the last one year may not be fantastic but is definitely not lack-lustre. Its tenure so far has been full of events and, of course, controversy. It has been a story of successes and failures of big proportions. The Vajpayee government shook the world last May by detonating nuclear devices, inducing immediate riposte from its fierce regional rival Pakistan and, in the process, inspiring apprehension world-wide of an imminent disaster. However, what followed was rather unexpected. In major foreign policy success, Mr. Vajpayee used the trans-border bus service as a diplomatic vehicle to initiate talks with his Pakistan counterpart towards improvement of bilateral ties.

There have been setbacks of similar proportions, especially in domestic affairs. Hindu extremists unleashed a reign of terror on Christians, putting a big question mark on the government's ability to protect the rights of the minority. Then, termination of the state government in Bihar simply backfired. It was forced to rescind the decision and reinstate Rabri Devi and her government. Failure to arrest price-hike of necessary commodities led to humiliating defeat in the state assembly elections in Delhi, Rajashthan and Madhya Pradesh. Congress, led by Sonia Gandhi, almost triggered the collapse of the coalition government. Recalcitrant allies like Jayaram Jayalalitha's AIDMK or Mamta Banerjee's Trinamul Congress made life miserable for the government with threats of withdrawal from the coalition. The budget, placed earlier this month, however, came as a silver lining in the cloud.

Success of the multi-party coalition in remaining in power itself is no mean achievement. And, of course, this has not come without achievements. Parties, vying for power after the last general elections in early March last year, were in a quandary as no single party could attain absolute majority required to govern the world's largest democracy. The BJP was the single largest party but, even with its electoral allies, it fell much short of necessary support in the 544-member house. Smaller parties with little ideological similarity came forward and even a major exponent in the anti-BJP plank, the TDP of the Andhra Pradesh, broke with United Front (UF) to help BJP form the new government. The government was vulnerable from the beginning with its razor-thin majority in the *lokshaba* but received a tremendous domestic boost by exploding a series of nuclear devices within fifty days of coming to power. It helped the authority at least for the time being although critics say that the explosions in ultimate analysis helped arch-rival Pakistan to match India in atomic capability which rendered India's vast superiority in conventional arms somewhat irrelevant.

The BJP with the sagacity of the moderate leaders like Vajpayee himself kept the hard-liners in the party at arms distance as the organisation known for its Hindu nationalism opted for a "national agenda" rather than the party's electoral manifesto in running the affairs of the country. This helped the allies which believe in secularism to remain with the government despite the undercurrent of tussle that continues between the two groups within the BJP. According to BJP president Keshu Bhai Tekare, who is considered as close to the hard-liners, the government is not running fully based on policies of the BJP but still the organisation is happy that it is a BJP-led administration. The government may continue to derive benefits from its allies and also, to some extent, from the minorities if the BJP leadership realises the distinction between government and party which the moderates have been insisting. Once this is blurred, the omens cannot be good for the organisation as far as running the nation is concerned in present strength in parliament.

If the authority of a leader like Vajpayee is weakened, this will greatly harm the government. The government has shown maturity in the affairs of foreign policy although Defence Minister George Fernandes's unexpected hard-line stance against China embarrassed Vajpayee, who later amended the mistakes committed by his defence minister. The bus diplomacy in recent times paid dividends to the government and enhanced the image of India even though the eventual improvement of ties with Pakistan remains a Herculean task. The budget by Finance Minister Jashwant Sinha helped the government silence its critics within the coalition in one hand and won public support to some extent on the other. Successful hosting of Test cricket matches against Pakistan despite threats from Hindu zealots was also a plus point for the government.

Main opposition Congress has become stronger but are still not finding it appropriate and suitable to spark the fall of the government. It lacks necessary support to form a new government should the present government is forced to quit. Congress can do it only by support from the centre and leftist parties but this is proving difficult. On the other hand, the ruling coalition allies, in spite of occasional differences and even threats of calling off support, largely remained unanimous that the government should continue. This stems from the fear of midterm polls which none of the allies want now. Besides, the lurking apprehension that the opposition might desperately try to form a new government is also helping the coalition remain intact.

The disturbing allies have not so far made any serious bid to pull the carpet from the below of the government although pulls and pressures are there. This situation is likely to continue for the coming months in the second year for the Vajpayee government.

The Jungle Creeps in

With industrial collapse imminent unemployment crosses fail-safe limits, law and order comes under threat as individuals become predators, turning to means other than legal to feed their families, and then gang up together as a means of self-protection (if not self-defence) in a lawless society.

AS I SEE IT

Ikram Sehgal writes from Karachi

A cursory survey of the telephone calls made by common citizens to the PM on Saturdays is just one indication how rapidly the rule of law is giving way to the rule of the jungle.

In striking down the Military Trial Courts (MTCs), the Supreme Court (SC) indirectly showed sensitivity to a basic question that is of prime importance, is real justice available in Pakistan to those who cannot afford the costs? A question may well arise soon, in the new millenium, will justice be affordable at all in Pakistan? You may rest assured that some with patriotic, selfless reasons (and some with rampant ambitions) may well be waiting patiently in the wings for the system to collapse so that they can get their chance at governance of an increasingly un-governable society.

The day the government sent the Army into WAPDA, it tacitly accepted that the system had collapsed, at least in part. Energy forms the backbone of any modern economy, without a comparatively cheap source of electricity, manufacturers are doomed to produce unsaleable goods. With industrial collapse imminent unemployment crosses fail-safe limits, law and order comes under threat as individuals become predators, turning to means other than legal to feed their families, and then gang up together as a means of self-protection (if not self-defence) in a lawless society.

Neither the government and/nor the Army had any choice in the taking over of WAPDA by the Army, the mishandling of the Independent Power Producers (IPPs) affairs by the Ehtesab Bureau left virtually no options, even though the IPPs were foisted on us ostensibly by PPP during their reign but really the brainchild of a few, very unscrupulous bureaucrats bent on increasing their own "pension" benefits at exorbitant cost to the country in cahoots with their World Bank mentors.

It is all very well to blame Asif Zardari for all the economic ills of the country, people conveniently forget that it was a pliant, conniving bureaucracy that not only came up with devious plans of how to beat the system and rob the national exchequer but also facilitated the process for his (and their own) benefit, as they still do with all rulers whenever an opportunity target presents itself.

Whereas the Army took the correct step in entering the WAPDA fray, at the quantum it did it was incorrect. The Army already had a role model in place, the induction of solitary Brig Khurshid in KESC (by himself at first followed by a handful of others) as an example that could have been finessed and honed to key appointments only. It is true that the "meter reading" exercise is a massive one where personnel in good numbers had to get involved, the Army should have taken into account the cost to itself and its rank and file, both with respect to reputation and injury to integrity. While the Army tacitly accepted that it was in a no-win situation with likely damage to its reputation. Nonetheless it was very brave of the COAS to accept this challenge for the sake of the stability of the country's economy. Now it is time that the Army took stock of the situation and limited the injury to itself by active "damage control".

The ISPR gave a statement recently about the COAS expressing satisfaction with the interaction in WAPDA. With a reputation as a blunt, forthright man, the COAS is fast learning diplomacy. The greatest erosion that one can inflict on the image of the uniform is to put them in a situation where they do start looking to politicians and bureaucrats in the pursuit of their career objectives. The odd man here and there will demean his uniform (shades of Gen Ziaul Haq) by generously "sir-ring" "connected" civilians, politicians, non-politicians and bureaucrats alike. But if a senior red-tape on deputation takes to behaving like a Naib Qasid, you can well expect that others in uniform will be treated with contempt by those who matter, particularly those with venom in the heart for the uniform, a hate that seldom displays itself because of the fullsome practice of the art of lip-service. It was to be expected that many of the meters would have been tampered with by the corrupt linemen. Some meters would have been inherently defective.

There was always the possibility that to embarrass the government and cause confusion between the Army and the Government, some personalities would be directly targeted by the unscrupulous as a convenient smokescreen. Case in point Ms Abida Hussain where the accusation about meter-tampering is so full of holes that an inquiry must be made as to who, why and how it was contrived? Would it not have been better to have investigated the whole issue before bringing it to "media trial" under a blaze of publicity.

One believes the COAS had given strict orders that whenever any known personality was involved, the matter would be kept confidential until fully investigated as to the actual truth. Since as a major-general WAPDA Chairman Zulfiqar was in-charge of the media cell in the ISI under Qazi (when interestingly enough Mian Nawaz Sharif happened to be the target of "dirty tricks") one expects that he learnt enough about "spin doctoring".

It is common intelligence practice (at least among those who lack professionalism) to invent facts when they do not exist on the ground. Suffice to say a person of the integrity and strength of character of Ms Abida Hussain will hardly steal electricity worth Rs. 4000 — 5000 from one meter when she has 9 others on her farm using up more electricity on each of the meters. And why did the SDO change the meter only a month before its very "amazing" discovery of tampering? And why did the Army's inspectors focus like homing pigeons onto that one offending meter when others were also available to inspect? And why did the publicity precede the hasty filing of the FIR even when it was clear that an element of doubt existed? Someone somewhere was pulling strings to tarnish Ms Abida's reputation and sure enough the news reached the Internet faster than one can say "hello, what's this?"

There is political skull-duggery here and inadvertently the Army has been involved as an unwilling, unknowing collaborator in tarnishing the image of a fine, upstanding lady who is a credit to this nation. The Army should order, if it has not already done so, an impartial inquiry to reveal the entire circumstances, there should be no attempt at a cover-up. The WAPDA Chief should have no means of influence over the enquiry given the fact that he is a close relative of PPP's Rao Sikander Iqbal, one of Chandi's political opponents in the area. For the sake of the Army's (and his own) credibility, Zulfiqar should distance himself from the facts so as not to be seen "doctoring" them as he once used to for his boss Qazi, the man who would be COAS i.e. if Benazir and Zardari had had their way in 1995.

This is but one test case, there are many others throughout the land in which the upright and honest in uniform will be inadvertently drawn into by motivated interests. That faces the COAS with a Hobson's Choice, he must have reluctantly allowed the Army's rank and file to come into temporary contact with the temptation of corruption. The earlier decision must have been based on surgical action for a finite time period, maybe 90 days, maybe 180 days but more than 6 months would be tempting fate. By now he must have come to a difficult conclusion. WAPDA's linesmen are sure to return to their bad ways with a vengeance once the Army departs, so what then?

And how?

By doing away with MTCs, the SC foreclosed the proposed MTCs for WAPDA/KESC defaulters. By limiting their role to monitoring and inspection of WAPDA's field staff, a modicum of respectability could have been ensured for the Army. Involvement in the morass in such a pronounced fashion makes the extrication difficult without injury. Yet it is necessary to maintain the Army's operational readiness — or are we sending a subtle signal that the Army is gradually becoming redundant? One does not envy the COAS for the options available to him but the Army went boldly in, it has to exfiltrate out of WAPDA in the same manner, leaving enough spine in WAPDA to prevent the organisation from sliding back to the horrible situation obtaining earlier.

This shows up the system as one under grave threat, with the jungle creeping in. WAPDA is being subjected to micro-reforms when macro-effort across the board in the country is necessary to correct the system of governance. To put it bluntly, the SC has been contemptuous about "the doctrine of necessity", unfortunately "necessity is the mother of invention". And when push comes to shove, no society will stand by and see the jungle creep in to replace the rule of law, if not strictly according to the Constitution, at least by means invented to secure civilised society.

To the Editor...

Licenced to kill?

Sir, Very recently the police personnel killed Mujibur. Rubel was murdered in police custody. Sheema, Nurjahan and many others were raped and killed by police, so-called friend of the people. These cases mean that police have absolute power to do anything they like. They can kill anybody, they can rape any girl and they can arrest any body without any charge and can beat to death.

The question is, who is responsible for these activities done by police? Nobody? Only the victims? May we, the poor people of Bangladesh , ask some simple questions to the supreme authority of Bangladesh: are we a civilized nation? Are we free? Do we have any freedom? Don't you have any responsibility?

Pradip Kumar Deb
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Premium bus fare

Sir, The Premium bus fare from Rajlaxmi Complex (Uttara) to Farmgate was Tk 10. But they have suddenly raised the fare to Tk 15.

When the price of fuel and other related things are static there is no valid reason for sudden increase of fare by 50 per cent.

May we hope that the government will intervene here and stop this exploitation by the bus company? It may be mentioned that this bus company is financed by the deposits made by the people with bank.

Mostafa Sohel
Dhaka

Thanks for the campaign

Sir, Kudos to *The Daily Star* for persistently following up on the Asma case.

Asma's story has had a happy ending and the credit should be given to the DS campaign. Thanks to the reporters concerned. And keep up the good work.

Mamnoon Murshed
Dhaka

Well done BTV, not commentators

Sir, It is a great pleasure for the cricket lovers that BTV is telecasting the live coverage of the ongoing Meril tri-nation cricket tournament. I would like to thank the BTV authorities for their timely thinking. Although on the first day the camera crew were a bit haphazard in showing the right shots of the action in the field, they covered up well as time progressed. Again to our surprise, they are now giving us all the views of action timely and correctly. BTV can do one thing that is 'picture in picture' (PiP) by which the viewers can view the chase of the fielders behind the ball while the batsman's run also. We think the BTV crew should be more professionally skilled.

On the other part, our commentators are not that expert that we expected. Our expectation might be high but they should find no excuse for their cumbersome commentary. Hearing commentary of some of the 'specialist commentators' (our great past cricketers) it seems that they probably don't know how to speak even in Bangla. The people around the country are probably fed-up with their commentary. Well, not all the commentators are like them. Some are really good. Much have written in the newspapers about this topic but we see no change as yet. They should listen to their criticism.

S M Enayetur Raheem
Applied Statistics
University of Dhaka

Is the change cosmetic?

Sir, The recent removal of Rafiqul Islam and the appointment of Md. Nasim to the post of Home Minister seems cosmetic at best. This is particularly so in the context of the aid donors meeting scheduled to be held in Paris this April. Recent articles in the leading dailies have all stated the position of the donors -- that the worsening law and order situation in Bangladesh adversely affects its chances of favourable consideration for receiving the yearly hand-out.

I would like to remind the powers that be that a condemned building will still remain condemned even if a fresh coat of paint is splashed onto it, which is not to say that I doubt the Minister's long experience and capabilities. It will be wise to bear in mind that political will, more than a cosmetic facelift, will be required to remove the ills which plague us today. As the saying goes "you can fool some people some time, but you can't fool all the people all the time...."

Sadat Omar
Dhaka