Founder-Editor: Late S. M. Ali

Dhaka, Friday, November 26, 1999

### LDC Positioning for the Seattle Conference

CTAKES are high for Bangladesh at the third ministerial confer-Dence of the WTO scheduled to take place between 30 November and 3 December, 1999 at Seattle in the United States of America. Not only is she the mirror-image of an LDC she also has the onerous responsibility of a coordinator for the LDCs, leading, as it were, the charge of collective bargaining for the Least Developed Countries vis-a-vis the affluent group of economies. This obviously puts a premium on the quantum and quality of the know-how we have been able to master over the subject to negotiate representatively and effectively at the highest decision-making forum of the WTO. There is no gainsaying the fact, therefore, that we do need to carefully select the members of our delegation to the Seattle conference. While we ought to be a stickler for negotiating skill and experience due weightage has to be given to the private sector to strike a pragmatic balance in the composition of the team. Since the WTO negotiations conjure up a continuous process the need for capacity-building can hardly be emphasised.

At the WTO forum, the face-off between the developed and developing countries has often been marked by a conflict between form and substance, with the former somehow taking precedence over the latter. The four-day Seattle ministerial would obviously be time-pressed for the range of topics it is set to address. First of all, the stock-taking of the implementation of the decisions arrived at the Singapore ministerial in 1996 and the Geneva ministerial in 1998 is an important exercise at hand. The LDCs are certain to focus on the pledges for preferential treatment made to them by the affluent countries in those ministerial conferences which, for the most part, remain unfulfilled even to this day.

The next order of business would be negotiating the future action plan for the WTO. Because much of the previous agenda designed to curb marginalisation of the LDCs in the world trade order has yet to be redeemed we want this to be incorporated in the new list of agenda but invariably with safeguards built into them for their fail-safe implementation. Furthermore, the dangers of an exponential exacerbation in the sidelining of the LDCs from the global trading system warrant that the WTO negotiations are not only unprotracted but are also result-oriented.

Multilateral or interdependent trading system is a misnomer when the LDCs' share in the global trade is not even half of one per cent. This hiatus in wealth creation between the rich and the poor economies needs to be gradually but progressively bridged through a coordinated, need-driven response from the industrialised countries and the multilateral financial and development institution to the problems of trade and development being faced by the Least Developed Countries. Unless a robust collective political will of the OECD countries is brought to bear on this crucial task it will continue to be intractable.

The points at issue for the LDCs are: zero-tariff marketaccess to the importing countries on a non-reciprocal basis; spurning linkage to any labour or environmental standards the rich countries are prone to setting; free flow of labour like that of capital across the world; renewed emphasis on technical assistance to developing countries; reduction in their debt-burden; and enhancement of the supply-side capacity in the LDCs to enable them to benefit from the likely increase in trading opportunities.

If the LDCs take a unified stance on all such issues at the Seattle conference, the affluent members of the WTO might feel goaded to summon the required political will collectively for a turnaround in the inequitable global trade order.

# The Superpower Approach to Arms Treaties

ATE last week, leaders of thirty European nations met in Istanbul to sign the landmark Conventional Forces Treaty aimed at controlling conventional weapons in Europe. The new treaty, signed at the summit of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), will reduce the levels of weapons allowed in Europe to almost half its current level. This treaty is an updated version of an agreement originally concluded in 1990, at the end of the Cold

War. The 1999 version sets limits on a national basis instead of the bloc-to-bloc totals set in the 1990 document, which saw Europe in terms of two opposing blocs — NATO and the Warsaw Pact. Negotiations leading to the signing of the treaty saw some manoeuvring by, among others, Clinton and Yeltsin.

However, the treaty will not be ratified until Russia ends its offensive in Chechnya, which currently puts it in breach of the levels of weapons allowed in the new treaty. Russia is engaged in a seven-week military offensive in the breakaway republic, which it accuses of harbouring separatist Islamic guerrillas. Yeltsin earlier rejected OSCE offers to mediate.

While in Istanbul, Yeltsin signed a draft law approving a global nuclear test ban and urged the Russian parliament to ratify it without delay. Yeltsin also urged all nations to follow Russia's example and back the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT). Obviously, what he had in mind was the recent rejection of the CTBT by the US Senate.

However, shortly before Yeltsin's announcement, the Russian Navy made its third test missile launch in a month. Russia has been alarmed by a US proposal to amend the 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) treaty to allow the US to build a missile-defence system to protect against limited nuclear attacks from so-called rogue

This raises an interesting issue relating to the recent behaviour of both the United States and Russia regarding arms control treaties.

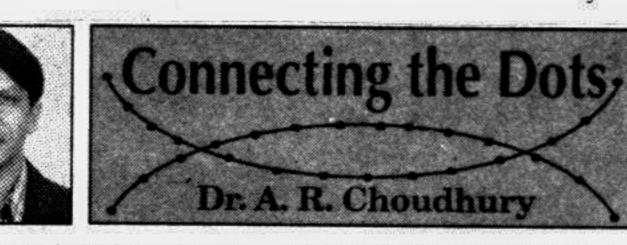
During the Cold War and the years that immediately followed, it was generally assumed that the United States and Russia would honour the arms control treaties they had spent so much time and energy agreeing on. Although some Western policy analysts thought that the Russians

would cheat, they believed that the big danger would emanate from the Third World - countries not part of the arms control regime might get involved in the weapons programmes the agreements were designed to prevent.

Like a lot of other Cold War beliefs, this one has proved to be false. While some Third World countries, notably India

tem, even though doing so is clearly prohibited by the ABM treaty, a 1972 agreement between the US and the Soviet Union. Indeed, preventing the emergence of missile defense is the precise purpose of the treaty.

The Russians have not just talked about breaking their obligations; they have actually broken the law. The treaty on



and Pakistan, have lately tested nuclear weapons, fired ballistic missiles or flexed their muscles in other ways, the legal architecture of arms control has come under siege by the two superpowers — the very nations whose leadership was supposed to be a shining beacon of maturity and restraint.

In early November, the Clinton administration made explicit what it had broadly and repeatedly hinted at earlier: that it might begin work on a national missile defense sys-

Dr. A. R. Choudhury Conventional Armed forces in Europe, negotiated in 1990, limits the number of troops and conventional weapons that may be deployed in parts of the former Soviet Union. According to most international observers. Moscow's military

> limit. These threatened or actual treaty breaches may seem overly legalistic and trivial, but they are much more - and much more dangerous - than

buildup in and near Chechnya

has put the Russians over the

that. Clinton and his predecessors have urged the developing nations to sign the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty. which is designed to keep nuclear weapons out of the hands of countries that don't possess

them now. The importance of this treaty is obvious; the use of nuclear weapons becomes more likely as ever more countries acquire them. The danger is worsened when such countries ruled by crackpots or terrorists get their hands on them.

But Clinton isn't going to convince reluctant government to sign treaties like the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty if Clinton himself begins to ignore solemn, binding obligations that he suddenly finds not so solemn or binding. The US cannot, on the one hand, say arms control agreements are essential to the safety of the world and, on the other, belittle or ignore them.

For its part, Russia cannot violate treaties, even modest ones like the one limiting conventional arms, and then turn around and, citing the sanctity of such pacts, complain when other countries threaten to violate the ABM treaty.

In fact, violating arms control treaties and making such

breaches more commonplace and acceptable unravels the whole fabric of international law - not only the law on weapons proliferation, but the law on such other things as trade, environmental pollution and human rights. The world, in short, becomes more lawless and chaotic.

The US threat to break out the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty is generating friction not only with the Russians, but with other US allies. At a committee in the United Nations recently, 47 countries (including most European nations) voted for a Russian-backed proposal that opposed any new measure which attempts to undermine or circumvent the ABM treaty.

It is not an accident that nuclear weapons have not been used in war since the end of World War II, nor an accident that only a relatively few countries possess them. If the world is a safer place than it used to be, it is partly because arms control treaties have made it that way. They need to be honoured, not scoffed at, and cer-

tainly not deliberately violated. That the two super powers need to be reminded of that is both demoralising and appalling.

# Open Letter, Closed Mind

by Mohammad Badrul Ahsan

AST week, a lambasting letter addressed to the leader of the opposition appeared on this page from a non-resident Bangladeshi who lives and works in Canada. The letter written in the sinuous style of an embittered monologue criticised the political activities of the main opposition party in Bangladesh, especially during the last three and a half years of its political movement against the government. There was an invective overtone to the contents of the letter muffled in the palliative language of an earnest appeal. In so much as it was euphemistically named an open letter to the leader of the opposition it was also a cryptic eulogy to the leader of the ruling party. And if there was anything open about that letter, it as how one could write so bitterly with a closed mind.

The letter read like a rant prejudice from someone who deliberately wanted to throw his bile at one particular leader and chose to overlook the fundamental precept of a conflict: it takes two hands to make a clap. Politics is ultimately the calculus of public sentiments when a leader can bring exponential growth in popularity through his thought or action The reverse is also true in equal intensity. The same Argentines who worshipped Peron's wife also exhumed and defiled her corpse when they turned against her husband. The Russians who once raised Lenin to a cult figure prepared a life-size

have completed 29 years, and still we suffer from

a leadership crisis. It sounds quite strange when

we fail to identify a sincere, honest, educated and

a capable leader. Nobody is born with such qual-

ities. One needs to develop the same. Institutions

are required to be strengthened. Honesty is

required to be engrained at all levels. Irrespective

of our religious alignments, the basic character

building process has to be re-started if we wish

Let us invest heavily in human resource devel

opment. The leaders, administrators and the

bureaucrats should be the first ones to go

through this process of re-orientation. The

entire country is waiting to see the action of the

Let us communicate

is 20, the other is 13. I grew up in a non-Bangla

speaking country. My wife was educated in an

Bangla. My children read and write Bangla. They

write to their relatives in Bangladesh and in USA

we do not speak Bangla, because we could not

communicate if we insisted on speaking in

Bangla. We would not have gone too far if we had

to translate every conversation from English to

Bangla, process our thoughts, and then, trans-

late back to English. We would not survive if we

had to translate everything that we read and

hear into Bangla. If we insisted on doing so, we

would soon be restricted to our house. Soon, we

will not be able to afford the house. Soon, we will

go on the welfare rolls. We would have to depend

on US aid, because we could not compete, since

On a macro scale, that is what happening to

I love my mother tongue, but I have to recog-

nise its limitations. We cannot as a nation, insist

on doing everything in Bangla. It cannot be done.

The practical countries, like India, Holland and

Hong Kong recognise this. They are reaping the

The only language spoken in our house is

But when we go forth to earn our daily bread,

Sir, I live in the US. I have two children. One

Computer & Financial Consultant

Akbaruddin Ahmad

CEC in respect of this election.

English-speaking environment.

we could not communicate.

to leave something tangible for our posterity.

cake of his likeness and devoured it in the symbolic act of

banishing him from their lives. The letter was also eclipsed by the electric choice of a slice of history of writer's own choice; it was narrowly focused on this regime. If the present opposition has taken to the streets and is threatening to unseat the government, it's only the repetition of what this government had done to this opposition when it was in the opposition and this opposition was in the government. If this leader of the opposition has been 'hired' by the people to do her job, it also applied to the previous leader of the opposition who had boycotted the parliament for the most part of the previous regime. If this leader of the opposition has been piling hartals upon hartals on the fragile economy, the previous opposition leader had not done less than this. If this leader of the opposition had shamelessly rigged the by-election in Magura when she was in power. the previous leader of the opposition has been accused of the same in Tangail now that she is in power. If this leader of the opposition has joined hands with the alleged killer of her husband, the leader of the rul-

ing party once sat in the opposition while that killer was in power and again formed government with the support of his party. Not only that, the ruling party leader had also once shared the same political platform with the party that was created by an alleged conspirator of her father's killing. If the leader of the opposition had once formed a government with "the killers of 1971" and has now formed an alliance with them, the previous leader of the opposition had also formed an alliance with them to unseat the previous government. The question also comes to mind that while so much is being done to restore the spirit of 1971 distorted in twenty-one years in the absence of this ruling party from power, why doesn't this government do something about Golam Azam and his flunkies? According to Locke's theory

of government, there is little that is original. As a rule, the man who first thinks of a new idea is so much ahead of his time that everyone thinks him silly, so that he remains obscure and is soon forgotten.

Then, gradually, the world becomes ready for the idea, and the man who proclaims it at the fortunate moment gets all the credit. Darwin became famous for the same idea, which had made Lord Monboddo a laughing stock earlier. Nobody is above question in politics, and that includes even "the very people and the party who spearheaded the campaign and led the people to create sovereign Bangladesh." Just because the Congress Party fought for the freedom of India has not helped it in the polls lately. The Federalists, the party of loyalists of George Washington, were voted out of power in the elections of 1801. In our recent history, we have seen how Muslim League, the party, which struggle for the creation of Pakistan, lost touch with the people and got it branded as their enemy. In the shifting sand of political discourse, success isn't and inheritance.

In Jorge Luis Borges' novel Funes, the Memorious, the eponymous character suffered from a serious affliction: he couldn't forget anything. Every bit of information got stored in

his memory until one day all his knowledge jumbled in the head and congested it. Suddenly, Funes was no longer accessible either to information or impetus. The burden of memory proved fatal in the end and Funes died young. The same affliction also characterised the letter and stifled its openness as the writer tried to apportion credit for the liberation war to the ruling party. The dream, which pulsated in the blood of Isha Khan, Nabab Sirajoddowla and Titumeeer, culminated in the sacrifice of a twentieth-century politician. But that cannot be monopolised by his daughter or party as a carte blanche to justify their actions.

And if we talk about the Chief Election Commissioner being nominated by the opposition party, one can only talk about the unbreakable cycle of trust and betrayal if not anything else! Two candidates who won elections on the opposition ticket crossed over to the ruling side. Is the party to blame for this or the candidates? Dissent and betrayal are sadly ingrained in the nature of politics and one is never too late to resent any of these. If the CEC hasn't done his job, why cannot

the opposition demand his resignation even if it had nominated him? If that is the case, then people don't have the right to criticise the government. which they have voted to power. For the same reason the killers of the father of this nation may not be tried because he had once trusted them!

To come back to that bitter letter, its partisan tone has defeated its purpose. That is one fault line, which runs through the emotional terrain of our anguished hearts, where the party loyalty clambers over love of country in the subconscious corner of mind. According to Richard Aldington, English poet, novelist and biographer, "Patriotism is the lively sense of collective responsibility." If this country belongs to us all so does its politics. Let our patriots come together from wherever they are and take their country back. That brings us to the most important note. which the letter from Canada may have raised. Let us write an open letter to all our politicians. If they don't shape up anytime soon, they are going to have to ship out.

The write is a banker

## Friday Mailbox

#### **Expectations from Kader** Siddique and Santu Larma

Sir, With much interest and optimism, we have been watching the two national leaders Kader Siddique and Santu Larma making important moves in the political arena of the country. While I congratulate them for their bold steps. have the following requests to make.

I would request both of them to kindly refrain from creating yet another "political party" Instead, they should consolidate their positions in their own regions and generate interest and support among the people of these regions. If they try to form something at the regional level such as in greater Mymensingh and greater Chittagong Hill Tracts districts respectively. I believe their efforts will produce more benefit for the people. And in course of time if these two leaders can mobilise large public support, we can hope to have two important participants in the national politics. Many of us would be happy to see some more stake holders in our politics instead of the two major ones. We need some more people who can play important roles and create a healthy balance of power in the politics of Bangladesh.

> Mostafa Shiblee Executive Director Working for Better Life House-19, Road-30, Sector-7 Uttara, Dhaka.

### Tangail-8 by-election

Sir. Kader Siddique, an acknowledged freedom fighter was bestowed with the highest gallantry award. He resigned from the Parliament recently and decided to contest as an independent candidate. The disillusioned Tiger was suspended from Awami League's primary membership for his outspoken and bold attack on Awami League policies. Instead of pacifying the Tiger, the AL went on a systematic campaign to discredit him. It is a pity how fast people tend to forget the good works done by a person. The question is: why? What has he done to get this harsh treatment?

Sometimes, we wonder whether the two major political parties, AL and BNP, have anything democratic within the party decision-making process. At least on this one point both the parties are similar and are run on autocratic lines. Flexibility, understanding and accommodating each other's views, party policies and administrative management are unheard of in both these major political camps. Confrontation is practically head-on. The resultant damage to the society is beyond comprehension. The anarchic situation is slowly getting out of control. Terrorism is at its peak. Extortion, harassment and all conceivable vices have reached dizzy heights. There is a fast degradation of human values. Security of life and property is now at its lowest level. Does the ruling party know about these facts or are they being shielded by a group of

sycophants. The Tangail-8 by-election boycotted by the opposition parties has been a total farce. We are confident that the government party is fully aware of all this. Actually, to please the top bosses in the camp, the leaders and the government officials went for a straight kill. Unfortunately it was overdone. The independent watchdogs overseeing the elections have all made their comments which are not at all praiseworthy.

Bangladesh is no longer a basket case. We

English is not the language of England any more. It is not the symbol of the rulers of India, any more. English is now a world language. It is getting that way more and more every passing day. Countries that fight it, get left behind. And it is not Bangladesh alone. I love my mother a lot. And I respect her a lot a whole lot. But I cannot bring her to work with me, and insist that she do everything that other

people do around me.

Bangladesh.

We all love Bangla, but no mother is so selfish that she would want her children to commit suicide to show their love for her. Let us not do that. Let us recognise as soon as possible that English is a world language. Let us strengthen the teaching of English. This should be our priority. If we cannot communicate, we cannot learn, we cannot win in the competition called international business. The world is getting more and more open every day. Opportunities are exploding. Let us decide to go forth and work hard.

> Wali Alam Houston, USA

government they have never been without a point. At times, points multiplied to make them sizeable and imposing. And at the other, they silently subtracted or sustained

mathematical jugglery of combination and permutation hardly settling at any point any time. The trend has been so erratic and elusive that it is very difficult to keep track. In the process, it has boiled down to two or two in one.

ROM day one of the present

In recent times, the BNP led four-party alliance has been frantically trying to upbeat its agitational progrmames against the government. The blunt weapon of 'hartal' is being quite frequently used. But to the utter dismay of BNP leadership and those of the other three it has so far proved infructuous. Inspite of the apparently big meetings at different places their programmes on the streets have not been able to mobilize adequate number of leaders and workers to show their numerical strength, at least considerably. The experience, till now, has been both utterly frustrating and unrewarding. The BNP Chairperson was reported to be furious with some of the leaders of the party who were found indifferent to their responsibilities to make themselves physically available on the street. These so-called hardliners, mostly implanted from other parties, made an abortive attempt at justifying their points with Begum Zia but were rebuffed and severely admonished. Still then, the 'movement in the street' is yet to gain the desired momentum.

The scenario in the districts has been all the more disappointing. Leaders and workers in the mufassil areas continue to bitterly lament the suicidal decision of BNP high command not to participate in the Union and Municipal elections. Even though some of the party workers did participate in those elections as independent candidates and a few got elected and many lost to their opposite members. The communication gap between the central leadership and the districts had been so wide that none in the latter could be sure about the ultimate decision that could be forthcoming from the former. They were consequently plunged into total disappointment and they only knew how much costly it was for the party bases due to the indecision at the top or its belated decision to abstain from the local government elections.

On the schedule we have Upazilla election set, till now, on December 27, 1999. The BNP led opposition perhaps to have been realizing that their decision (that of BNP specifically) to boycott union and municipality elections was a colossal blunder strategically. And now inspite of their announcement not to participate in any election under the present government their request to the Election Commission to defer the election to any date after Ramadhan, that is, after 27th December appears to be a strange but wholesome contradiction. Such a stance may be substantiated by the fact that, despite **OPINION** 

## Point One Onwards

by Kazi Alauddin Ahmed

their absence in the regular session of the Jatiya Sangsad over the past few months, the opposition MPs have been regularly attending the standing committee meetings. Political observers believe that their eventual participation in the Upazilla election to be preceded by city corporation election (except Dhaka) would heal much of the damage done to their respective parties at the grassroots level.

The funniest part of the whole game has been that, irrespective of their public announcement to boycott all elections under the present government they have already pronounced the names of their mayoral candidates for the four city corporations. Now that city corporation elections for Rajshahi, Chittagong and Khulna shall be held on December 06, 1999 under the existing administration, it will be of immense interest to see how they react. If they continue to stick to their 'decision' to abstain, it might be tantamount to inviting a sort of political burial. On the other hand, the announcement of the Election Commission to hold elections to the three city corporations on December 06, 1999 is likely to create a serious breach

in the unity of the opposition particularly in the incumbent Mayors of Rajshahi and Khulna besides in the sitting Commissioners in all the three city corporations. The situation in such event, will assume an unmanageable proportion for the BNP high 'command in particular. Meantime, the by-election of Faridpur-4 constituency has been peacefully held when, besides Awami League. Ershad's Jatiya party was among the other 3/4 parties that participated. This provides a significant indication of the breach within the 4-party conglomer-

The bitter and detestable 'hartal' of yesterday has today turned out to be apparently sweet and palatable. But the degree of persistence required in such an offensive has so far been notably absent in the opposition leadership. Practically, it has been at a loose end. The 'hartal' programmes' are being observed in an absolutely lackadaisical manner. However, there have been bomb blasts injuring poor rickshaw pullers and innocent passers-by and damaging public and private vehicles in the street. On the top of this usual episode there has been instances of op-

position leaders themselves viclating the 'rules of 'artal' . On one of these occasions in the recent past Ershad was seen driving himself through the city thoroughfares to go to the airport and take a flight to Jeddah. BNP leaders. Dr Khondkar Mosharraf Hossain and MK Anwar were likewise seen on rickshaws going towards their party office at Nayapaltan. From their 4-point at the

earliest stage of the agitational programme against the government till date many more points emerged and vanished. On September 12, 1999 - they laid siege of the Bangladesh Secretariat when Begum Zia formally announced her single point 'oust the government' programme. And on September 30, 1999 when they observed the gherao' programme of the election commission they added to it another point 'oust the Chief Election Commissioner' - thus unknowingly slicing down the importance of the core point on 'oust the government'. Such a vacillating approach to their movement against the government has further degraded their credibility among their own men and to others it epitomizes a larcical play-acting.

### Academic Colonisation Muhammad Azher Zafar Shah

THE destiny of Bangladesh relies on the kind and con-L tent of education our society obtains. He who dominates and guides the content of education of any society dominates their opinions and perceptions.

After a period of two centuries of British colonial rule. our institutionalised education has had only one objective : to westernise the Bangladeshi elite in thought, perceptions and conduct. The subjects offered, the curriculum, the textbooks, the structure of courses and the system demonstrate the aims of Bangladeshi higher education intended for Bangladesh and manufactured by Britain.

The entire operation is pursued for the purpose of internationalising "knowledge", which actually represents the internationalisation of European knowledge without in-depth consideration of the knowledge, culture, past and contemporary civilisations, and philosophies

of the Asian societies. For example, comparative analysis indicates that the contribution of Islamic civilisation to human progress have survived the test of history. It has contributed significantly to the birth of modern technology, particularly in science and mathematics.

After the First World War. the colonial authority recognised that it could not forever occupy its South Asian territories as the movement for independence accelerated. Thus the British considered an alternative that would uphold their links with their colonies when the latter obtain formal independence.

were extended for the training of South Asian personnel in British institutions to equip them for the future administrative vacancies. It was planned that the cultural and economic relation-

Handsome scholarships

ship between the metropolitan power and the colonial territory should not alter due to political decolonisation. Academic institutions, such as the University of Dhaka, were established to create a new indoctrinated status quo. What Britain understood

and possessed was provided to Bangladesh in its content and operation: the highest seat of education in our country was based upon the Oxford model. The westernising influence has been total in its impact, with disastrous results for the politics and economics of our soci-

The contemporary academic elite at the University of Dhaka, as well as the political, bureaucratic and cultural elite produced by it, appear to be too satisfied with the status and privileges flowing from the system to formulate and implement the fundamental reforms required to prevent our

society from plunging into the abyss of anarchy. Our post-colonial national experience has demonstrated that our most desired goal, that of socio-economic development, is still a mirage, in spite of the ritual implementation of all development principles, models and concepts formulated at Anglo-Americal academic and financial institu-

cally. The fundamental cause of our present tragedy is the miseducation of our decision-making elite. All attempted cures for our national disease have failed because each diagnosis is incorrect.

tions and "validated" scientifi-

During the era of colonial ism, the West controlled us with their armed forces, but now they dominate and exploit us through subtle and effective thought-control. This is the age to rule by ideas. If our society is to get on the right track, it must undertake voluntary psychological decolonisation first.

We require a system of higher education that fits our own environment. The present system produces graduates who either form a misinformed elite or expand the horde of frustrated and disillusioned unemployed.

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The much awaited summit of the topmost four leaders tentatively set for this month is still as uncertain as before. To keep this agendum alive the Secretary General of each of the four parties met recently together in order to prepare the ultimate agenda of the envisaged summit. At this stage of my writing Ershad is away to Saudi Arabia his 'go between' Kazi Jafar Ahmed is in Australia for Medical treatment and the Secretary General Naziur Rahman Manzur is in New Delhi. And at home other JP leaders are perhaps, still in the stupor of somnolence, singing lullaby to their children. Their reactivation is not yet in sight. Ershad himself cannot ordinarily be expected to make a full-throated call to his partymen to beef up his party's stand against the government. The palpable reason is the number of cases against him in the court engaging his immediate and unfettered attention. His visit to the Holy place so often may be seen as a self-purging endeavour at seeking the benign mercy of God. However, there is nothing to

grudge or to be speculative about

Jatiya Party's political wed-

lock with BNP is viewed by independent political observers as an absurd proposition. This absurdity has been justifiably attributed to the vicious hostility or hatred that the two leaders had been nursing against each other. Some of the stingy remarks that the BNP Chairperson made against Ershad between March, 1988 and February 1991 are worthy of recapitulation. Begum Zia accused Ershad of "lying in the sacred premise of the mosque" and considered incongruous his 'establishing' Islam in a country where 90 per cent of the population were Muslim. Or her hateful remark " a thief and a traitor has been removed through the mass upsurge' would still ring in our ears. Nor can we forget her firm conviction that "Ershad's ideal place is in jail" and that "Ershad cannot be allowed to go without severe punishment". Likewise, till December,

1997, Ershad castigated Begum Zia and her BNP quite often. We quote a few remarks: "Begum Zia spoke against hartal 140 times. Now she herself is indulging in hartal". Or, "BNP has sold a mill worth Taka one hundred crore at only Tk 3.00 crore and the rest it has swallowed". "The person who in-dulges in utter falsehood about her own birth date is easily the one I would hate most" is yet another statement of condemnation. And "even if I embrace death I will not support BNP" or "Khaleda Zia tried to kill me" are again some of the critical remarks Ershad made.

And in spite of all these words of mutual distrust the two adversaries have now joined hands to overthrow Sheikh Hasina by December 1999. We have got to wait and see the results. But we shall not be surprised if the table is turned upside down on them. Nor, if their one point movement becomes a pointless one or compounds into many more points hence!

Views expressed in this column are the writers' own. The Editor may or may not subscribe to those views. The Editor reserves the right to decide which letters should be published.