## The Baily Star

Founder-Editor: Late S. M. Ali Dhaka, Monday, January 24, 2000

Too Hurried a Rejection

N O sooner had the Prime Minister renewed her offer for talks than Khaleda Zia rejected it. as if the two leaders are in a competition of showing who can be tougher than the other, regardless of the cost to the country. On Saturday, the Prime Minister lambasted the opposition for the most part of her speech during the Businessmen's Conference. She blamed them for most of the violence in our politics. But at the end of her tirade she reiterated her offer for talks, including on the very sensitive issue of resignation of her government to hold early elections. How the PM ended her speech is far more important than how she began though we would have clearly preferred for the talks to take off if she had avoided her aggressive stance altogether. It is her ending that we intend to underscore. Yes, it would have been far better if the ruling party had created a better environment for talks. Yes, PM should have written about her intentions to the opposition instead of articulating them in public forums. But what lies at the core is the intention and NOT how they are expressed. And we think that the PM's offer merited a positive response. Why? Because the alternative will cost the country dear. The opposition should have weighed seriously the cost to the economy, to public order and civic peace of a situation of continued confrontation before rejecting the offer for talks. Surely the opposition cannot want a situation in which armed goons - of both sides — will call the shots.

The call for talks should have been positively responded to because most of the stumbling blocks have apparently been removed. First, the PM does not seem averse to the idea of an early election, a core demand of the opposition. Second, ill health has forced the Chief Election Commissioner to relinquish his responsibility and he is all but gone. This meets another key demand of the opposition. What remains could easily have formed the subject of the talks themselves. A little more than a year is left for the elections. Opposition forcing it a few months earlier by constant agitation with consequent devastating effect on the economy does not seem really worth it. That is why we had strongly urged the opposition to respond positively to the dialogue offer. The way to go about it would have been to start with the Speaker. We have expressed our feelings about the Speaker and yet we suggested that as members of the parliament nothing could be more natural than to talk to him. Tell him what needs to be done to get the direct talks between the leaders going.

Khaleda Zia's rejection of the offer for any talks throws our politics into a very uncertain future. We foresee nothing short of violent clashes and destructive confrontation. We cannot support Opposition's decision not to sit with the ruling party under any circumstances. We are afraid that this kind of politics will greatly damage our economy and the prospect of any growth. We are greatly saddened by Khaleda Zia's outright rejection of any dialogue.

### Strike at the Root

TIMELY intervention by the Indian police has L certainly saved the six Bangladeshi boys and girls from a subhuman existence as camel jockeys and prostitutes respectively while the initiative of the Bangladesh Women Lawyers' Association secured their passage back home. These children and their parents, although their union took some time materialising, would be indebted to both these organisations forever. Indeed, it is a happy occasion but definitely tinged with sadness; for it reminds us of those children who have not been that fortunate and are, if they are still alive that is, passing their days in hardship and humiliation. It also reminds us of a collective failure at the national as well as regional levels to put an end to the heinous trade in human misery once and for all. Trafficking of our boys to the Middle East to be used as camel jockeys and girls to India and Pakistan to be sold to the brothels has been on for many years now. According to a report by the United Nations Development Fund for Women, brought out in late 1998, two million children are abused and trafficked globally every year, South and Southeast Asian countries topping the list. Another report spoke of Bangladeshi women landing at brothels in neighbouring countries.

Aside from the active child-trafficking racket at play, there is another side to the story here as reflected in Parveen's case. The 12-year-old was taken to India by her own aunt who sold her off to another trafficker for seven thousand taka. It could be interpreted as a reflection of a dire economic compulsion; but primarily it is a law enforcement failure. It is time the SAARC played an effective role in bringing together law enforcing and intelligence agencies of the seven member countries to wage a war against the inhuman and illegal traders.

Spend for a Good Cause

TT happens all the time that government exche-I quer runs dry when it comes to financing a good cause. Higher computer education in five universities of the country has not been able to take off because of funds constraint. The government is yet to provide taka 15 crore only to the universities to start this important course. Introduction of Masters in Computer Application (MCA) for the improvement of the nascent Information Technology (IT) sector of the country is bogged down in fund shortages as well as lack of enthusiasm on the part of people who matter. This course could offer the students an opportunity to study IT instead of the conventional subsidiary system and improve their skill in this vital sector.

The ministry concerned seems to have washed its hands off the job by writing to the Computer Science Department (CSD) of Dhaka University in haste; but when the reply was sent accordingly to the ministry the latter appears to be sitting pretty

on it.

Private universities cater to the need for computer education to some extent but at great expense. The students can only be trained in IT at a cheaper cost in the public sector institutions. But lack of funds hinders the progress here. This is going to be the new era for Information Technology worldwide and we cannot sit back and watch the progress of other nations as bystanders. We must catch up with the rest of the world for our survival and progress, otherwise we shall perish. We strongly criticise the Ministry of Science and Technology for not taking effective measures for releasing promised funds to the five universities for introducing the MCA programme. We hope they will do it immediately.

## A "Clash of Civilisation"?

The clash of civilization is, however, not unknown to history. It is that clash which catalyses change and brings about rise and fall of civilization. The time is not as yet ripe to challenge the civilization symbolised by advanced western countries; neither is there a countervailing force to match it. The clash is however inherent in the process of history and it will erupt elsewhere, if not in Chechnya.

applied exclusively to the west with whom a resurgent political Islam clashed - and clashed violently at times. During the past decade the United States alone bore the brunt of international terrorism for its alleged crimes against Islam: propping up Israel in Arab heartland, inhumanely starving the Iraqis and desecrating with its presence the land of Islam's holiest places during the Gulf War. In retaliation, the Islamic militants allegedly struck at New York's World Trade Centre. American base in Dhahran and the US embassies in Kenya and Tanzania in a series of deadly bomb blasts. Now it also seems to be the turn of Russia - an inferior version of western culture under Greek orthodox

T the end of eighteenth

century the Russians, in

Atheir long process of

empire state building intruded into what is today the North

Caucasian republic of

Chechnya - then an idyllic

abode for the meditating Sufi

branch of Sunnite Muslims.

The Russian intrusion however

portended the period of a

protracted conflict between the

two peoples and their faiths

with none ever reconciling to

another. Immediately on their

annexation by Russia the

Chechens rose in revolt led by

Sheikh Mansoor, a Nagsh-

bandy saint. Tsar's army took

fifty years to bring the

Chechens under control. But

they could never be humbled

turies' of intermittent war be-

tween the Russians and

Chechens the conflict is now

seized on by the believers in the

'clash of civilization' pro-

pounded by Samuel Huntington

who said in 1993 that cultural

and religious fault lines would

be most likely source of conflict

in post-Cold War world. A pro-

totype of such conflict was read-

ily found in the growing fric-

tion between the West and Is-

lam. They now tend to treat

Russia's war in North Caucasus

to be a case in point. To them

the 'clash of civilisation' had

already been there in Caucasus

right from the beginning in

miniature and now with the ex-

panding scope of the conflict it

has taken its classical form. It

is believed that the war in

Chechnya is today fought by

Muslim militants of several

countries under the influence of

Osama bin Laden, the Saudi

born coordinator of interna-

tional network of the Islamic

terrorism. That gives the con-

flict in Chechnya its tenor and

So far, Huntington's theory

IGNS are indeed ominous.

Dark clouds are again hov-

ering over the horizon (the

sky, however, had never been

very clear either). War cries are

passing day.

texture of civilizational clash.

After more than two cen-

into total submission.

church. Recently the Russian government has blamed terrorists from the country's Muslim south for a series of bomb blasts in Moscow and other cities which claimed over 300 lives. This is apart from their secessionist war in Chechnya. To make a common cause with the west, Russian Prime Minister (now acting President) told President Bill Clinton during the former's recent visit to United States that both of their countries faced the common enemy — the international terrorism. As evidence that both anti-Russia and anti-US terrorists have one common source, the officials in Moscow have pointed to the alleged involvement of Osama bin Laden both in Caucasus and urban bombing. They insist that Bin Laden, while not instigator of urban

bombing has offered financial help to its perpetrators. And the fighters under Laden have certainly been active in Chechnya and Dagestan.

Another factor that brings Chechnya conflict closer to the notion of civilizational clash is its multinational involvement. Since the collapse of Soviet Union in 1991 emissaries from the Arab world especially Saudi Arabia, flooded into Caucasus and Central Asia to exploit the spiritual and economic vacuum in the area. These preachers of faith initially acted peacefully.

But they gradually began to arm

themselves and set up semi-au-

tonomous enclaves with !ocal

followers in Caucasus to en-

force Sharia. Can they be with-

out a role in on-going war in

Chechnya? All thoughtful Mus-

lims — whether the proud

mountain clans of Caucasus or

the outsiders — tend to find

cause in Chechnyan war to wipe

Shamil Basaev, the military

leader of Chechnyan resistance

himself is a man of mission.

Trained in Soviet Union he

later said that his life's mission

was to wage holy war against

Russia not only for his Chechen

people but for Muslims op-

pressed elsewhere in Russia. He

out the rule of foreign infidels.

fought ruthlessly against Russia in the Chechen war of 1994-96 which forced Russia to grant Chechnya greater autonomy just short of independence. What however worries the Russians more is his pan-Russian mission of Jihad. Khattab, another fighter of Basaev camp is an Arab who fought the Russians in Afghanistan and earned prominence in Chechnya for his prowess. He was one of those 15,000 volunteers who to fight against Soviet occupa-

returned home duly battle

hardened. Many of those

Afghan-veterans are believed to

be in Chechnya in search of new

Islamic cause to fight. It is the

presence of these elements

which helps to explain why

Russia regards its own Islamic

adversary in Chechnya so dan-

nya is anything but a clash of

civilization. Because a clear-cut

battle line is yet to be drawn be-

tween Islam as a civilization

and a counter force. Islam is

certainly an element in the cri-

sis looming on Russia's south-

ern rim. But there are also other

dynamics of conflicts in the

prevailing war in Chechnya. A

Still the conflict in Chech-

by Brig (Rtd) M Abdul Hafiz

gerous.

came from all over Middle East tion of Afghanistan and later

lot of grey areas surrounding the crisis make it disputable as purely Islamic issue. Even if there are supports in bits and places for an Islamic cause in Chechnya or elsewhere there is no Pan-Islamic support base. In fact the Muslim countries are notoriously divided in their perception of Muslim cause whether it was in Palestine, Bosnia or Chechnya and their response to them is characterised by abysmal apathy and insensibility. As a matter of fact the gov-

ernments in Muslim countries lend indirect support to Russia by not taking up Chechnya issue in international fora, not even in the Organisation of Islamic Conference. Iran as the current chairman of the organisation presented in the OIC rather the Russian case. A Shi'ite Iran with her bitter memory of Shia persecution in Taliban-held Afghanistan has been openly supportive of Russian standpoint on Chechnya Kamal Kharazi, Iran's foreign minister, has promised 'effective collaboration' with the Kremlin against what he has described as 'terrorists' in Chechnya bent upon destabilising Russia.

The 'victims' of so-called Islamic terrorism are themselves circumspect in distinguishing between their current adversaries in Chechnya and Muslims in general. According to former President Boris Yeltsin, the terrorists are enemy with no faith or nationality'. Like President Bill Clinton who recently refused to target Islam as an adversary in his drive

against international terrorism even if it was the handiwork of some militant Muslim groups. Mr Putin also firmly rejected the view that the 'bandits' Russia was fighting could be described as Islamic

That the west in general is discreet in dealing with Islam and even its own Muslim minority grows out of its fear of a Muslim backlash the world over. So its policy is to divide and deal piecemeal. There are six million Muslims in the United States who constitute certain political weight and the government is increasingly conscious of their clout. Russia has 18 million Muslims which is a force to reckon with. By fanning anti-Muslim emotions the Russians are likely to spark secessionist trend in other Muslim majority areas like Inghushetia, Tatarstan and Bakshir. So the Russian authorities are very careful about labelling Chechen rebels as Islamist and instead they prefer to call them international terrorists or mercenaries under the cover of Islamic slogans. Or else a common Muslim front may emerge in Russia much to the embarrassment and predicament of

Notwithstanding a highly mixed up scenario in Chechnya where multiple factors like geopolitics, religion and ethnicity combined with each other to fuel a protracted conflict, the clash of civilization is, however, not unknown to history. It is that clash which catalyses change and brings about rise and fall of civilization. The time is not as yet ripe to challenge the civilization symbolised by advanced western countries; neither is there a countervailing force to match it. The clash is however inherent in the process of history and it will erupt elsewhere, if not in

# Ruling Party and Opposition Poised for Another Bout

by Mansoor Mamoon

In a speech to the Johns Hopkins University School for Advanced International Studies on January 19, 2000 US Secretary of State Madeline Albright warned the elected leaders of the new democracies not to succumb to the temptations of self-enrichment, self-glorification and self-perpetuation in power. The result is sham democracy.

increasingly becoming louder and the ruling party and the mainstream opposition combine appeared to have been on an unwilling nation yet anpoised for yet another bout in other black law. The first their do or die bid to elbow out Awami League government's even to the extent of liquidatlegacy of the Special Powers Act ing, their rival. What will be the outcome in this frenzy of is still riding high on the shoulder of the nation and canknock-out is rather difficult to not be shaken off despite persisbe predicted beforehand, but the tent demand from the compomasses in general and the hardnents of the civil society. All earned fledgling democracy in and sundry strongly maintain particular, stand ultimately to that the proposed law is absobe the loosers. Despair and inlutely unnecessary. stability with their concommitant impacts in the form of ris-The people should not be asked to pay for the utter failure ing anarchy, deep division breakdown in the law and order

of the government in curbing situation have again cast their violence and crimes and in looming shadows on this unformaintaining law and order tunate nation. Seemingly there which was professedly the first is no flicker of light at the end priority of Prime Minister of the tunnel and the long lin-Sheikh Hasina when she asgering political stand-off is assumed power on June 23, 1996. suming the proportion of a The glaring dichotomy is that simmering cauldron with each now her ministers are admitting that there is in recent times The recent decision of the a rising trend in crimes in the cabinet to go for the draconian country. The opposition has Public Safety Bill for what has been made the scapegoat as is been described as "the rising usually the case in such a situatrends of violent crimes, hi tion. Mere enactment of laws jacking, dacoities, destruction cannot improve the situation of public properties etc" has when the factors contributing added fuel to the fire. In a delito the preponderance of crimes ant mood the ruling party has lies elsewhere. Apart from this, come out with redoubtable force there is a plethora of laws in after initially backing out unvogue for adequately dealing der public pressure to place the with the perpetrators of crimes. controversial bill before the What is needed is sincerity and Jatiya Sangsad (Parliament) the will to do so forgetting party which has now been reduced affiliations and coatings. into a one-party show due to continuous and prolonged boy-

Burma's uncompromising pro-democracy leader and Nobel Peace Prize winner Aung San Suu Kyi in one of her political eassys succinctly said it is largely out of fear, fear of mass alienation and the possible backlash arising out of such a dire situation that a government becomes repressive. Ac-

cording to her, repression is an indication of weakness and not strength of a government. The tragedy of history is that no body takes lesson from history. The BNP government of Begum Khaleda Zia enacted the timebound Anti-Terrorism measures and the irony was that the Awami League, then in the opposition, was vociferous in its protest against the act. But with the change of its position it has itself prepared more repressive and no time bound bill. History, indeed, repeats itself and to quote the Bangla adage 'whoever goes to Lanka turns into Ravana', this latest step of the ruling party has exacerbated the already heated political atmosphere. It knows pretty well that it will have instant backlash from the BNP-led opposition and dwindle the modicum of the possibility of a dialogue for which it is inviting the opposition to join and posted the Speaker to use his good offices.

In a democracy the carrot and stick policy does not work. What works is gesture of goodwill and confidence-building. The folly of the ruling party was that this carrot and stack policy has rather helped the fourparty opposition combine to iron out their differences. As expected the opposition has taken a united stand against the proposed Public Safety Bill and said it will be resisted at any cost. The opposition alliance apprehend that through the cover of this bill the ruling party will try to hold the Upazila Parishad and Zila Parishad elections (sub-district and district council elections) despite opposition boycott to

have an effective local government power base so that when national elections are held under a neutral caretaker government as provided for in the country's constitution it will have an edge over the opposition. Monopolisation of local bodies by the ruling party supporters will be a safety-valve for it to influence the polling. Outwardly though not in power, inwardly the ruling party will be very much there. The opposition claims to have detected this tricks of the ruling party and vowed that it will thwart any such attempt at any cost even to the extent of effecting a screeching halt' of the country's economy.

The increasing confrontational politics will not augur well for the country. It is likely to have debilitating impact on the economy as well as on the

overall law and order situation. The innocent people who have nothing to do with power politics will be the innocent victims and bear the brunt. Resolution of the impasse is therefore of utmost necessity to save the nation from the possible pitfalls. Even though the ruling party may not like, the President should intevene and himself initiate a dialogue in the larger interests of survival of democracy and the masses. Earlier when such a proposal was floated the Prime Minister was on record to have opposed it. The situation is almost reaching the precipitating point. No further time can be lost. The feeling of the people is that the President generally revered as the conscience keeper of the nation can no longer afford to re-

bring the two sides to the negotiation table. In this effort the President will find the entire nation behind him which will be his strength and which neither the ruling party nor the BNP-led opposition will be able to ignore to the risk of their peril and isolation from the

Meanwhile, the ruling party should better pay heed to US Secretary of State Madeline Albright's advice to the leaders of new democracies the world over. In a speech to the Johns Hopkins University School for Advanced International Studies on January 19, 2000 she warned the elected leaders of the new democracies not to succumb to the temptations of selfenrichment, self-glorification and self-perpetuation in power. The result is sham democracy. When elected governments depart from democratic principles, they run a grave risk."

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## A Nation of Rescuers?

main a silent spectator but

should exert his influence to

by A R Shamsul Islam

S some of the alleged accused of the most Ashameful act repression on a young lady on the thirty-first December night on the Dhaka University campus are being apprehended by the police they have amusingly started to come up with a defence that it was they who rushed to rescue the lady from attacks on her chastity perpetrated by someone else. Further, mothers of some such accused students have gone to the length of giving statements to the press that whereas the nation feels proud of the courage and sense of alertness of their sons as exhibited in their attempt to save the lady on the thirty-first night from the clutches of the criminals it is stunning that some vested and vicious circles have manipulated the incident

shielding the real culprits. The outcry against such an infamous incident has been quite great and wide. Different sections have cried shame on it and strongly demanded exemplary actions against the culprits. The PM herself bitterly condemned and expressed concern at the incident and ordered the Home Ministry to go for stern action. The Home Minister sharply reacted with an assurance of arresting and pun-ishing the culprits. Meanwhile a handful of youngmen have been arrested and interrogated

so as to victimise their brave

sons with the ulterior motive of

by the police. There was a section of men who have opined that in the prevalent situation of law and order deterioration and corroding moral values the victim lady might not have gone to the campus to celebrate the occasion at so dead hour of night for her own safety. Another circle has forthwith protested this view saying that there should be no discrimination against the ladies in matter of sharing celebration in whatever odd hour it is held. They argue that to keep the ladies indoors on security reasons is a gross genderdiscriminating mindset denying due rights to the female.

Whereas this time thirtyfirst night celebrations passed off rather peacefully without any reported incident of extreme, wild youthful exuberance in trouble-prone, vulnerable, sensitive posh spots of the metropolitan capital, it is extremely sad that a lady was sexually attacked, before the very nose of the law-enforcing agencies and hundreds of onlookers, by a band of youngmen includ-

ing the students on the campus of Dhaka University known as the Oxford of the East. Though in fact in recent time

even the sacred precincts of universities have reeked off lavish acts of student's licentiousness. The affairs of the students of Jahangirnagar University repressing women students on the campus practically benumbed the whole nation. The divulgence of the news of a student of that university celebrating 'a century of rapes' on fellow university girls put down our heads millions of time.

However boisterous be the claim of the alleged accused to their role as rescuers of the rictim lady the old proverb goes: "The wearer best knows where the shoe pinches". She has clearly deposed that all the accused listed by the police had violated her.

Whose shame it is that the police who stood near the place of occurrence remained unmoved despite pathetic entreaties of the male associates of the victim lady to rescue her from the attacks of the ruffians. Yes, the police woke up to recover the victim only when it was quite late after enough of harm was done to the hapless

The whole thing may have gone totally suppressed (it is learnt that the victim lady too begged for suppression of the incident for fear of so-called social repercussions) but for the newsmen who brought out photographs on their national dailies that clearly identified full face of a handful of cr.minals who swooped on the lady obviously to molest her. This is only one of the few reported incidents of this kind. Majority of the likes peter out unreported and unknown. Had these come to light, list of the feigned rescuers would have gone miles lengthier.

As a matter of fact there is no dearth of self-styled rescuers in our various spheres of political, social, economic, educational, healthcare etc activities. Below is outlined some exam-

The political arena is crammed with so-called rescuers. Every now and then the opposition political parties routinely call hartals and carry on rampage and terrorist activities to enforce them (hartals). They call hartals in the name of rescuing the country from government's repression on the people and surrendering to the heels of a neighbour that tantamounts to the loss of

sovereignty. Conversely, the ruling party has also ingeniously invented to bring out battle-equipped peace processions on the road in a bid to rescue the country from the acts of vandalism of

the hartal-caller terrorists. When one talks of Bengalee nationalism or secularism the fundamentalists may rattle up their swords and point these on him in a vein that the cause of Islam will never be better championed than by lynching him (infidel in their vocabu-

What one finds in the educational sector of Bangladesh? Kindergartens, private English medium schools and colleges, private medical and engineering colleges, private universities etc have cropped up as flourishing commercial enterprises in the name of rescuing the nation from the poverty of updated, well-managed academies in different tiers of

education. The health sector presents a none-too-happy picture. Private clinics, diagnostic centres have menacingly mushroomed to supplant rickety government hospitals and investigating cells and to provide medical facilities to the people at high rates and on sizzling rents. These also claim to have rescued the nation from languishing under almost non-existent

health services of the state.

Regarding the bureaucratic tangle the less spoken the better. The bureaucrats are, in general, master of filibustering projects, in acceptance and implementation, as and when these fail to ensure their personal interests by throwing them into labyrinth of process and formalities calling those exercises as mandatory for the sake of full, far-flung considerations by the experts in a guise to rescue the government, and for that matter the people, from the hazard and loss of taking hastily considered schemes.

So on and so forth. Austria once branded the Serbians as "a nation of assassins" when heirapparent to the Austrian throne was murdered in Serbia. Long have come upon us condemnations like "a nation of beggars", "a country of bottomless basket" etc. These are all coined by the donor countries. Can't we ourselves now put on our coat a badge of self-proclaimed honour inscribing "a nation of res-

The writer is retired principal, Govt Mohila College,

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

### Preserving our

cott by the opposition parties.

Independent analysts, ob-

servers and the print media as

well as the political parties

which take extra care in main-

taining equi-distance from

both the warring sides have al

most in one voice slated the rul-

ing Awami League for imposing

national heritage Sir. Two different English dailies, in their 14 January issues published reports depict ing the dilapidated condition of two historical mosques --Dhaka's 'Satgambuj' (Saat Masjid) and 'Chandamari Pucca Mosque' in Kurigram. Due to lack of maintenance, these mosques are on the verge

of destruction and collapse. I would like to call upon the relevant authority to take urgent measures for the protection and development of these mosques. This is important for our heritage.

M. Zahidul Haque Associate Professor

## BAI, Dhaka-1207 A bid to save the

Chechens

Sir, we express our heartfelt appreciation for the stand taken by the government of the US and European Community (European Commission) to deplore and condemn the inhuman attack of the Russian military against the freedom loving Chechens. The relentless bombing and severe civilian casualties in Grozny and other cities of Chechnya have been termed by the European Commission as 'appalling'. They have not only condemned this inhuman act but also asked the Russian government to immediately halt their criminal activities.

In comparison, the Islamic countries and their 'toothless organisation' (Organisation of Islamic Countries) are almost silent on the matter, well knowing the fact that the majority of the population in Chechnya is

Once again, we'd like to thank the western world for standing against injustice and oppression in Chechnya.

Golam Ahmed Khan 44. Mirpur Road Dhanmondi, Dhaka-1205

## Fighting pollution

Sir. We hall the concerned members of Bangladesh Environment Lawyer's Association (BELA) for obtaining a verdict by the High Court upon their petition to save Buriganga from ruin by the encroachers (DS January 19,2000).

Similar initiative should be taken immediately against the production of polythene especially black polythene bags. which has recently flooded the city markets. These black polythene bags contain injurious chemical even germs of cancer, which could easily attack the foodstuff kept in it and ulti-

mately the human body. We urge upon BELA to move a petition to HC immediately to

save the people from the slow poisoning of these killer polythene bags.

Abdul Majid 13. Rajani Bose Lane Dhaka

### Cripple the country?

Sir, I found in the Daily Star a news item which began with this: "Main opposition BNP has threatened to cripple the country...." The threat is attributed to Mr. Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan, the party Secretary-General The news report explained the context. The BNP does not like the proposed Public Safety Bill, even though, as reported in DS in its 18 January issue, while in power the BNP itself had enacted a very similar law.

The hypocrisy involved in this is not the point of the present letter. Neither is the undemocratic nature of the proposed legislation. What is remarkable here is the ease with which our leaders talk of their wish to cripple the country. It was only a few weeks earlier that the same leader was reported to have said the same thing in another context. shall cripple the nation', he said then.

It is preposterous of a leader to threaten to cripple the very country he or she claims to lead. Crippling here means loss of production and income, less access to education, deteriorating law and order, another day of human misery. It is one thing to try to oust the government of the country. It is quite another to threaten to cripple the country.

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