

## Electioneering Battle on

THE tone, temper and texture of Begum Zia's speech at the mass rally of the four-party Opposition combine in Mymensingh on Monday left no ambiguity about her intentions to take part in the national elections. In fact, what she basically proclaimed from Mymensingh constituted her first serious public commitment to throwing the opposition's hat into the electoral ring. By formally seeking votes for the candidates to be put up by the constituent parties of the opposition alliance Begum Zia has virtually flagged off electioneering from her side. Earlier, the Prime Minister and Awami League chief Sheikh Hasina had heralded her party's campaign mood by opening the central election office of her party.

So, the die is cast. And with that impression etched on our minds the trading of charges between the opposition and the ruling party about 'hatching conspiracy' to foil the next general elections should now cease to be indulged in by either side. From this point on, neither the prime minister nor the leader of the opposition should say or do anything that might create doubts in the public mind about the elections taking place on or before schedule. Although Begum Zia's return to the hartal option in the umpteenth protest against law and order situation -- that might well have been an election plank rather than an issue for hartal anyway -- has been a disappointment, her embarkation on the electoral journey nonetheless is good augury; for, eventually this could stamp out hartal from the scenario.

As the major players in national politics Sheikh Hasina and Begum Zia will have to scrupulously refrain from indulging in acrimonious rhetoric against each other by way of persuading their followers to shun intimidation, provocation and violence of all kinds. While that is the overall demand of the situation what clearly needs to be stressed though is that the onus chiefly lies on the ruling party to facilitate the holding of a free and fair election that would yield a true reflection of the popular verdict. Already some steps might have signalled a wavering belief in the objective situation. For instance, just when the appointment of Sayeed as the Chief Election Commissioner appeared to be gaining a tacit acceptance from the detractors, the appointment of a possible equilibrium was upset by the appointment of Shafiqur Rahman as an election commissioner. This has to be righted while the voters list is rendered fully credible by authentic finishing touches and abusive language forsaken by the top political leaders to adopt the idiom of debate.

## Can Amnesia be the Price of Friendship?

PAKISTAN Foreign Minister Abdul Sattar's twin pleas that we forget the "traumatic" events of 1971 and build friendly bilateral ties with his country actually convey his government's trivialisation of the genocide enacted on the people of the then East Pakistan. Mr Sattar could come up with such a preposterous proposition primarily because he, and for that matter his chief executive as well, have looked at the happenings of 1971 from the other end, not the way we do. Our persistent demands for a formal apology from Pakistan and trial of the perpetrators of the crime against humanity in special war crimes tribunal are premised on the rightful claim of a people -- grossly wronged nearly three decades back -- to see justice dispensed and the fundamentals of human civilisation upheld.

We don't know how the military regime of Pakistan could even think of evoking amnesia from us when one side has been carrying a profound sense of injustice and the other hopefully a burden of guilt for all these years. General Pervez Musharraf's government must understand that it itself stands in the way of two countries forging lasting friendship by consistently refusing to seek apology on behalf of the sinners of 1971.

Let the fact be not lost on the present generation of Pakistanis, military and civilians alike, that the act of genocide perpetrated on the people of Bangladesh in 1971 was as heinous as the ones book-marked as the darkest episodes in the annals of human civilisation. Before you ask us to forget the massacres and mass rapes, go and ask the Kosovars, the Bosnian Muslims, the Palestinians to forget the deep scars they carry in their hearts. Why the Pakistani rulers or some politicians have been trying to project it in a lighter vein and as an exception looks baffling to us because they are not the ones who did it. Is it because Pakistan is ruled by a military regime now? We are sanguine its sentiment stems from the prejudice of the ruling clique and cannot be representative of the people of Pakistan who want a huge debt to history cleared by a formal admission of the guilt the nation need not bear for an eternity.

## Attract Tourists, will you?

TODAY is the first World Tourism Day of the new millennium. It has got a thought-provoking theme Technology and Nature: Two challenges for Tourism at the Dawn of the 21st Century. Although our technological base in tourism is not yet so sprawling and advanced as to come in open conflict with nature we need to keep our environmental concerns alive in view of the haphazard development taking place in the country all the time.

In fact, the heart of the problem of tourism lies in a set of attitudes we have brought to bear on its prospects. We still rest content with handling incidental tourists on transit through Dhaka to some other destinations. Dhaka is yet to develop as a tourist destination on its own merit. The notion to make the travellers' sojourn interesting on a competitive basis is yet to evolve in the mind of both our public and private tour operators. They better start thinking seriously on this point. On the other hand, we will never succeed in turning tourism into a thriving industry so long as we fail to wean away our own countrymen from the humdrum of household routines. Mere yearly office decoration in Dhaka, rallies, discussions, token cruises on the Buriganga river, and baking traditional pithas won't attract them to tourism. Tour operators will have to be more creative in attracting both local and foreign tourists as the basic infrastructure is improved.

PRIME Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee never stops saying that he is a democrat and therefore prepared to accept the consensus of opinion in the country on the policy we should follow. The 24-party National Democratic Alliance (NDA) he leads should support his contention. Yet, it is strange that Vajpayee did not take along with him even one member or MP from any other party except his own, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). He even ignored the NDA partners, Foreign Minister Jaswant Singh was there and so were Finance Minister Yashwant Sinha and Parliamentary Affairs Minister Pramod Mahajan. Commerce Minister Murali Manohar was supposed to be in the list of the PM's 100-member entourage. But it turns out that only his name was there.

The most important aspect of our foreign policy since independence has been its bipartisanship. Vajpayee's predecessors have been following it, both in letter and in spirit. Under Gujral, as Prime Minister, kept then Opposition leader Vajpayee informed on a regular basis, whether the talks were on Pakistan or on China. Yet the PM did not invite him even once to talk about the US visit.

Congress president Sonia Gandhi, Samajwadi Party chief Mulayam Singh Yadav and other party chiefs too figured nowhere. In a way, it was Vajpayee's usual behaviour because he had not taken them into confidence on the explosion of nuclear bomb. At that time his defence was that he had to confine the information to the minimum. Surely, the discussions in the US were not a hush-hush affair.

Whether Vajpayee's visit to the US was productive and to what extent is not the point. The post-cold war policy was sought to be formulated. It meant long-term repercussions, long enough to go beyond the tenure of the Vajpayee government. Main political parties should have been consulted beforehand.

Coming back to the visit, it was neither a roar nor a whimper. It was more or less on the expected lines. However, one thing noticeable was the profusion of adjectives that Washington used this time. When rhetoric proliferates, the contents become deficient. It appears as if both India and America did not know what to extract from the visit. President Clinton wanted India to

# Neither a Roar, Nor a Whimper

In fact, Vajpayee should have picked up the thread from where Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina had left it off. She had very rightly drawn the UN attention to the overthrow of elected governments by military juntas. Musharraf was unnecessarily peeved over the remark when he cancelled his appointment with her. But Vajpayee's silence is not understandable. Apart from being a neighbour, Bangladesh is one of the few Islamic republics where democracy has taken roots. The Indian officialdom, arrogant in its attitude, treats neighbouring countries in a nonchalant manner.

## BETWEEN THE LINES

Kuldip Nayar writes from New Delhi

be an obedient ally in the region, possibly to thwart China. The collapse of the Soviet Union had exhausted New Delhi's options. It would have liked some firm understanding on China. But the Clinton Administration was receding into the shadows when Vajpayee was visiting Washington. New Delhi was also not clear about its own objectives. In the beginning, its eyes were fixed on the never-ending problems of Kashmir and Pakistan. The strategy changed on the eve of PM's departure. The official spokesman was asked to announce that India was looking forward to deepening economic relations and entering into a long-term understanding on industry, technology and trade.

After Pakistan military chief Pervez Musharraf's attack on India at the UN, New Delhi came back to its initial proposition: Kashmir and Pakistan. It did not serve our purpose. It sent conflicting messages to Washington. Probably, it was realised during the discussions that America was more forthcoming on economic cooperation than on subcontinental's obsession on Kashmir. We tried to mix both but did not succeed. However, Washington

recognised India as "a responsible and stabilising force in Asia."

Had we concentrated on economic co-operation, we could have got deals worth many times more than the six billion dollars. India badly needs infrastructure. A couple of power projects have been thrown into the agreements but there is nothing on transfer of technology. Even the sanctions against India have not been withdrawn, although I recall Deputy Secretary of State Inderfurth telling me in Washington last year that he would see the end of sanctions before he laid down office.

New Delhi should have known by this time that Washington has its own, contorted sort of policy on Kashmir and Pakistan. This was more evident when Clinton used the word, 'core', to describe the Kashmir problem for difficulties between India and Pakistan. Strange, both the PMO and the Foreign Office, which sent scores

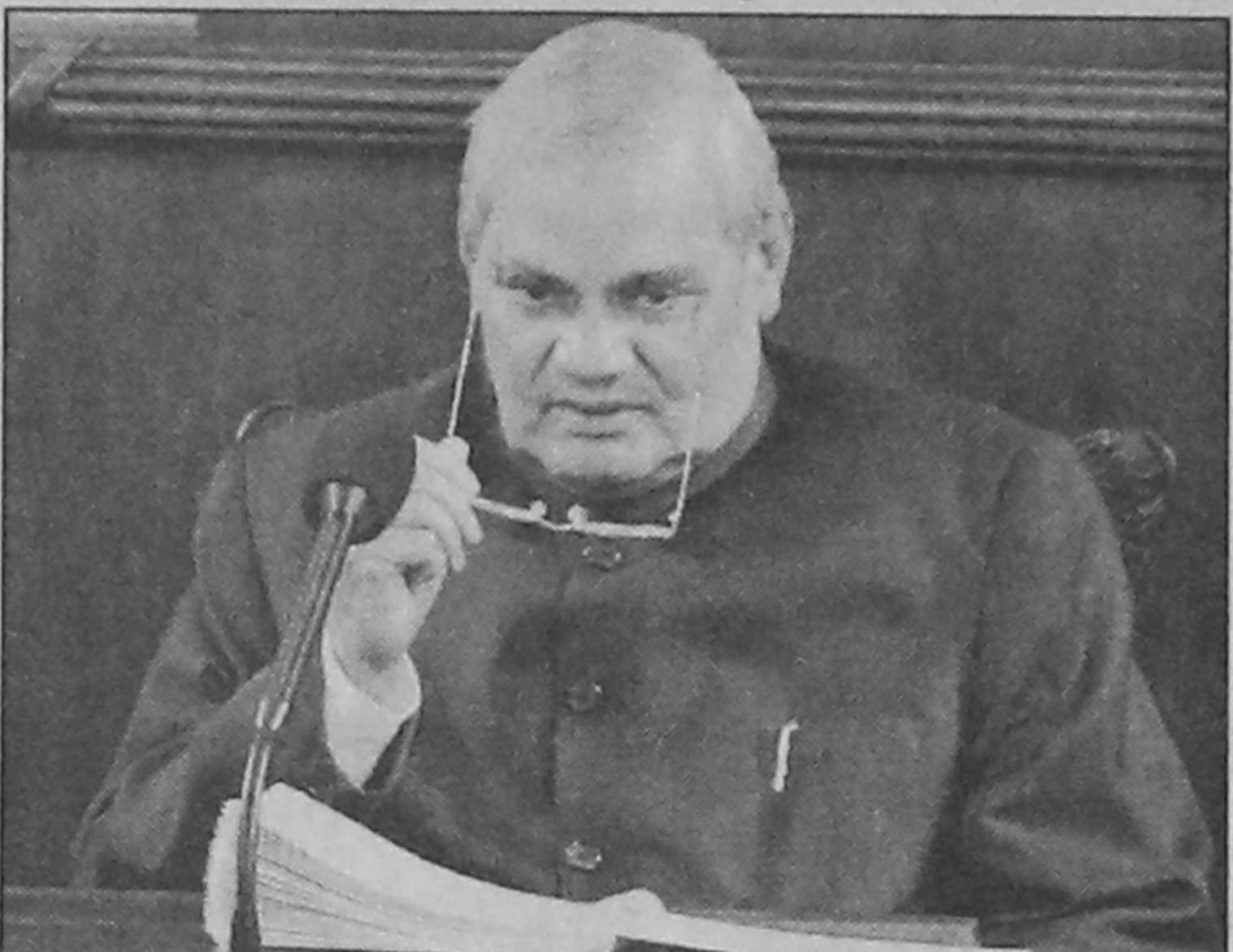
of officials to Washington before Vajpayee's visit, failed to make out the extent to which the Clinton Administration was prepared to go. Either they have not yet built an equation with the State Department or they were simply ham-handed in their approach.

Rightly or wrongly, America believes that it should continue to have some equation with Pakistan so that it can put pressure on it. This is the reason why Washington has conveyed to New Delhi that it may be successful in lowering the level of cross-border terrorism, not eliminating it. The State Department has cited Musharraf as saying that Pakistan does not have control over all the militants operating in Kashmir. In any case, Washington's tilt towards Islamabad has got straightened.

True, Clinton refused to give appointment to Musharraf. But this was not because of New Delhi's pressure. The US President did not want to impart even an iota of legitimacy to a military government. This is an election year. The Republicans are looking for an issue. The Clinton-Musharraf meeting might have provided them with one.

Prime Minister's Principal Secretary Brijesh Mishra belatedly felt that their emphasis at the UN and other forums on Kashmir and Pakistan was misplaced. He said at Washington: "We have not come here to discuss Kashmir." It was an admission which was rather late in the day. Even then he could not resist the temptation of adding that "Kashmir would certainly come in the context of the discussions."

It did. What is the result? America assured, as they have done before, that it did not want to offer its good offices unless both countries agreed to it. This



What Vajpayee read out in English was unlike him. This spoilt his visit still further.

# Multiple Facets of Terrorism

by M Enamul Huq

*It is perhaps necessary to assess whether the whole system is functioning properly. Allegations cannot be totally ignored. Policing is a matter of conscience and not merely a matter of law and hence the maxim is aptly suited, particularly in our country, law cannot be enforced, it is to be obeyed keeping in view the two precious flowers of humanity - security and freedom.*

grab. Nothing succeeds like success.

Developments, which have created tremendous possibilities, have also offered new incentives and avenues for crime. Open frontiers do not discriminate between tourist and terrorist. Crime is going global, too. Therefore, national action is not enough anymore; required is regional and international partnership in combat against crime and terrorism. The challenge is clear, we either work separately and lose or work together and win.

Law and order in our country has hit a dismal depth. Today, maastans, muggers, goons and, above all, political activists under the patronage of 'godfathers' have become a formidable presence in our daily life. Even worse, the custodians of law are hogging headlines for unlawful activities. Such an anarchic situation has eroded people's faith in the institutions of the state. It is indeed a matter of grave concern.

Justice is always advantageous to the rich has assumed axiomatic proportions and some crit-

ics go to the extent of saying, "Good laws remain in the books only and are rarely implemented." Fundamental rights, guaranteed by the constitution and internationally adopted human rights declarations, are also rarely translated into reality. Nith lack of law enforcement, absence of impartiality in judgement, rampant corruption amongst public servants and people's representatives, the society has fallen into the grip of a few terrorists and unscrupulous persons and ordinary people, particularly the poor, have become their hostage.

Thenewcultureofdevelopment, although meant for the mass, actually remains concentrated in the hands of a few. Now, it is argued that methodological complications of development have actually induced international trafficking, terrorism, economic crime and corruption.

In Bangladesh, international terrorism has been demonstrated in the attempted abduction of a diplomat in Dhaka in November 1975, in the forced landing of hijacked Japan Airlines aircraft

in September 1977 and the seizure of an embassy building in March 1979 and alleged firearms dispatch in the 1990s. Bangladesh however tackled those situations with tact and resourcefulness through our technical capabilities to meet such violent terrorist activities are limited. Since terrorists have no national boundaries and they are indiscriminate in their areas of operation and target, international co-operation is imperative to combat such crime effectively.

Destabilising democracy is perhaps the hidden agenda of the terrorists. As a result, policemen, judiciary, politicians and their families become their prime quarry and soft targets. International standards known as the Paris Minimum Standards do provide for yardsticks in relation for upholding law consistent with human rights but it may not be easy to find satisfactory solution.

In establishing rule of law criminal justice system has to play its role duly. Police being the most visible forum of the four organs often come to be blamed. It is perhaps necessary to assess whether the whole system is functioning properly. Allegations cannot be totally ignored. Policing is a matter of conscience and not merely a matter of law and hence the maxim is aptly suited, particularly in our country, law cannot be enforced, it is to be obeyed keeping in view the two precious flowers of humanity - security and freedom.

The writer is former IG of Police.

## To the Editor ...

### Oil, the leveller

Sir, The oil crisis in Europe is creating new social problems, which has put the government on high alert. As a result of the rise in the price of crude oil, the fuel prices have gone up recently, but the point at issue is the high local tax on petrol and other fuel, which is a vital source of income for the exchequer. The consumers in the mechanised transport sector have shown unusual strength in depth and breadth in trying to force their governments to reduce the high tariffs.

But this is not a solution, directly or indirectly, according to different schools of experts and analysts. Today the Western economy is ailing, and the industrialised countries are finding no easy solutions to the global market trends. The peaks of prosperity have shifted, but the means have lagged behind. The First World has to export more to the Third World to maintain their standard of living, as the growth rates are down in their own regions. Small cycles can be introduced, but the big cycles of civilisation take over (so well depicted by Toynbee).

The developed countries are facing a crisis in daily life style. The very future of the car, an economic yardstick, is at stake. Many small rich countries such as Singapore have imposed

higher duties or levies on vehicle, road and fuel to discourage the use of private transport, namely the car. The very pattern of daily life is now open to question. At the bottom there is a hidden cause: the bane of consumerism, on which modern economies thrive.

The disparities between the high and low levels in the societies are not narrowing to ensure more realistic equitable distribution of wealth on this earth; as also rapid rise in the literacy rate and public health services in the LDCs. The Western nations' state subsidised public services have been too good to last forever. Now the over-spills are showing, when soft living is no longer possible.

The world's only super power has a main for chasing energy and power resources all over the world, and dominate over its marketing and global distribution. This exploitation has been ruthlessly followed, revealing the devastation caused in Iran and Iraq, and the fight for the resources in the CIS region; and the Western grip in the Middle East.

The lust for nuclear power armament is an extension of the mindset of the developed nations. The smaller nations (such as Pakistan and India) are compelled to compete, uneconomically, with serious ramifications

in the regions concerned. The oil war continues unabated in the background (continue to watch the scene in Bangladesh with its rich gas resources).

What is the percentage of spending on non-essentials in the North nations, while the poverty level remains static in the South? The presence of ample doses of humanitarianism in international affairs has become a relevant question. A new approach to sharing the fuel resources of the world has to be drawn up in the Global Village concept, under which the South would have a definite role to play. While recessions move fast and steady, the sharing of natural resources (like oil) take a back seat. Since this is the age of change, mental preparation has become obligatory.

A Husnain Dhaka

### Car parking area at Kakrail

Sir, A large area had been demarcated adjoining to Kakrail Mosque for 'car parking'. But unfortunately almost the whole "Car Parking Area" has now been occupied by unauthorised hotels, shops, hawkers, beggars etc. It thus has become difficult for muslims to come to the mosque and park their cars for offering prayers.

I would therefore request the authority concerned to look into this matter and arrange for immediate removal of all the unauthorised encroachments parking area.

Sher Ali 47 Shah Shaib Lane Narinda, Dhaka

### Concern for environment

Sir, I, as a concerned citizen of Bangladesh, would like to draw your attention to the effect pollution is having on our environment, and how it is gradually destroying the nature. Air pollution, noise pollution, littering these are just a few examples of what is destroying our country's environment.

Pollution from cars, pollution from our own carelessness. We have to make people aware that the polythene bags they use everyday, are very harmful to the environment. We have to make them realise that it is not right to cut down all the trees; how trees help us live. If all the educated people can only take up some action a lot of things can be put right. But I wonder will anyone take up the action?

Humaira Wahid Sunbeams School

time the formulation was a bit different but not the contents: "The two countries reaffirm their belief that tensions can only be resolved by the nations of South Asia and by peaceful means." This should, however, clear doubts in the minds of Pakistan that pressure can bring about talks. Whatever the cost, India is prepared to bear it but it will not have a dialogue until the cross-border terrorism is stopped. An overall cease-fire, to which Musharraf agreed at one time, is the only honourable way out. Still the question that New Delhi has to ask itself is whether it was worth wasting a summit. It went over the same exercise when Clinton was in New Delhi a few months earlier. Could they not pay more attention on China which, even Washington believes, is flexing its muscles in the region? America also knows that Beijing is wholly committed to

Pakistan and has given it weapon.

In fact, Vajpayee should have picked up the thread from where Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina had left it off. She had very rightly drawn the UN attention to the overthrow of elected governments by military juntas. Musharraf was unnecessarily peeved over the remark when he cancelled his appointment with her. But Vajpayee's silence is not understandable. Apart from being a neighbour, Bangladesh is one of the few Islamic republics where democracy has taken roots. The Indian officialdom, arrogant in its attitude, treats neighbouring countries in a nonchalant manner.

Why should Vajpayee be a party to their way of thinking? My impression is that at some stage of his visit, the hawks took over and the thinking to ignore Musharraf's statements was dropped. That was probably the time when the texts of speeches prepared in New Delhi were discarded. Not that there was anything commendable in them but they at least avoided vituperative observations. What Vajpayee read out in English was unlike him. This spoilt his visit still further.

## OPINION Women's Empowerment

Mamuda Imam

Women's empowerment is a catchword now. Although nearly half of the country's population is female, the majority of them are excluded from the development process. No significant change has taken place in their overall position in our society. In fact, women have fallen behind in all spheres of life. Unless women are empowered politically, socially and economically they will continue to do so.

Unfortunately, our social and political conditions are far from conducive to women working independently with her feminine identity. The society still nurtures discriminatory attitudes towards them. The constitution of Bangladesh has guaranteed equal status of women and men in all spheres of life under the articles 28(1), 28(2) and 28(3). But, women are integrated neither in mainstream politics nor in the decision-making process.

In the last Union Parishad elections more than 13,000 women got elected as chairpersons and members. The non-government organisations (NGOs) played an important role in sensitising women to participate in the electoral process. Now each Union Parishad of the country has three women members elected through direct vote, thanks to the new law that seeks to give more power to women at the grassroots. However, there are drawbacks in the system: the responsibilities of the women representatives are not defined; and they have

less role in the decision-making process. Women are not being entrusted with any significant role. They are not represented properly on various management committees on education, health, drinking water, sewerage, etc. Unless distribution of work is democratised they will not be empowered in true sense. Their positions will continue to be decorative. Women representatives at the Union Council have no power to sanction only tube-well. No wonder, they are sarcastically called the tube-well party.

Speaking of their representation in the Jatiya Sangsad there is a demand that a change be made in the system of filling up the 30 parliamentary seats reserved for women. As the term of women's reserved seats expires in 2001, there is a growing demand that the number of reserved seats be increased to 64, one each from the 64 districts in the country with the provision for direct polls. Some organisations have been rallying for one-third of the total JS seats, i.e. 100, be given to women.

To incorporate such changes into a bill and get it passed in the parliament co-operation between the ruling and the opposition parties is imperative. Being women themselves, the leaders of the country's two major political parties AL and BNP are expected to uphold the cause for women's political empowerment.

## For Free and Fair Election

Saiful Alam Lytton

Nearly one year is left for the parliamentary elections. If everything goes well the next general election is due sometime between July 14 and October 14, 2001. The preparations for polls particularly on the part of the two major contending political parties, much ahead of the schedule is somewhat amusing. Both the parties are reported to have already rented separate offices, other than more than one respective party office, for kicking off electioneering.

Such activities to an extent seem to indicate that the nation has attained political stability. Because the parties in question appear to be confident that the elections will be held in time. And since they want to fare well in elections for acquiring the right of governing the country, they do not want to waste time.

Had the whole matter been such as it appears then every citizen of the country would be happy and proud. But the reality is perhaps different. On the one hand the parties concerned are announcing their preparations for elections and on the other, they are also expressing apprehensions about holding of elections. The contradictions between their words and deeds confuse and concern us most.

If the parties concerned are to any extent apprehensive of holding the next polls in time, they should first make efforts for repelling their apprehensions. There is no denying the fact that there exist some genuine problems like illegal arms, deteriorating law and order, musclemen, black money, administrative bottlenecks and corruption etc. which might jeopardize the election process. The political parties should first remove these hindrances, then embark on electioneering. But the problem seems to be that they are not interested to that as one party's irritants might appear to be advantages for another. And this is what is going on for the last four years as has been seen in various bye-elections.

However, as the importance of next general elections is very crucial in terms of power politics, it is assumed that despite apprehensions the parties concerned shall participate in the polls without removing the

hindrances. But the bottom line is that without removing those obstacles, which according to the parties concerned might hinder the election process, should the results of the elections be acceptable to them? The recent past record does not say so. After 1990 and 1996 elections the loser parties rejected people's verdict on the pretext of vote rigging and vowed to oust government even before its assuming power. What guarantee is there that this time the loser party shall not do the same?

One might argue that since the next general elections will be held under caretaker government there is little possibility of malpractices in elections. But one also knows that the loser parties in 1990 and 1996 elections, which were also held under caretaker government and acclaimed as free and fair, raised the bogey of subtle vote rigging. Perhaps, in reality, caretaker government cannot be the panacea for free and fair elections due to its inherent limitations. It is mainly comprised of non-political persons and its tenure is so limited that despite its utmost sincerity it is not possible on its part to look into every bit of the prevailing problems while conducting the elections.

So the onus rests upon the political parties for creating the atmosphere for holding of a free and fair elections by recognising and removing the factors that they apprehend might vitiate the election process. And it's they, not the caretaker government, who could rightly point out where the problems lie and initiate the corrective measures. It is widely believed that their participation in elections without removing such apprehensions shall raise suspicions in the minds of the people about the real intentions of the parties concerned. It may appear that they prefer to fish in the troubled water. The party, which shall not be able to reap harvest, shall leave no stone unturned to jeopardize that of others. So the parties should prepare not for 'election for election's sake', but sincerely for a free and fair election. They themselves have greater duty than the caretaker government towards ensuring it.