

Boycott of parliament Now is the time to end it

BNP is planning to embark on mass contacts with 400 public meetings and rallies slated across the 300 parliamentary constituencies of the country in February and March. Evidently, the whole exercise seems designed to mobilise public support for the party keeping in view the national elections which are round the corner. The focus is on mass rallies and processions, with an eschewal of the hartal option, prompted by the felt need to cultivate public support rather than alienation at a time when the general election is only some months away.

As we welcome this election-centric thinking within the BNP leadership, manifest in an inverse proportion to the decline of agitational politics, we urge them to do the next thing that logically follows from such a change of emphasis. As the bed-rock of electoral politics which it is otherwise poised to launch through a series of meet-the-people initiatives, BNP must now put an end to its parliamentary boycott and assume the full responsibility of an opposition party in the House of the People. It is never too late for a good move. Yes, we can see that only six months are left to the life of the seventh parliament, and at best there can be two more sessions of the Jatiya Sangsad before the nation went to the polls. So what?

Our one-liner counsel to BNP leader Begum Zia would be: "It is precisely because the parliament's tenure is running out that you must see it fit to walk back to the JS all at once." It would be too skin-deep and blinkered a judgement on the BNP's part to be feeding on a diet of masticated politics, even now. Let's catalogue the benefits which the BNP appears certain to derive from resuming its abandoned parliamentary role. Aside from obviating the embarrassing charade of signing the attendance register just before the expiry of the 90-day absence period to retain parliamentary membership or circumventing the contingency of submitting resignation en masse, the BNP stands to benefit substantially from taking to parliamentary politics even at this stage.

If the BNP as a major political force in the country went back to parliament it would bring a dramatic change in politics, a paradigm shift to it in terms of perspective, quality and direction. Begum Zia will signal the restoration of her own faith in the parliamentary system thereby enhancing the people's faith in it with a resonating effect.

If she can utilise the remaining two-and-a-half or two sessions of parliament to air her grievances through to the people BNP will be moving that much closer to its constituents. The opposition will get much wider media access while the electronic coverage of parliamentary proceedings will be politically educative for the people at a most propitious pre-election time. The budget session of parliament would present a fabulous opportunity for the opposition to draw popular attention to their platform. The MPs from BNP who have been reduced to the position of any other party member will regain their sense of purpose. Besides, the dire need to change the electoral laws makes BNP's attendance in the parliament all the more imperative.

In all, it is with the image of a vibrant parliament erasing all the stains of the past that all the political parties will go to the polls in a state of high public approbation which will be a big stimulus to the process of free and fair elections.



**HASNAT
ABDUL HYE**

AMERICANS have been at it again, taking pot shot at the lame-duck civilian targets in the so-called no fly zone in southern Iraq. The latest forays with cutting edge weapons of death and destruction have been ostensibly due to the dare of the Iraqis in setting up missile defence system defying a ban. Sending a message by the present incumbent of the White House that paternal legacy will be held high in the country that incurred his administration's wrath is a more likely explanation. America is not alone. In Great Britain it has a staunch ally, thanks to the undertone of special relation infusing the foreign policies of the two countries. A few days earlier when the present American administration was busy taking inventory of the White House, Britain faithfully filled up the interregnum and carried out several sorties in the no fly zone. BBC's video footage vividly showed the rubbles of a razed down veterinary hospital and mourners carrying dead bodies of their loved ones. Neither of these were military targets. But the press note issued by the British solemnly announced that Iraqis were hiding military installations in civilian guise. On the basis of this paranoid suspicion any and every civilian structure is a possible target for air strikes. Iraq can comply with the goal of the self-declared guardians of no fly zone only by making the northern and southern parts of the country no man's land.

But why should Iraq oblige America and Britain through military withdrawal from the northern and southern parts of the country? These are integral parts of its sovereign territory. Under what international law can a country be made to renounce its authority from any part of its land over which its sovereignty

More sinned against

extends? Moreover, while the whole "Operation Desert Storm" in 1990 and the post-war sanctions have UN approval, the declaration of no fly zone and subsequent air strikes in those areas by the Americans and the British have not even a whiff of approval from any quarter. Such attacks are nothing short of blatant aggression violating international law. Insofar as they cause wanton death to civilians they amount to massacre of the innocents. One may also ask the American and the British governments that if safeguarding the Kurds in north Iraq and the Shiites in the south is such an important moral imperative why have they not taken similar steps in Turkey and Iran where the Kurds are equally endangered or for that

of freezing of her assets abroad. After long six years' of nearly total ban on import of any item the UN Security Council passed a resolution providing an oil-for-food deal. Iraq was allowed to use half of its proceeds from oil exports to import food and medicine. The remaining half of earnings from oil exports was to be used for compensation to those who suffered by Iraqi aggression and occupation of Kuwait. Determination and ultimate conclusion of the process of compensation being based on so many factors and involving so many parties this process is likely to remain open ended for a long time. On the other hand, the requirement of tight scrutiny and approval by a UN sanctions committee of each and every consignment

among children due to diarrhoea was 1,450 in 1983 and 18,777 in 1997. The corresponding numbers of pneumonia deaths during the two periods were 1,444 and 1,750 respectively. By now the economic sanctions resulting in interrupted and meagre flow of food supply have killed hundreds of thousands of children, 5,500 per day per month since 1990, according to an estimate. According to another estimate the number of deaths among children rose from 1,089 to 23,665 in 1997, after seven years of sanction due to malnutrition. By now the figure is much higher. A survey by the UNICEF and the Iraqi Government 1997 estimated that 31 per cent of the population, equivalent to 960,000 children were suffer-

plenty and luxury, has hardly had any change for the worse. It is reported that by 1995 falling incomes and rising prices reduced the purchasing power of the middle class so drastically that many families were forced to sell family assets. This continues unabated.

Sanctions provide an innocuous, silent and deadly remedy. Most of the times, they don't work, given the resilience of the adversary. But sanctions never fail to harm and inflict suffering on the common people. They are marginalised and improvised without mercy. It would appear that the majority of innocents are being forced to pay for the culpability of the minority. Sanction wangles collective expiation for individual (or group) guilt or venality. Only the sadist and the diabolic minded can commit this kind of crime against humanity without qualms of conscience. The American and British governments

Secretary General of the UN said in 1998: "I personally believe that Iraq being fully disarmed is never going to be possible. At the end of the day, the Security Council must decide whether Iraq is disarmed to the extent that it is not a threat to its neighbours." Although three of the five permanent Security Council Members take the view that Iraqi disarmament has gone as far as it can possibly go, they have been unable to convince the USA. The American and British governments should realise that as a goal total destruction of lethal weapons is meaningless. A country like Iraq with its potentially huge oil revenue can arm itself to teeth in no time. A better safeguard for world peace and stability is creating conditions where blatant aggression against neighbours becomes extremely difficult, if not impossible.

If the hidden agenda is to remove Saddam Hussein from power through a coup or popular uprising precipitated by the bite of sanction, the possibilities seem to be slim and remote. Judged by his durability during all these tumultuous years he is either too popular with his people or too clever to be pushed aside against his will. If he is popular the Americans and the British can claim some credit. It is their aggressive policy which has touched the raw nerve of Iraqi patriotism so adroitly been exploited by Saddam Hussein. As regards the potential plotters, they seem to have been more than adequately taken care of by him through patronage or ruthless pre-emptive measures. Neither bombing, nor sanction can destroy Saddam now. Their cessation could in future. At least the probability will be ratcheted up.

One of the basic tenets of the law of war is to make distinction between the civilians and the combatants. Weapons of war have always been designed and used in such a way that they target mainly the combatants with minimal collateral damage. Any departure from this principle is a gross violation of human rights and qualifies to be considered as a war crime. Such a crime is being committed against the innocent men, women and children of Iraq for the last 10 years. Their only fault is that they have a leader called Saddam Hussein. If it is a sin for them to be stuck with him, it must be said that they are being more sinned against.

IN MY VIEW

One of the basic tenets of the law of war is to make distinction between the civilians and the combatants. Weapons of war have always been designed and used in such a way that they target mainly the combatants with minimal collateral damage. Any departure from this principle is a gross violation of human rights and qualifies to be considered as a war crime. Such a crime is being committed against the innocent men, women and children of Iraq for the last 10 years. Their only fault is that they have a leader called Saddam Hussein. If it is a sin for them to be stuck with him, it must be said that they are being more sinned against.

matter in all the countries where minorities of every description are being persecuted and even subjected to periodic pogroms? There is a limit to having double standard and deviousness.

If the intermittent air strikes cause civilian massacre, the decade old sanction imposed through the UN against Iraq has set in motion a slow but inexorable process of genocide with its toll of lives becoming heavier with the passage of time. The children, the poor, the sick and the old have borne the brunt of this cruelty. Although the sanction imposed in 1990 at the end of the Gulf War excluded medicine and food, this exclusion was of no significance as Iraq was denied full access to proceeds from oil exports and because

of import have proved to be so time consuming that there is always a crisis of shortage of some essential items, whether food or medicine. The new food basket, though an improvement over the monthly ration hitherto arranged by the Iraqi government, was still below the minimum requirement of calorie and protein. According to a FAO/UNDP Mission the additionality in ration made possible by the oil-for-food deal was still "inadequate and unbalanced."

Because of fragility and vulnerability the children are the worst sufferers of this crunch. As a result of untimely and inadequate imports following the UN sanction the mortality rate of children below five has increased manifold. It has been estimated that the number of deaths

from either mild, moderate or acute form of malnutrition, up from 18 per cent before the war. Meanwhile, millions among the adult population have remained hungry, the poor and the displaced being the majority. By denying raw materials, machinery and equipment the sanction has not allowed the economy to recoup and rise from the debris of war. Rising price inflation, frequent currency devaluation and chronic unemployment have ravaged the economy and inflicted untold miseries on the population, particularly the middle class and the poor. The ruling elite and the rich who were mainly responsible for the decisions leading to the aggression against Kuwait in 1990 have remained unscathed. Their old lifestyle, wallowing in

have shown their mettle in this respect beyond any shadow of a doubt. Their recklessness, hypocrisy and insensitivity have embarrassed, even pained, some of their allies. Violating the sanctions these countries have started sending relief materials and volunteers. Instead of upbraiding them the American and British governments should realise the gross violation of human rights caused by their blind pursuit of an antiquated policy of reprisal through attrition.

The long-running sanction is also ineffective in realising both its purported and hidden goals. Complete and total destruction of lethal weapons, on which withdrawal of sanctions now depends, can never be achieved to the satisfaction of the nit-picking die-hard. As the



**MOHAMMAD
BADRUL AHSAN**

It was a high mark of hypocrisy, when a preacher had lost his own battle while trying to salvage the soul of another adulterer. Reverend Jesse Jackson, the celebrated civil rights leader and Christian minister of the USA, was having an extramarital affair with a woman while he was counselling President Bill Clinton over his affair with Monica Lewinsky. If anything, the man, who was the first African American considered for the US Presidency, performed the black art of moral discrepancy. He didn't practise what he had preached.

One of the characters in Oscar Wilde's 'The Importance of Being Earnest' pleads, "I hope you have not been leading a double life, pretending to be wicked and being really good all the time. That would be hypocrisy." Those words proved prophetic in Wilde's own life as he would be accused of homosexuality and sent to prison. Thus hypocrisy has the mastery of a juggler about it when the double standards of Mr.

You will hit the target, but miss the glory

Jekyll and Mr. Hyde are extrapolated within a single personality.

An Islamic scholar, who is visiting Bangladesh from Australia, tells me that hypocrisy is the mother of all evils. Perhaps the reason why it is true is that hypocrisy destroys identity and throws everything into a jumbled state of confusion. What are we supposed to make of a man who has performed Hajj, and is caught in the airport while smuggling deadly drugs into the country? How do you identify prostitutes, who run their business from respectable neighbourhoods? Where do you draw the line between the rational and the animal, when calculating men plant bombs in public meetings?

In simple words, hypocrisy is when the label tells something other than what the bottle holds. It's moral pretension when falsehood and deception prevaricates in order to prevail. But caliphs Omar and Harun-ar-Rashid used pretension to ascertain truth. They walked in disguise amongst the poor and the needy so that they could learn about the plights of their people. In certain cultures masquerade is a festival or entertainment in which disguised participants offer gifts to their host and then join together for a ceremonial dance. Therefore, it is not always bad if the label belies the bottle so long as the aim is not to deny the essence of what it contains.

According to the Bhagavata-

Purana, a Brahman who is not free from falsehood, hypocrisy, envy, aggression, and pride cannot be the highest of men, and many persons of low social status may have some advantage over him in moral attitude and behaviour. In a way, hypocrisy is the womb where other vices are conceived and cultivated. But even worse, as W Somerset

Maugham explained, hypocrisy cannot, like adultery or gluttony, be practised at spare moments; it's a whole-time job. The proof of that pudding is in eating. If you look at the politicians, you can tell how it happens.

So, hypocrisy is adulteration of truth and falsehood with malafide intentions. In recent times, a killer has expressed his horror at the cruelty of the crime of which he is accused. During police interrogation, he is said to have compared the atrocities of the butchery of cutting

up two young men to those committed by the Pakistan army in 1971. In the same manner, a political leader has defended himself against him by a journalist who is lying in a hospital bed after being seriously wounded by his goons. While the victim claims to have been beaten up by his men, the politician is blaming it

and conscience is its first casualty. American political philosopher Hannah Ardent explained, "Only crime and the criminal, it is true, confront us with the perplexity of radical evil; but only the hypocrite is really rotten to the core." Hypocrisy is, thus, a moral disaster, when all values are destroyed in the name of serendipity. Even a criminal is committed to his crime and takes responsibility for its consequences. But the hypocrite is footloose, who does what suits his purpose and is comfortable with his peripatetic morality.

The Islamic scholar whom I met last week also told me that divers lose sight of colours as they incrementally descend into the deep sea. First they lose sight of red, then yellow, green and blue until they are engulfed by the black colours of the stygian darkness. Hypocrisy is the lowest point in the nether region of moral depravity, where everything is coated in darkness, because one cannot tell the difference between right and wrong as all things are judged within the scope of opportunity.

In that sense, hypocrites are worst kind of criminals who do two wrongs in one mischief. They commit the crime and then justify it either through change of value or by passing the blame on a scapegoat. They pretend evil and at the same time pretend innocence for it. But the worst thing about them is how they remain unperturbed by the

whole thing. How they perpetrate evil, yet keep a straight face as if nothing had happened. Hypocrisy is the deadliest ailment of the soul, when the conscience degenerates under the onslaught of an eclectic moral system.

When Jesse Jackson, himself the illegitimate son of a white planter and a slave girl, fathered an illegitimate child with one of his colleagues at the Rainbow/PUSH Coalition, he gave in to that eclectic system where a philandering president completed his second term at the height of his glory. How did it happen? Is hypocrisy contagious? Did it pass to Jesse Jackson from his celebrated confessor? Was it a temptation hidden in the flesh of the noted priest all the time and then encouraged to leap out all of a sudden while handling the moral failure of an illustrious president?

What is common amongst President Bill Clinton, Reverend Jesse Jackson, the butcher of Sutraper and the ferocious man of Feni is that they have all shocked us with the unthinkable. Some of them did the grisly, but each of them did something grotesque, which violated the fundamental values of human society.

On the surface, their misdeeds embodied two of the primal instincts: sex and violence, where the animal overpowered the rational and committed the sin. But hypocrisy is when the rational overpowers itself, and helps the animal feed the crime scene. If you think about it, it is as loathsome as shooting your enemy in the back. You will hit the target, but miss the glory.

CROSSTALK

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on victim's family feud masquerading himself as the misunderstood benefactor.

At the root of hypocrisy then is a twist, where appearance is more important than essence. The power of a chameleon lies in its eyes, and a blind chameleon cannot change its colours. A hypocrite finds his strength in greed, because what corrupts him is the indomitable urge to covet. He wants what he likes, and he is ready to take on any colours to get what he likes. For him convenience is the art of survival,

TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR

For the record

My attention was drawn to an article called "AL in opposition, AL in government" in the Special Supplement of The Daily Star of January 30, 2001, by Staff Reporter Reaz Ahmed. The pictures of my husband K M Obaidur Rahman MP, Nurul Islam Manjur and Shah Moazzem, who are accused in the jail killing case of November 3, 1975, has been published in the same line with three other gentlemen who have been tried and convicted in the Bangabandhu Murder Case, with the caption 'Righting wrongs of the past'. The article just below the pictures reads, "AL started the process of trial of the killers of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in 1996. Trial court gave verdict awarding capital punishment to 15 ex-army personnel in 1998. Subsequently the Appellate Court gave a split judgement confirming death sentence against 10 while differing on the other five. The matter is currently under judicial review."

The intention behind publishing the pictures of K M Obaidur Rahman MP, Nurul Islam Manjur and Shah Moazzem Hossain is not understood since there is no mention of them or the jail killing case in the article. I wish to remind the readers that Obaidur Rahman MP, Nurul Islam Manjur and Shah Moazzem Hossain were not accused in the Bangabandhu case. They had been arrested in connection with the jail killing case, and have been in jail for the last 25 months but not a single proof of their involvement could yet be produced by the authorities. The trial is at the preliminary stage and I am positive that my husband's innocence will certainly be proved. We all know "an accused is innocent

until his guilt has been proved beyond all doubts." So pictures of three innocent citizens published in such a manner may lead to misleading influence on the trial and the minds of the readers. Please publish my letter in your esteemed daily to set the records straight and clarify matters.

**Shaheda Obaed, wife of
K M Obaidur Rahman
Dhaka**
There was no such intention as imputed by the writer. -Editor

Earthquake could strike Bangladesh

We are deeply shocked at the loss of lives in the severe earthquake which hit India and Pakistan on January 26. It is a calamity and our heartfelt sympathy goes to the sufferers.

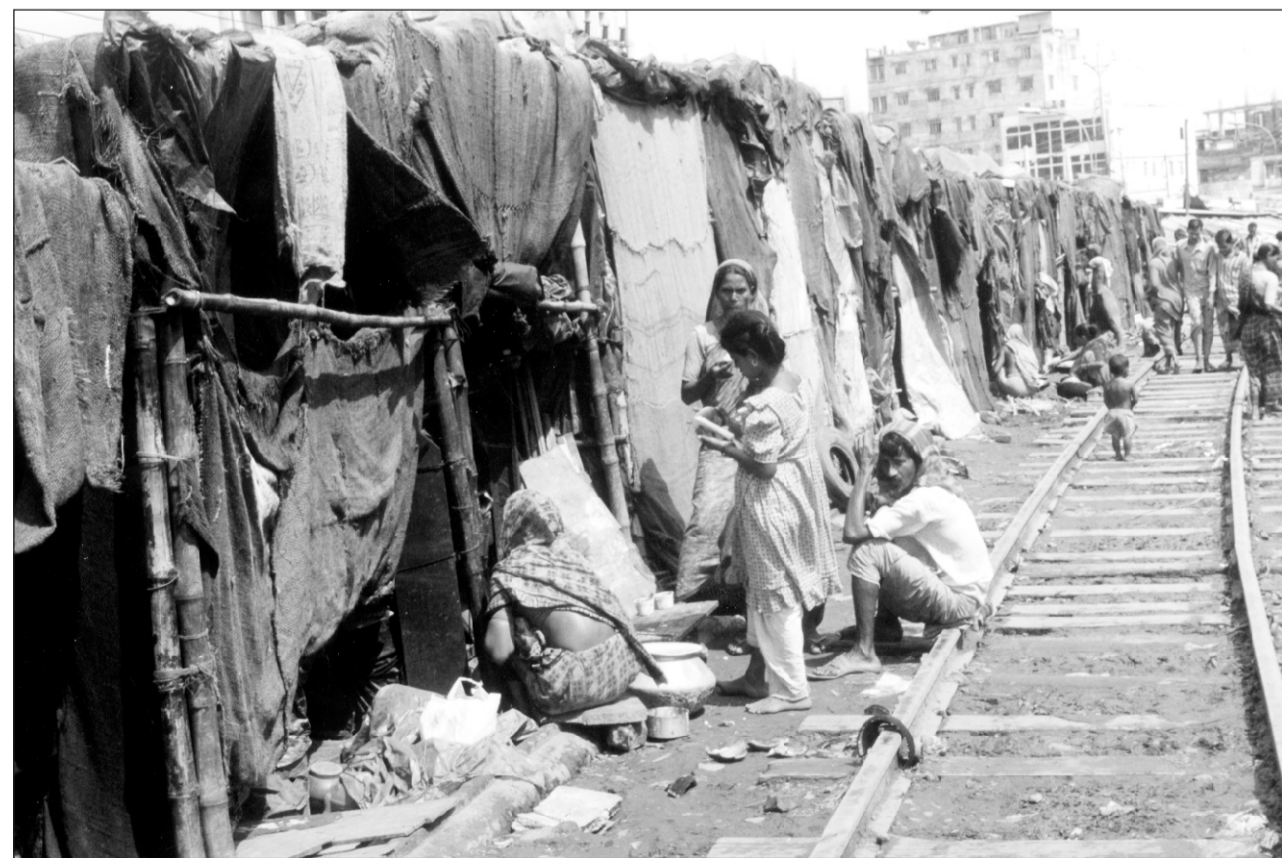
Tremors were also felt in Bangladesh and Nepal on the same day. An earthquake is a terrible natural disaster. No device has been invented to alert people beforehand so when it strikes, it takes a huge toll. According to geologists, Bangladesh also faces the risk of being struck by a major earthquake at any time, as it is situated on the tectonic plates. In the last few years, tremors have been felt in Chittagong and Cox's Bazar a number of times, and the earthquake of 1997 in Chittagong was strong enough to kill a few people. One is apprehensive of what might happen if a strong earthquake hits Bangladesh as all the major cities are congested, with unplanned, multistoried buildings. The lone seismograph, located in Chittagong is not in working order so the duration, strength and distance of an earthquake remains unknown.

**Nur Jahan
Chittagong**
"Facts, Not Fiction"

PHOTORIAL

Readers are invited to send in exclusive pictures, colour or black and white, of editorial value, with all relevant information including date, place and significance of subject matter. Pictures received will not be returned.

On a dangerous track



STAR PHOTO: AKM MOHSIN

Slum dwellers are at the mercy of *mastaans*, pimps, the police and all kinds of accidents. In this slum, anyone could be hit by a speeding train. But where do slum residents go? Eviction is not the answer. They should be relocated, with basic housing facilities. Since the DCC cannot get its act together, Dhaka should be brought under a city government to implement a truly modern city plan.

As a senior citizen who witnessed the "Quit India" movement in Calcutta, and the emergence of Bangladesh, I find much substance in Kuldip Nayyar's commentary (The Daily Star, January 24). The diabolical role of ZA Bhutto was not well brought out in the Hamoodur Rahman Commission report. Bhutto's argument that Pakistan could not have two Prime Ministers broke up Pakistan, although the military leaders were used as a face-saving device.

There were two facts whose implications did not dawn on West Pakistani negotiators: (a) the communication, cultural, and language gap between the two wings of Pakistan (the majority of the population were Bengalees); and, (b) the geographical distance separating the two wings, which increased the communication and transportation gaps, leading to much misunderstanding at different levels of the two societies. It is not enough to be Muslims to hold two societies or nations together, as we see in the Middle East and Central Asia.

The concept of Pakistan was based on an external cause, namely, Hindu domination in British India, which lasted till 1947. The East Pakistani Bengalees were treated as second class citizens by the dominating West Pakistanis. Pakistan is now in political and economic shambles, confirming the wrong stand by the then West Pakistani leadership. India took advantage of the situation in 1971, and easily broke up Pakistan.

**Elder Citizen
Dhaka**
Violence against women

There is a misconception that violence against women takes place only in the public domain. This wrong picture is due to our social structure which keeps women from speaking out, even when they are suffering hideous torture. Incest and inappropriate touching are common in many households but young girls, threatened with dire consequences by male relatives, dare not speak out. Sometimes uncles molest their nieces and brothers-in-law take advantage of their young sisters-in-law. Social condemnation falls usually on the girl or women because it is commonly believed that the female had encouraged the male.

To change this we must encourage women to speak out and protect them from the social trauma that will occur. Men must come forward to expose other men, because only then would the stigma be removed from the woman to the man. Our religious leaders are of no use to us because they always take the side of the males. Don't they have daughters and sisters?

**A concerned citizen
Dhaka**

Noise pollution

Coming home from the USA, it has struck me that our country is polluted by noise. We do not have to be so noisy, especially on the roads. But horns are honked indiscriminately, by all and sundry. The bigger the vehicle, the louder the horn. Students trying to study have to close all windows and sweat because opening anything would mean that one would get a headache from the noise.

I call upon the concerned authorities to make an effort and save citizens from this menace to health and peace of mind!

**Shama Husain
Dhaka**