

Social movement recommended

Against the cheating malaise

SUNDAY'S parliamentary standing committee meeting, which approved a set of recommendations to checkmate cheating and other unfair means in the secondary and higher secondary examinations, has diagnosed the disease all right; however, one must say, it has been a little too eclectic in prescribing a remedy. From incentive for strict invigilation to moral education for students, the list of 25 recommendations has everything the sub-committee members could possibly have thought of. As a result, already tried out but failed measures have been overemphasised, crowding out the ones that could be most effective under the circumstances. Instead of being too generalised in their approach, the committee members could have been a little more specific hammering exclusively on the concept of building a social movement against the menace of cheating in public exams. Admit it or not, the phenomenon has assumed all-pervasive proportions and might precipitate a complete collapse of the country's education system. Imposition of Section 144 around the examination centres to keep prospective aides of students keen to cheat, as recommended by the sub-committee, should be a pointer in this regard.

Although asked to play a greater role in the fight against cheating, the teachers have had found very little to do under the circumstances. The best they can do is to look the other way when students are cheating. We have read and heard of many invigilators, who were roughed up and humiliated for being tough on cheats, both inside and outside the examination centres. With political and, subsequently, criminal elements joining in, needless to say on the side of the cheats and their aides, resistance could spell even death for the teachers, so grievous the situation has become.

The authorities must not fool themselves into thinking that the problem can be cured with ad hoc measures. Until and unless political and criminal elements are driven away from the scene, whatever suggestions one committee or the other comes up with will be an exercise in futility. Isn't it an irony that when the lawmakers on the Jatiya Sangsad committee are urging all segments of the society to initiate a social movement against cheating, their partymen and their hired hands are facilitating it?

No anti-dumping duty on battery

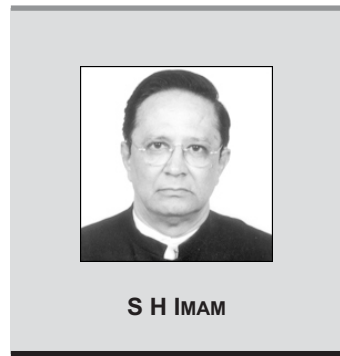
Timely government move for private sector

THE threat of high duties being imposed on battery exports to India has been averted, thanks to a timely move by the government. We congratulate the ministries of commerce and industries for responding immediately and firmly to concerns expressed by local manufacturers on the subject. As reported earlier, two Indian companies had recently filed a complaint with the federal authorities in India, demanding an anti-dumping investigation to be followed by the imposition of duties, on battery imports from Bangladesh. The Indian companies were choosing to overlook the terms of the South Asian Preferential Trade Agreement or SAPTA which provides tariff breaks to a few items from Bangladesh, among which are lead acid batteries.

Immediately after local manufacturers raised the alarm last month, the two ministries took up the matter with the Indian authorities and succeeded in resolving the issue in accordance with the exemptions guaranteed to Bangladeshi items under SAPTA. As stated in a message to the respective ministries by the president of the Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Latifur Rahman, the success of their initiative has illustrated the effectiveness of partnerships undertaken on trade-related objectives between the public and private sector, in the larger interest of the country. Presently, the domestic demand for batteries is for 200,000 pieces, while local manufacturing capacity is for 800,000 pieces. If the threat of anti-dumping restraints had been allowed to materialise, the Indian government could have slapped a duty as high as 900 per cent on Bangladeshi batteries, with adverse consequences on the domestic lead acid battery industry and its export potential.

The government's responsiveness has reinforced the importance of providing timely and appropriate public support to the private sector, particularly on critical trade issues. We hope this example is emulated more often, for the ultimate national good.

Patience to pay dividends



S H IMAM

MOST people think there is the least cause for political agitation in the country at this point in time, given the overall inclination towards staging polls before the end of the present government's term. Yet, it is a matter of supreme irony and enormous public bafflement as well that the Opposition alliance is apparently in its most belligerent mood to date having called for three consecutive days' hartal all over the country, inclusive of a day's shutdown programmed by their student wings.

Yesterday, opposition leader Begum Khaleda Zia has had a call on meeting with President Shahabuddin at the latter's behest, her second one with him in recent times, and only three days before she embarks on her inexplicably announced hartal programme. Earlier on the same day, representatives from 11 left parties met the President for the first time since the controversy surged over electoral time-table.

Hasina had earlier eschewed the offer for her resignation 'after April 17' in the face of unrelenting opposition calls for her resignation by March 30 adding that she was giving the opposition leader until July 13, the day the parliament was otherwise due to be dissolved, to try and remove her from office, if she could. But essentially, she is expected to hold on to her original intent to quit power any day after April 17 to clear the course for polls.

One only hopes now that she will

today take the opportunity of her Paitan rally to announce a fixed date for her relinquishment of the charge and thereby send an unequivocally positive message to the opposition for elections, 3-4 months ahead of the completion of her term.

The opposition's approach, patently so fixated on one point and undiscerning about any positive change appearing in the general outlook of things, has given three negative vibes: one, they may be seen to be trying to force the government's resignation on the streets of Dhaka when the latter has gone on public record having pledged its readiness to quit any day after April 17 i.e. some 20 days from today; two, whether the opposition intended it or not, their new burst of agitation, intimidation and provocation could lead to a spiral of anarchy and destabilisation; and last but not the least, they want to go to the polls with a victorious image derived from having called for three consecutive days' hartal all over the country, inclusive of a day's shutdown programmed by their student wings.

If the two major political parties in the country, Awami League and BNP, should go on giving each other the taste of its own medicine when out of power then where do the people turn to and find dependable leadership?

There is no denying the Awami League inner circles' natural resistance against being seen to have made a climb-down to meet the opposition's deadline for resignation, howsoever close it may be to the ruling party's preferred date of departure. That could be regarded as a liability by the party before the polls, which should not be lost on the opposition negotiators.

No dispute has ever got settled anywhere in the world, be it between countries, political parties or individuals, except through a spirit of

JUST ANOTHER VIEW

It will be possible to find a solution to the arithmetical jigsaw if the political parties agree to a fixed date for the dissolution of parliament but the principal matter of fixing the date for election to the Election Commission whose job it is to do it, albeit in conjunction with the caretaker government. Those two institutions are ideally suited to assess the time needed for conducting free, fair and impartial polls besides their being constitutionally empowered authorities to be doing so.



enlightened compromise and accommodation, a certain healthy willingness on both sides to meet each other in the middle of the road to final reconciliation.

It is noteworthy that all the political parties, including the leftist ones had approached the 1991 elections under Justice Shahabuddin Ahmed's caretaker government from a position of complete understanding and unity in their ranks. In fact, they participated in the election as contesting political parties but were uniquely bound otherwise by a 19-point programme of understanding they all stood committed to implementing or pursuing when in power or in the opposition as the



case might be. Some form of understanding had also to be forged between parties on both sides of the political divide for the 1996 elections to be held successfully even though the opposition had, for the most part, been at dagger's drawn with the ruling BNP over the caretaker issue. The non-party instrumentality for conducting impartial polls was to be adopted through a post-facto consensus forged after its enactment through a parliament which atrophied out of its own burden of assailability as soon as it did its job.

But why is it that the opposition and the ruling party should remain so distraught of each other and



persistently refuse to acknowledge the need for a working understanding as they approach the 2001 elections?

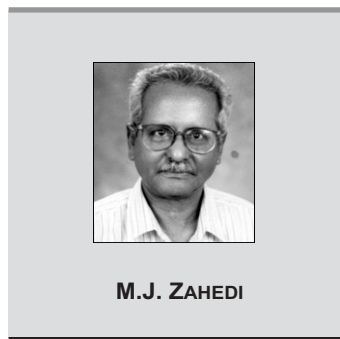
Going by the ruling party's proposed time-frame, on the face of it, some 55 days will be left for the caretaker government to have the next general elections held in the country by June 12. Conversely, add 18 days to it that the opposition are pressing for and you have another time-span of 73 days for the non-party administration to assist the Election Commission in conducting free, fair and impartial polls. If 15 days' time is taken for the formation of the caretaker government from the date of the parlia-

ment's termination as allowed for by the 13th amendment to the Constitution then effectively we have even less than 55 or 73 days being tossed up by the ruling and opposition parties respectively, way short of the 83-day mark as in the case of 1991 polls and 73 days insofar as the 1996 elections were concerned.

In the present context, the margin between the indicative time for the dissolution of parliament and that for actually holding the election is short owing to the fact that the ruling and opposition parties are putting a limit or a cap on both ends of the time-table. It will be possible to find a solution to the arithmetical jigsaw if the political parties agree to a fixed date for the dissolution of parliament but leave the principal matter of fixing the date for election to the Election Commission whose job it is to do it, albeit in conjunction with the caretaker government. Those two institutions are ideally suited to assess the time needed for conducting free, fair and impartial polls besides their being constitutionally empowered authorities to be doing so.

The constitution provides for national elections to be held within 90 days since the dissolution of parliament. In other words, technically speaking, it could be held even on the 30th or 45th day after the parliament's termination. Does it mean though, that we should settle for an unrealistic date that proves counter-productive to the very concept of the caretaker government system? Certainly not. Once we have opted for early polls the sooner we dissolve the parliament the better for us. Let us have a fixed date for parliament's dissolution through a process of consultation between the stake-holders brought together by the President of the Republic. When that happens, the rest will fall in place.

Does the going get tough for the CE?



M.J. ZAHEDI

FEW will say that the Alliance for the Restoration of Democracy or the ARD's call for a protest meeting on March 23 was a success. The fact of the matter is that it was not. In fact, the strike call was a dismal failure. Few shops in Lahore (the proposed venue of the proposed protest) and other towns of Punjab were shut; people did not respond sympathetically because they seemed not to have any sympathy either for the ARD or its demands. At least not to the demands on which the strike call was given.

Also there was the government action that saw to it that the strike did not succeed, shopkeepers did not shut the doors of their premises and the people did not go to Mochi Gate where the public meeting was to be held. Ahead of the proposed meeting, the police rounded up many workers of the ARD. Many leaders

of the Alliance, including its president the veteran Nawabzada Nasrullah Khan were put under house arrest. Many others were arrested elsewhere. It was almost a foregone conclusion that it would be like this. The heads of the country's leading political parties, for one reason or the other, are in exile, mostly voluntarily; new adjustments are taking place within some of the parties (the PML for instance), and a

ban on outdoor political activity as also to have a political showdown with the government. Pakistan and the Punjab Bar Councils, too, demanded restoration of the 1973 constitution and restoration of democracy. In this context, the Chief Executive's remark that the 1973 constitution had to be amended also came up for criticism. The CE said in a recent interview with the Washington Post that the constitu-

people's. Observers here feel that what the Chief Executive has in mind is noble indeed. But they also advise him not to ignore the ground reality that most of the presidents in Pakistan have been very powerful men. Field Marshal Ayub Khan, General Yahya Khan and General Mohammad Zia-ul-Haq who wielded absolute power were all Chiefs of the Army and had assumed power by utilising their

state was concerned. Junejo, who appeared nothing more than as a handmaiden of the president, was dismissed when the General suspected that he was growing too big for his boots.

It should also not be forgotten that the 1973 constitution was introduced to lay the foundations of a stable democratic system for the country. It provides adequate powers to the president as well as to the

above narrative is that what really matters is not the revamping of the 1973 constitution nor restructuring of the President's office, but the restoration of democracy, a real one at that. How the government, the present one no doubt, will do it is entirely its option. It can accomplish it either by introducing it at the grassroots level, as it steadily intends to do, or by restoring the now-suspended assemblies. The Chief Executive has formed a National Security Council as well as a National Reconstruction Bureau, ostensibly to evolve a functional democratic order, so that the army returns to the barracks before the time given by the Supreme Court expires.

Most observers think that for the time being the Chief Executive and his team should concentrate on the seven-point agenda he had placed before the nation in October 1999. It includes reviving the economy, attracting investors, eliminating corruption and sectarianism as well as making the accountability process a success in the real sense.

These indeed are major issues in themselves, questions that demand and will take up most of the regime's time, talent and energy. If the constitution has to provide answers to issues concerning the country, then it should neither be abrogated nor mutilated, nor it should be held in abeyance any time again.

LETTER FROM KARACHI

Most observers think that for the time being the Chief Executive and his team should concentrate on the seven-point agenda he had placed before the nation in October 1999. It includes reviving the economy, attracting investors, eliminating corruption and sectarianism as well as making the accountability process a success in the real sense.

lukewarm public response to the Alliance's demands could be cited as the main reasons. The sights of ARD, PPP and PML have remained focused on democracy, immediate general elections, human rights, independent judiciary and election commission and restoration of political activities. The Alliance's demand for restoration of immediate democracy is in conflict with the government's own time frame.

The movement was decided in February in Peshawar to defy the

tion did not provide answers to the country's political problems. He also spoke of making the office of the President more powerful but subject to checks and balances. By dealing with these issues the CE hopes to 'eradicate the paradox of democracy we have suffered which was camouflage for the systematic plunder of the country by the political elite'. He said he wanted to deal with these issues by reintroducing democracy from the grassroots level so that power 'returns to the

official position. Civilian heads of state such as Ghulam Mohammad, Iskander Mirza, Ghulam Ishaq Khan and Faruq Leghari in turn emerged as strong men by exploiting whatever legal tools they had with them to exercise authority. During his long 11 years as the country's had of state, Zia-ul-Haq experimented with democracy and although he inducted Mohammad Khan Junejo as the prime minister, he continued to remain the dominant personality as far as running the affairs of the

prime minister who was the elected leader of the people. But in his bid to further strengthen the president's office Zia-ul-Haq introduced the Eighth Amendment, which wrecked the prime minister's office. It was left to Ghulam Ishaq Khan to display the power of the president's office when he removed Benazir Bhutto and brought Mian Mohammad Nawaz Sharif, only to oust him as well in 1993. The last action resulted in Ghulam Ishaq Khan's exit as well. What can be seen from the

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

Cure for overdose

The nation is suffering from too much politics since independence and specially during the decade of the 1990s. The coming general elections, if conducted peacefully, will reveal whether the rule of the dynasties will linger for some more years. Across the border, West Bengal experienced stable rule for two decades, thanks to a great leader, who came from the ranks and who has retired voluntarily.

This confined Bangladeshi society is short of volunteers and of space for mobility, internal and external, especially when it comes to acquiring and relinquishing power. Internal violence within the parties is cause for apprehension, affecting the safety and security of society, as there is practically no deterrent machinery against armed unlawful violence. Who is there to criticise the political leaders? The licence given to political leaders is fatal for any society, especially when parliament does not function in the normal way.

The political leadership has to become tough within, make visible sacrifices and offer statesmanship of a better standard than offered so far. In the IT age, there is no place to hide, as evident from the recent audio-visual disclosure of bribery in India, which has rocked the very foundation of politics in New Delhi.

AZ

Dhaka

Tribal challenge

The review by Professor Dilara

Choudhury of the book on the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) by Major General Ibrahim (March 24) was very interesting, as this type of book review is rarely seen in the local press.

Now people can grasp the problems of tribal communities more clearly, and notice the difference in attitude of approach since Bangladesh was created. The problem is that public discussions such as roundtables and seminars are not held frequently to keep people well informed.

One point which came out in the review was that GoB ignored the inherent rights of the tribal people, on the same principle which turned the then East Pakistan into an independent state.

It appears that the decision to allow Bangladeshis to settle in CHT in large numbers was disturbing for the tribal people. They felt insecure for many other reasons as well. This remains a sensitive problem and without a political consensus a solution is very unlikely. What are the politicians going to do about it?

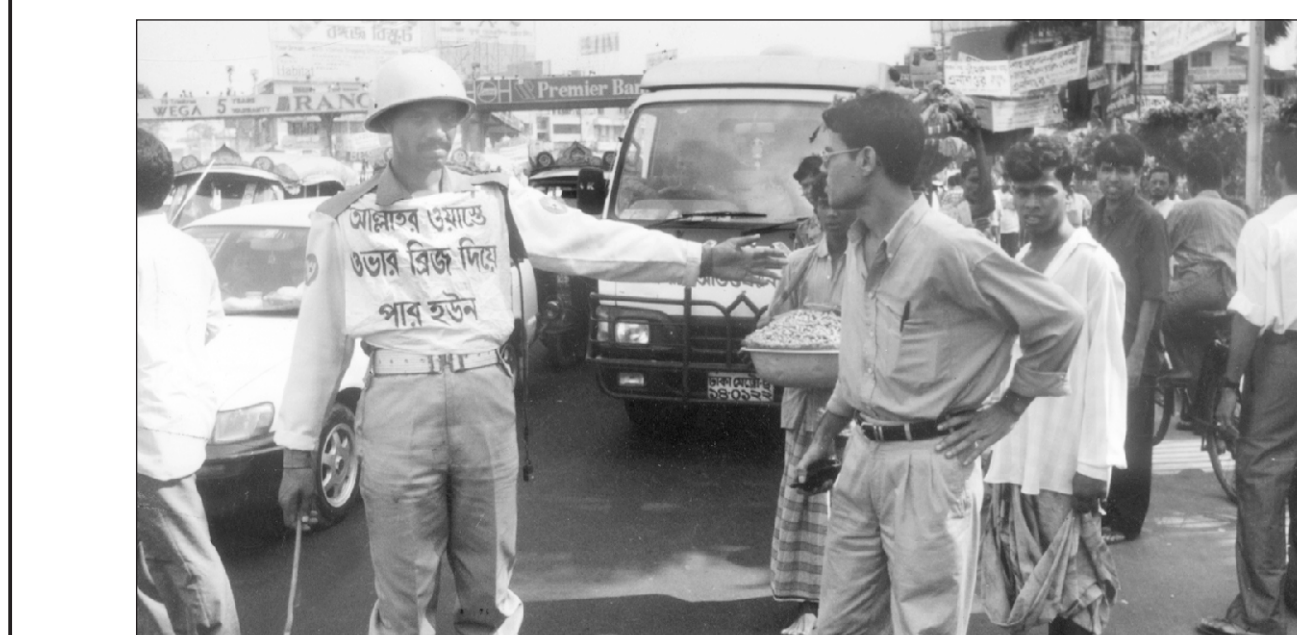
ACitizen
Dhaka
Pollution and our body's response to it

I was really moved after I read the article 'Watching Dhaka go to the frogs' by Almas Zakiuddin. It was frightening even to imagine that we are inhaling poison every day but it is not strong enough to make us succumb to it

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.

For God's sake!



STAR PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

"For God's sake, use the over-bridge". These words, on the banner worn by this traffic policeman, highlight his desperate plight and the breakdown in order on our streets. Ignoring traffic rules is a common practice in the country and, as this photograph reveals, people are generally unresponsive to rules and regulations. The authorities are not the only ones responsible. Everyone has to work together to bring discipline to our streets.

immediately and not weak enough not to do any harm to us, either. This is an appropriate description of the situation. But strangely enough our leaders who are in a position to do something about it are either ignorant of the whole thing or do not have enough moral courage to act properly. It is even more pathetic that people in general also do not seem to bother about it much, as if they have become used to it.

We have already started to pay the price of air pollution. It seems that almost everybody has some breathing or lung problem. I find almost every other person on the street either with a coughing or a spitting problem. They cough or spit so frequently and so loudly, it is as if they are trying to get everything out of their stomach. This is probably due to the body's defensive response to the poisonous air we breathe everyday and a desperate attempt to clean our lungs. 'Survival of the fittest' is the fundamental philosophy for surviving in an adverse condition and as a result the body tries to do something about it. Should we wait for our body to find a way to combat this or should we do something and act immediately to reduce pollution?

Dr. Md. Kamrul Hassan
Berlin

LNG plant at Ashuganj
On March 23, a report was published on foreign investment in the LNG plant at Ashuganj. The report might have been a successful one if it had an appropriate headline. The headline of

the news was "Wesfarmers plans to invest US\$200m in LNG plant", which does not match the report. As far as I know LNG stands for Liquefied Natural Gas. LNG is the liquid phase of Natural Gas (methane). An LNG plant has basically no relation with LPG, Condensate or NGL. For your information LNG plants are used to export natural gas in liquid form. LNG plants are mostly installed on ships. They require cryogenic storage and these ships shuttle between ports. Therefore it would have been appropriate if you had used "NGL Fractionation Plant" instead of "LNG Plant" in the headline.

Engr. M. Arif Iftikhar
Dhaka

Afrustrated nation
The nation recently celebrated its 31st independence and National Day. But what have we achieved so far? Can we consider ourselves a proud nation? Certainly not. Bangladesh is considered the most polluted country in the world. Law and order situation of the country is deteriorating day by day. Students, instead of studying, are involved in cheating and mass copying in the examinations. Instead of looking after the welfare of people, the politicians are involved in petty party politics. Frustration and despondence is the order of the day. Is this why millions of people sacrificed their lives in 1971?
Rumana Kabir
Dhannoddi, Dhaka