

## Shubho Naba Barsha

Let's work out our differences and start afresh

BEYOND the festive façade of fun and froth, Pahela Baishakh bears the quintessential message of equity and equanimity, of lenity and liberality, and of love and respect. The Bengali New Year would certainly usher in, as it always has, a refreshing relief for people amidst heightened political tension and socio-economic uncertainty. The urbanites especially, after hours on end in confinement due to opposition-sponsored hartal and consequent violence, would surely want to relieve their minds of concerns and let themselves be swept away by music and mirth. Political and partisan divide, we expect, would get dissolved, be it for a few hours, as people in their hundreds of thousands, irrespective of their caste, class and creed, pour out to the streets to join in for New Year's celebrations. There, in the midst of unbridled joy and festivity, we need to pause and probe deep into ourselves for ways to carry the sense of security and unity on to every sphere of our lives.

Admit it or not, mistrust and suspicion have overshadowed love and faith in each of us, and it reflects at individual, social and political levels. We need to break away from this. The first step in that direction would be restoring trust in each for the other. We need to appreciate the collective treasure that we have at our disposal. We must liberate ourselves from age-old prejudices and not taking pride in what we have, and we have a lot to be proud of — our language, our culture.

Now, the international community observes Ekushey February as the International Mother Language Day, in recognition of the sacrifices we have made for Bangla. It is time to let them know of the rich cultural heritage that we have. Let it be our Pahela Baishakh resolve.

## More dubious allotments by RAJUK

Stop this scheming once and for all

THE land-grabbing scandals in RAJUK never seem to end. Our investigative reporter has discovered that RAJUK is preparing a list of allotments for plots in its Uttara Third Phase for some 2,500 beneficiaries, mainly ruling party activists, leaders and government officials. We are aghast that RAJUK has not learned its lesson, for this is not the first time a tainted scheme has been touted by it. A similar list prepared in 1997 to benefit 242 ruling party members and supporters, with plots that RAJUK planned to develop by filling in the Gulshan-Banani-Baridhara lake, was cancelled by the Prime Minister after a public outcry.

This time, an ambitious and unscrupulous RAJUK official who hopes to contest elections on a ruling party ticket, has come up with an equally selective and bigger list, conveniently adding the names of the earlier political beneficiaries but leaving out some 12,000 applicants who have been waiting for years for allotments, as well as those who would be dispossessed by the Uttara development.

The list aside, RAJUK has not yet obtained ownership of the land and it is unlikely it will do so in the foreseeable future. Although the Minister of Public Works and Housing has said that acquisition formalities will be finalised at 'any moment' and that no irregularities will take place, his words do not inspire confidence. The process is not even underway at the DC's office which is responsible for acquisition and compensation. In fact, far from agreeing to compensation terms, affected landowners are not even aware of the RAJUK list as yet.

The fact of the matter is that as before, this latest RAJUK scheme has been entirely politically motivated, at the cost of legitimate owners and applicants. It not only smacks of nepotism but also threatens to unleash serious legal and social repercussions.

Let us remind the authorities of the fall-out of their earlier abortive scheme and demand, in no uncertain terms, that this dubious list be immediately cancelled. We also demand that severe action be taken against the offenders. The repeated and increasingly bold attempts within RAJUK to exploit ordinary people in order to satisfy personal greed and political ambitions is a scandal that must be dealt with, once and for all. The government cannot ignore such blatant criminality and political aggrandizement.

# Nationalism: Unresolved issue for the nation?

HARUN UR RASHID

NATIONALISM is a concept that defies description in precise terms. It is a doctrine invented in Europe at the end of the 18th century. Some suggest that the essence of nationalism is "the will to live together". Scholars are divided in their opinions as to what factors in fact propel people to live together.

It has been argued that neither race nor language nor religion alone can bind a group of people to hold together as a nation. Some argue that the common legacy of rich memories from the past appears to be the glue to live together as a nation. While other theorists argue that a nation is a "soul" which holds together a collection of ideals which bind a community of people together as a separate identity from others.

Basically, the concept holds that humanity is divided into nations, that nations are known by certain characteristics which can be ascertained both in subjective and objective terms. Nationalism constitutes a basis for a group of people to form a State of its own. Many historians date the rise of nation-states to the time of the 1789 French Revolution. The success of the French Republic as the first nation-state made it a model for other communities in Europe. Nationalism is a mixed blessing. Although nationalism can serve as an incubator for democracy, a few scholars believe that it can thwart the freedom of minority peoples.

**Nationalism and Bangladesh:** Nationalism is one of the pillars of

statehood of Bangladesh and has been incorporated in Article 8 of the Constitution. However, what constitutes nationalism appears to be an emotive issue in the country. It appears that nationalism has two variants—Bengali or Bangladeshi nationalism.

To express in simplistic way of a very complex and sensitive issue, one can argue that Bengali nationalism seems to be embedded in the concept of "Bengali first, Muslim

fact that separate Muslim majority nations exist from Morocco to Indonesia is a point in instance. Race or language also does not automatically determines nationalism. For instance, although some of the Arabs have the same race and language, they have formed their own States based on separate nationhood.

They suggest that Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's slogan "I am Bengali, my nationalism is

nation as modern Turkey was created according to its constitution of 1924 as a secular state by Kemal Ataturk.

**Bangladeshi nationalism:** The proponents of Bangladeshi nationalism believe that Islam and its dynamic interaction with Bengali language and culture makes Bangladeshi nationalism distinct. To them, the majority of the people in Bangladesh belong to traditions, customs and festivals that are largely

Chatterjee wrote in 1973 (Inside Bangladesh Today: An Eye Witness Account) that "Sheikh Mujib's 'Bengali' and our 'Bengali' are entirely two different things. His 'Bengali' is a political entity and by religion is Muslim whereas our 'Bengali' is a cultural entity and by religion is Hindu."

**Amendments to the Constitution after 1975:** After 1975, a series of Constitutional amendments were introduced by President

amendments maintain that neither national consensus was agreed upon nor any referendum was held before the amendments were made. They believe that these amendments of the Constitution were contrary to the spirit of Bengali nationalism, reflected in the original text of the Constitution.

**Conclusion:** Some argue that the underpinnings of Bengali or Bangladeshi nationalism fall short of inclusiveness of all Bangladeshis as neither of the variants takes into account language, culture and religion of indigenous peoples (e.g. tribal people and adivashis etc) who are nationals of Bangladesh. They are not Bengalis by race or Muslims by religion but are Bangladeshis.

It would not be incorrect to say that the political agenda of some of the mainstream political parties in the country appears to be embedded in either Bengali or Bangladeshi nationalism. Many political scientists argue that the chasm on the make-up of nationalism is to be one of the underlying factors of divisive politics in the country.

One cannot deny that national consensus is imperative in determining priorities in the country. If no national consensus exists on what exactly binds the people of Bangladesh as a nation, there would be difficulty in achieving national consensus on important issues facing the country.

Barrister Harun ur Rashid is former Bangladesh Ambassador to the UN, Geneva.

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second" while Bangladeshi nationalism is "Muslim first, Bengali second". This implies that the main difference between the two appears to be while Bengali nationalism is rooted in Bengali language and culture, Bangladeshi nationalism is an amalgam of Bengali culture with Islamic traditions.

**Bengali nationalism:** India and Pakistan were ultimately carved out of British India in 1947 on the basis of 'two-nation theory' which divided Hindus and Muslims into separate nations. Many argue that the birth of Bangladesh demolished 'the two-nation theory' because Muslims fought each other in 1971 and Islam failed to bind the Muslim peoples of Bangladesh and Pakistan as one nation.

It is argued by the proponents of Bengali nationalism that Muslims as such do not constitute a nation. The

Bengali" sums up the essence of Bengali nationalism which has been the root of the independence movement for Bangladesh. During the independence struggle, all Bengalis, irrespective of religion and creed, fought against the brutalities of so-called Islamic regime in Pakistan.

They hold the view that Bangladesh is founded on secularism unlike Pakistan. To them, religion is considered personal and is separate from State activities. The first Constitution of Bangladesh of November 1972 reflected Bengali nationalism and religious sentiments were kept at bay. The name of Allah did not appear in its preamble and the Constitution pledged nationalism, socialism, democracy and secularism as "the fundamental principles of the Constitution". Commitment to secularism is nothing new for a Muslim majority

rooted in Islam. They argue that spoken and written Bengali language in Bangladesh is interspersed with Arabic or Persian words as distinct from that of Sanskritised version in West Bengal.

The advocates of Bangladeshi nationalism maintain that the concept of Bengali nationalism suffers from an inherent contradiction because it would mean that all the Bengali speaking people, irrespective of their place of residence or religion constitute one nation. If that was the case the people of West Bengal in India and the people of Bangladesh would be one nation. They argue that what makes the Bengali-speaking peoples two separate nations is the different religions they profess.

Some refer to the views of Basant Chatterjee, an Indian journalist. After having visited Bangladesh,

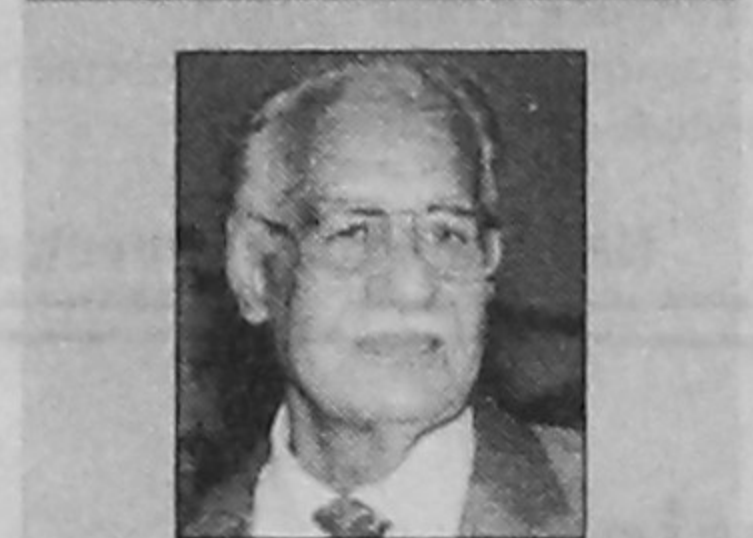
Ziaur Rahman and President Ershad.

In 1977 President Zia deleted the word "secularism" (Article 8) and incorporated the name of Allah in the beginning of the preamble. A new sub-Article was added in Article 25 by President Zia where it was stated that "The State shall endeavour to consolidate, preserve and strengthen fraternal relations among Muslim countries based on Islamic solidarity".

In 1988 President Ershad inserted 2A in the Constitution incorporating that "The state religion of the Republic is Islam but other religions may be practised in peace and harmony in the Republic."

While the advocates of Bangladeshi nationalism argue the purpose of the amendments is to mirror the spirit of Bangladeshi nationalism, the critics of the

## The region suffers



KULDIP NAYYAR  
writes from New Delhi

the BJP are stalling the talks. They probably believe that the posture of intractability will pay them better dividends in the forthcoming assembly elections in five states. This is where they go wrong. They underestimate public opinion, which favours a thaw.

The government's decision not to send the Indian cricket team to Sharjah, where Pakistan is one of the participants, has been characterized as the most un sporting step

mation. New Delhi's ban on the cricket team has damaged the process of understanding; it may prove to be counter-productive since people by and large are determined to understand each other.

A very few will dispute that New Delhi is justified in telling Islamabad to abjure violence and stop promoting cross-border terrorism. For that reason, the government has been successful in isolating Islamabad in the world. There is appreciation for

the same time say that it is ready to begin talks "at any place and at any time." Talks with Islamabad do not necessarily mean that New Delhi has accepted what the military junta does or its raison d'etre. All that it means is that India is determined to find a peaceful solution to the problems outstanding between the two countries, Kashmir included.

There is yet another reason why the process of conciliation must begin. It is apparent that the military

for a dialogue. Once again, Advani has aborted the visit. He has used the argument that the Hurriyat will play the role of a mediator even when it has clarified that its purpose was only to talk to the militants not to export violence from Pakistan.

Even if it is presumed that the Hurriyat has such an ambition, how does it matter when New Delhi does not recognise it as a mediator? No proposal or formula, which goes beyond consolidating the ceasefire,

of drift has only aggravated the situation. The government's announcement that it will hold talks with different groups is rather late in the day. This process should have started long ago. It would be difficult to do so when some Hurriyat leaders are trying to catch the attention of the people in the valley in the name of Islam. Some Hurriyat leaders may insist on visiting Pakistan before holding talks with the government.

A common ground should be found through non-officials before initiating the round of talks. Is the government clear on what it wants to convey during the talks? There will have to be some concrete proposals. Deputy Planning Commission Chairman KC Pant is not the best of persons to represent the government. He has no contact with the Kashmiri leaders. Even otherwise, he is a hardliner.

In any case, time is of the essence. The sooner the talks begin the better it will be because there is gloom all over the SAARC countries. No economic or any worthwhile progress in the region is possible without normalcy between India and Pakistan. True, Pakistan is still backing the militants. But there is a lot of confusion at Islamabad itself. Some should have been dealt with in a routine manner.

By this time, the Hurriyat team would have returned from Pakistan. Kashmir, which is in the midst of mindless killings, might have attained a pause in violence. The type of aggression spreading in the valley has scared even the pro-Azadi elements. They find themselves helpless and irrelevant in the scenario that has acquired a fundamentalist edge. New Delhi's policy

## BETWEEN THE LINES

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that New Delhi could have taken. Even the hardcore in India have come to feel that the field of sports has been politicized. The opposition by Sports Minister Uma Bharati, known for her salfronisation, is understandable but not that of Vajpayee. This goes against the image he has given in Pakistan, where people believe that he rises above the BJP ideology. The decision suggests that he, too, wilted under pressure.

The ban may adversely affect the people-to-people contact, which Vajpayee has praised and which New Delhi has encouraged from behind the scenes. It has taken five to six years for the intelligentsia on both sides to arrange visits of persons from different fields to each other's country to break open the wall of suspicion and biased infor-

India's stand that the Pervez Musharraf military junta, the architect of military operation at Kargil, could not be taken seriously when it comes to peace.

But in international affairs, as in governance, there comes a time when the law of diminishing returns comes into operation. Nations begin to wonder whether the quarantine has outlived its utility and whether the punishment has not gone far too long. New Delhi should also realise that no relationship can remain divided into black and white indefinitely. A grey area has to be developed to enable both black and white to mingle with each other. India has driven the point home. The world has seen it as a victim and has stood by it. Pakistan too has probably learnt a lesson that it cannot indulge in violence and, at

junta is responsible for most of the ills prevailing in Pakistan. It is also true that fundamentalism is drenching out every drop of liberal and democratic values from Pakistan's body. But how are people to blame? They did not opt for military rulers, who have walked in on their sweet will. A democratic country like India should help people in Pakistan retrieve freedom. But New Delhi's attitude seems to push them further into the shadows in which they have been forced to live.

There is the same flouting of Vajpayee's wishes when it comes to Kashmir. Even before declaring a unilateral ceasefire in the state, he was in favour of the All-Hurriyat Conference going to Pakistan and talking to militants to persuade them to stop cross-border violence. He wanted peaceful environment

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

### We want to come back

We came to the United States for higher education with every intention to return to our homeland. But now as we have finished our studies, we are unable to fulfil our intention due to political unrest prevailing in the country. What is happening in Bangladesh? Don't the politicians realise that they are ruining our nation? By their violent political tactics, they are destroying the backbone of our booming economy. Don't they understand that due to political imbalance, foreign investors are discouraged to invest in our country? I really feel ashamed that I have voted for them with the hope of acquiring some change in the country. We have our parents, friends, relatives back in Bangladesh and we want to come back. But, when we think of coming back we are discouraged by everyone. We have acquired foreign degrees and now we want to apply it for the development of our nation. Why are the politicians creating hindrance to our coming back?

I request the learned and sensible people of Bangladesh to raise their voice to stop this political annoyance and create a healthy environment for us and for our future generation.

Naushin Farzana Amin  
California, USA

### BTV 'objective' news

The Information Minister told the Jatiya Sangsad that BTV always telecasts 'objective' news and does not "believe in cheap popularity" like the private channels. In this regard, he referred to the private

channel, ETV (April 10).

However except the Information Minister, we all know how objective BTV news is! In this connection we remember the Information Minister's initiative to improve BTV news a few months back. It was after this initiative, BTV started to telecast news scoops and reports prepared by its reporters, though its quality may have been questionable.

As for ETV news, even the ruling party MP Sharif Khasruzzaman lauded the quality of its news. The ETV newsmakers understand well what the viewers want to know. That is why their half an hour news is more attractive than the 'objective' BTV news.

Ayesha Begum  
Dhaka Cantonment

### Kindness and sympathy yield rich returns

A woman who has the qualities which could be referred to as the 'Four S'—Sympathy, Sincerity, Sensitivity and Simplicity, is looked upon with much reverence. And if a woman becomes a Prime Minister, she must also have knowledge, wisdom and farsightedness.

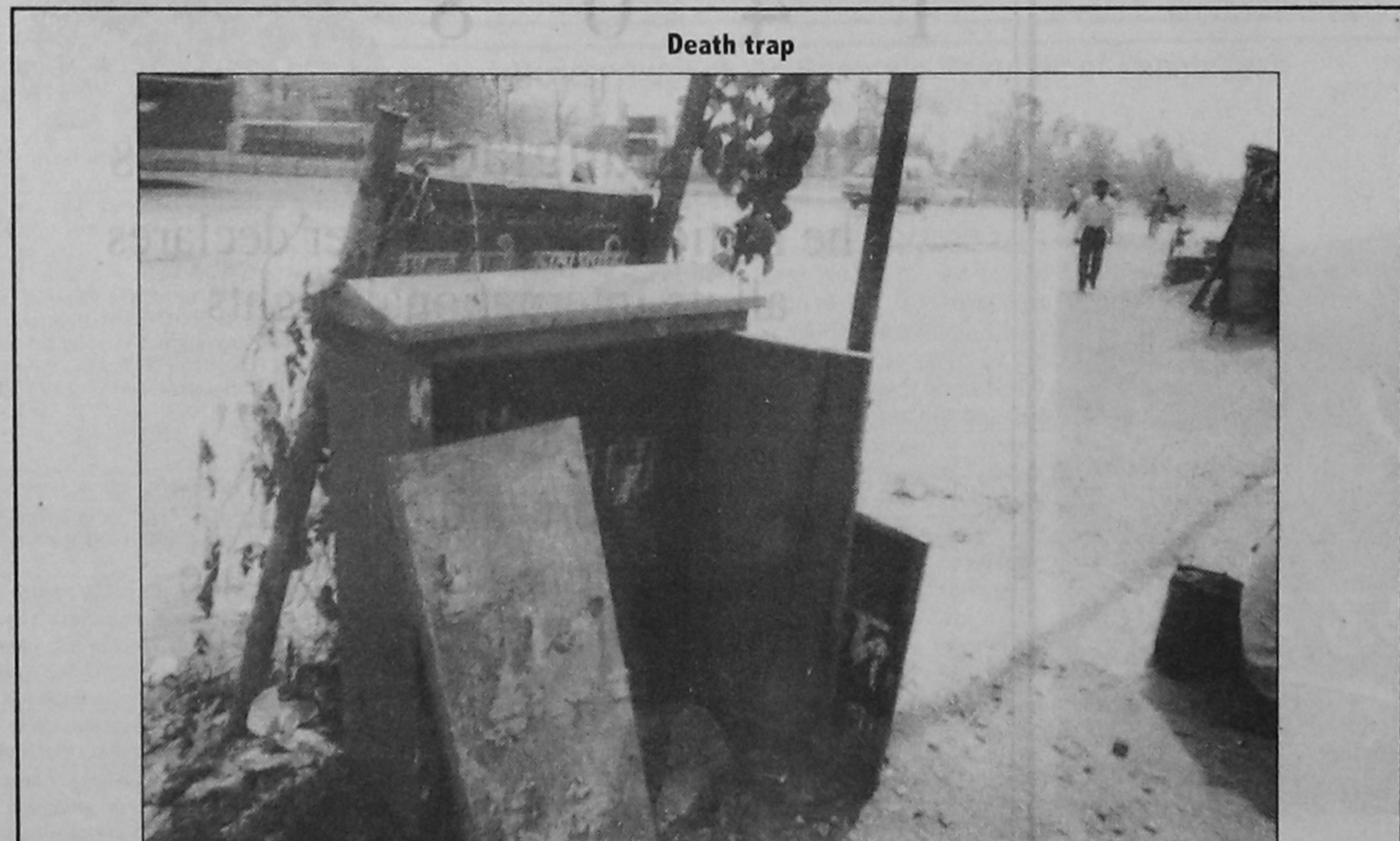
But does our Prime Minister have all these qualities? We are not lucky in this field as many a times we have to wince hearing her remarks about the Opposition Leader and sometimes her revengeful instructions to her party members to deal with the opposition political parties.

These are not befitting a Prime Minister and we hope that Sheikh Hasina will realise it and uphold the sanctity of her office.

NurJahan  
Chittagong

## PHOTOGRAPH

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.



Death trap

THIS PHOTOGRAPH HAS BEEN SENT BY AZIZ AMIRUL FROM UTTARA. WE WOULD LIKE MORE CONTRIBUTIONS FROM OUR READERS. PLEASE SEND US YOUR CONTRIBUTIONS!

This electricity box for street lights at Uttara has been gaping at us with its live wires for a long time. At any moment the high voltage could cause a serious accident, especially during the stormy and rainy seasons. What are the authorities waiting for? A tragedy to strike, before they take action?

### Aclarion call

In his famous address at Gettysburg, Abraham Lincoln defined democracy in the following way, "that the government of the people, for the people, by the people shall not perish". According to the internationally accepted definition of democracy, every citizen, possesses the right to express his/her opinion in public and to protest or demonstrate through peaceful means. These are the rights which are preserved in the Constitution not only of Bangladesh, but of all democratic countries. In our country, a number of government have come and gone but the fate of common people have not changed.

In this context, I vehemently oppose, condemn and denounce the ongoing autocratic policy of the present government. Killers and hoodlums loyal to the ruling party are being sheltered and are roaming freely, and no action taken against them. The police force is being used as party cadres by the ruling regime besides mass politicisation of the administration. Repressive laws are being enacted to foil peoples' movement. All these bear eloquent testimony to the autocratic character of the ruling regime. I, thereby give a clarion call to people of all walks of life to protest against this malpractice of the government and establish democracy in the country.

A Citizen  
Dhaka

### 'Black-Gold' of Cox's Bazar

In 1971, I found a huge deposit of valuable minerals in Cox's Bazar. The news was published in almost

all national dailies, announced over TV and broadcast over radio. During the last 20 years, I have left no stone unturned for the utilisation of the valuable minerals which I call "Black-Gold" either in the public or in the private sector. But due to some unknown reasons, all my efforts were nipped in the bud and the government abandoned all promised plans and programme for the utilisation of the valuable minerals. At times, the Ministry of Energy and Mineral Resources said that the minerals were commercially viable and at times they said that the minerals were commercially feasible but I insisted again and again and still claim that the utilisation of the valuable minerals found in Cox's Bazar which are Zircon, Rutile, Elmenite, Garnet, Magnetite and Monazite is commercially viable and profitable in the public sector and in the private sector. Due to red tapism, negligence and inefficiency of the authorities concerned tons of valuable minerals have already been lost in the sea.

To my surprise after an interval of over 30 years, the Ministry of Energy and Mineral Resources has signed an agreement with Australian International Titanium Resource Pvt Ltd for exploration, collection and development of the valuable minerals Cox's Bazar.

I am very much against the signing of this agreement with a foreign company and the policy of our government to hand over our valuable minerals. Why cannot we utilise our minerals locally? Do we have to depend on foreigners in every respect?

O.H. Kabir  
Wari, Dhaka