

Right to breathe clean air

How long do we have to wait?

WHAT do you say about a government that cannot ensure the citizens' right to breathe clean air? Worthless. What, however, do you say about a government that having failed to ensure clean air does not care about doing anything to improve it? Criminally negligent. We are forced to come to that conclusion after seeing how the ministry of environment has handled the US\$ 4.75 million Air Quality Monitoring Project (AQMP). It is for several years now that we have known that the quality of air in Dhaka city has deteriorated to such an extent that it is a serious health hazard. Yet nothing has been done to improve the situation.

The lead content in our city's air is now the highest in the world. The percentage of other pollutants is also among the highest. Yet the ministry of environment has paid no attention to protect the rights of the citizens to breathe clean air. It was after years of newspaper reports that import of leaded fuel stopped. However, high degree of carbon and sulphur continues to pollute our air. The issue of phasing out the two-stroke engine auto-rickshaws remains in a limbo. Yes, some modification was made in the duty structure to make import of such rickshaws more expensive but the measure fell far short of what was needed to make any significant impact in reducing air pollution in the city. Meanwhile 65,000 auto-rickshaws continue to belch the hazardous fume in city air while plying its streets unabated.

We heard a lot about special environmental courts to try and punish polluting vehicles in the city. Absolutely nothing came of it even though parliament had passed the necessary laws early last year. Will the ministry please answer? The case of AQMP is another example of the environment ministry's utter callousness about the whole issue. The project envisaged setting up of 20 stations in the capital to monitor air quality. Just because it involved a lucrative contract many eyes fell on it and the whole thing got stuck in our bureaucratic web. The project was launched last December which followed nearly a year of delay. But now five months have elapsed and yet no recruitment of staff has been made to implement this nearly US\$5 million project. Does our government relapse the damage that it has caused to the public by this delay? Each additional day of breathing the polluted air caused more people to contract disease. Talk to any paediatricians in the city and they will tell you that asthma and bronchial problems are on a quick rise and children are the biggest and severest victims of this polluted air.

We hold the environment ministry responsible for criminal negligence of public health concerns. We cannot understand why even after the World Bank had provided us with necessary funds our government did not move to remove the threats to our health and give us clean air to breathe?

Turmoil in the Far East



ARSHAD-UZ ZAMAN

SOME important states in the Far East are in a state of turmoil. It is to be hoped that it will be possible to settle the problems before they go out of hand. Indonesia is a major country of East Asia. After the downfall of long reigning Suharto through people's power, a relatively smooth transition took place and Abdul Wahid was elected President. This became possible because the second largest vote getter Sukarnoputri, the daughter of the hero of Indonesian independence struggle Ahmed Sukarno, lent her powerful support to Abdul Wahid. Abdul Wahid had a narrow majority, was physically frail with very poor eyesight and needed the help of an aide to walk.

His rule has been marred by rising street protests for his alleged corruption. The National Assembly has turned against him and has voted twice asking him to step

down. President Abdul Wahid has refused to take the parliamentarians' demand seriously and continues to fight for his political existence. How long this situation will continue is anybody's guess. Against the vote in the parliament President Wahid has made a show of force by rallying thousands of supporters in the streets. In other words a perfectly volatile situation has developed.

Another East Asian country facing political difficulties is the Philippines. The US stake in the Philippines has considerably diminished since the closure of US naval base there. Situation in the Philippines resembles that of Indonesia. In the Philippines President Ferdinand Marcos ruled for decades and his regime was tainted with massive corruption. Senator Aquino mounted a massive challenge to the

of corruption are galore. The latest twist in the situation is currently there is a lady President-elect Arroyo. Her immediate predecessor President Joseph Estrada is in jail charged with massive corruption. The supporters of Estrada have taken to the streets in Manila and elsewhere and daily clashes are reported between the forces of law and order and those supporting Estrada. The situation is extremely

and has developed along the Russian model. This situation has continued for half a century. The western media has branded North Korea as reclusive and content to stay in her corner. In other words, North Korea had been completely isolated.

A few months ago an astonishing event took place in Pyongyang, the capital of North Korea. President Kim Dae Jung of South Korea paid an official visit to Pyongyang. President

Clinton, President George W Bush has made some pronouncements regarding the Korean peninsula which would tend to slow down the reunification process of the two Koreas. Yet as we have seen in Germany that nothing can stop people's determination to overcome obstacles. Indeed the reunification of Germany is one of the great events of our times.

If some important countries of East Asia are going through a period of turmoil, other major countries like China, India and Japan continue to project an image of stability. It is to be hoped that this situation will continue.

Meanwhile the US continues to adjust her relations with these countries and particularly with major countries like China, Japan and India. The US President had announced the new missile defence system, which seems to cause considerable concern throughout the world. Does it mean the end of the ballistic missile treaty of 1972 with the Soviet Union? In any case this latest move by President George W Bush raises numerous questions and needs to be dealt with separately.

With the turmoil in the Far East has now been added the new move by the US. Are we heading towards an unstable world? It is an interesting question to be debated.

THE HORIZON THIS WEEK

The US continues to adjust her relations with the East Asian countries and particularly with major countries like China, Japan and India. The US President had announced the new missile defence system, which seems to cause considerable concern throughout the world. With the turmoil in the Far East has now been added the new move by the US. Are we heading towards an unstable world? It is an interesting question to be debated.

Indonesia is the largest Muslim country with a population of around 200 million and an important member of the ASEAN (Association for South East Asian Nations). This large group of Asia has achieved notable successes in the economic field. Indonesia is a rich country with large natural resources. She is a large producer of gas and oil, has big resources in timber and many minerals. In spite of recent economic difficulties Indonesia is a fairly prosperous nation.

regime. He was assassinated at the Manila airport in the mid eighties by the goons of Marcos. Corazon Aquino, the widow of the slain leader picked up the challenge and Marcos had to flee the country. Corazon Aquino became the new President.

The fallout of the Marcos regime has not given much respite to his successors. Meanwhile Marcos has passed away and his high profile wife Mrs Imelda Marcos has fought and won elections, although stories

volatile to say the least. Like Indonesia the Philippines is an important member of ASEAN. It is not blessed with the kind of natural resources that Indonesia has. The Philippines economy depends heavily on remittances from her nationals working abroad.

The Korean peninsula was divided in the early fifties. South Korea has developed along the western model under the guidance of the United States. North Korea has been under communist influence

Kim Jung Il of North Korea personally received his South Korean counterpart and an amazing emotional reunion took place. All barriers suddenly collapsed between the two states and there was euphoric reunion of the two peoples. The United States, who had masterminded the partition of Korea could only watch in utter amazement. These were the last days of the Clinton administration of the US. No action was taken.

The successor of President

Sqabble over water



M.J. ZAHEDI

FEDERAL intervention was needed to break the inter-provincial deadlock (particularly between Punjab and Sindh) on how to share the water shortage. The daily 'The Nation' said it was a hardening of positions within the respective provincial bureaucracies.

Finally, the Chief Executive had to come in the picture and allocate the available water among the provinces. According to the latest arrangement, Sindh will draw 22,450 cusecs of water from May 1 as against 21,350 cusecs at present, which is three times more than Punjab's 8,350 cusecs. Additional water inflows are estimated to be 1,200 cusecs from May 1, all of which Sindh will get.

Of the presently available 32,000 cusecs (according to figures available on April 26, 2001), Sindh draws 18,000 cusecs, Punjab 5,000 cusecs and NWFP 2,500 cusecs. Sindh and Punjab share the remaining surplus

of 6,700 cusecs.

From this month water inflow is expected to increase from 32,000 to 33,400 cusecs. All the additional water has been allocated to Sindh, which would increase its quota to 22,500, including existing allocation of 18,000 cusecs plus 3,350 cusecs surplus water and all additional inflows from May. Punjab, showing goodwill gesture, unilaterally granted its 5,000 cusecs a day to Sindh during last two weeks. This

sent over to Sindh, irrespective of the quantity. Already the flow in Kabul and Indus rivers has increased to 62,000 cusecs. This would mean 57,000 cusecs to Sindh. As the situation improves during the next fortnight, Sindh's share would further increase. This, some think, is not right; they are of the opinion that each party should get share of the additional water available, only proportionately.

The argument for Sindh was that

100 billion. With the Indus going dry, fish have perished on a large scale depriving thousands of fishermen of the only means of livelihood they have. According to an estimate, about two million people have suffered economically due to the shortage of water.

What has caused this damage? Experts think that the construction of dams and barrage on the Indus river during the last 60 years or so have substantially reduced the flow

has been ascribed by some people to this phenomenon. It is not only that agriculture has been affected. On the other hand, as an after-effect of the deteriorating agricultural activity, trading activity has also declined, unemployment has increased bringing in the attending hardships for all sections of the people. The result is that protest marches have been brought out.

But the fact that Sindh has taken

the move will produce no more than a temporary effect of a limited nature. Despite the 1991 accord, the conflicting claims over water resources between provinces have remained unsettled. These have to be resolved through consensus rather than through diktat if the federation is not to be weakened. Punjab will be expected to play a vital role in evolving a permanent agreement satisfying everyone. A number of objections were raised from Sindh when the formula underlying the 1991 water accord was being devised. Many of these mad sense.

At the moment, there is still no agreement how future water shortages are to be shared. This merely creates seeds for future acrimony as in the words of 'The Nation', Punjab will never accept the present scheme as a precedent while it is to be accepted that Sindh will quote it in future. The paper, therefore, wondered why the federal government did not resolve the issue finally.

'The Nation' used the occasion to plead for a representative government in the country. It said in an editorial, 'The water crisis is a national, rather than an inter-provincial, problem, and has to be handled politically, by elected representatives, rather than administratively by a military government'.

LETTER FROM KARACHI

"The water crisis is a national, rather than an inter-provincial, problem, and has to be handled politically, by elected representatives, rather than administratively by a military government"

helped Sindh to draw 2,84,400 cusecs additional water during April, from the Indus arm.

It seems, however, that the latest scheme of distribution has satisfied neither Sindh nor Punjab. The latter thinks it has been unjust. Sindh is unhappy over the fact that police had taken action against protesters who demonstrated against the delay in announcing the scheme.

Anyhow the matter is now settled, at least for the time being. Punjab has been finally coaxed into surrendering its entire share except for 5,000 cusecs. It is to get this quantity for the next few weeks. All water excess of this quantity is to be

while drought had affected all provinces, the scale of devastation and public suffering in Sindh has no parallel. The shortage has left the province's agriculture-based economy on the verge of collapse. Expectedly, almost all political parties have been protesting the water shortage in Sindh.

Reports in the national Press say that about 1.4 million acres of agricultural land in Guddu Barrage and 3.2 million acres in Sukkur Barrage have been badly damaged. Orchards all over the province and mangrove forests in lower Sindh have dried up. The losses in Thatta and Badin districts are estimated to be over Rs

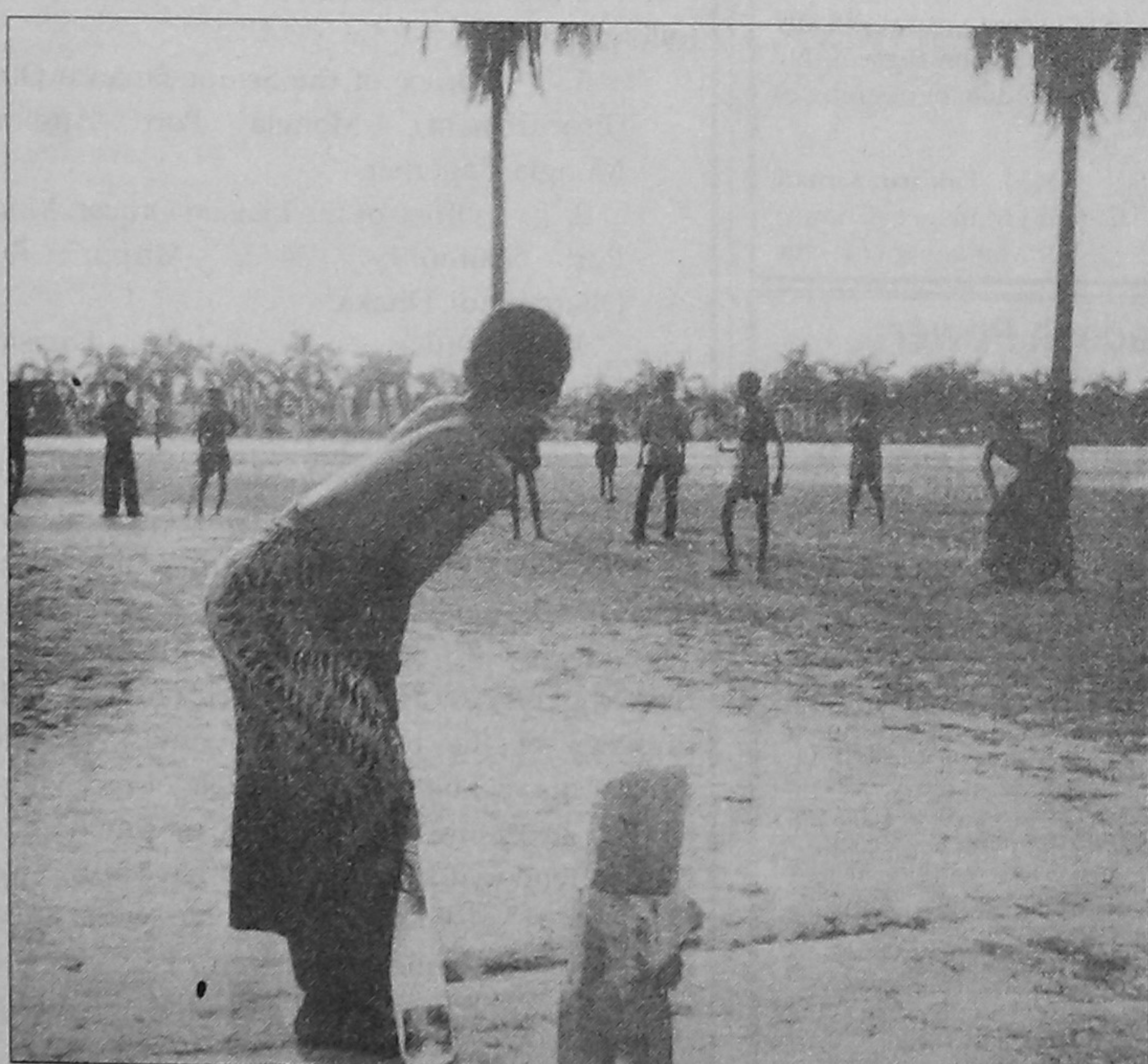
of sweet river water into sea resulting in serious ecological imbalance. This year the flow has been almost nothing, leading to the critical stage. This, knowledgeable people say, explains why the 1991 accord had recognized the need for minimum escapages to the sea below Kotri. Social effects of the disaster currently being faced by Sindh are visible all over the province. Virtually every section of society is feeling the crunch, the cultivators, both rich and poor, see their fields turning into wasteland without being able to do anything. In certain areas even drinking water has become scarce. The rising graph of suicides in Sindh

full brunt of the drought does not bode well for the federation. Moreover, there have been everybody-for-himself types of statements by bureaucratic circles and the farming lobby in Punjab, these have made the situation even worse. There have been reports that some elements in Punjab have sought to wriggle out of the 1991 agreement on the inter-provincial agreement on water by invoking a controversial decision taken in 1994 in an inter-ministerial meeting that had no constitutional authority. Many in Sindh did not see the 1991 agreement as fair, but it had at least a constitutional backing. It has also been pointed out that

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

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.



Positioning for a promising future

THIS PHOTOGRAPH HAS BEEN CONTRIBUTED BY FREELANCE PHOTOGRAPHER TAREQ HADI, DHAKA

These youngsters are no Sachin Tendulkar or Shane Warne. But who knows, if given the chance and proper training, they won't turn out to be star cricketers and enhance the image of the country? But hoping for such a bright future is difficult for them as these juvenile youth had to start earning their bread from the early party of their life. Where is the time to play like normal kids when feeding themselves always remains their top priority? Can't we do something for our deprived young generation?

To the 'True Indian'

Thank you for publishing the letter written by a 'True Indian'. The views expressed by this person are not a case in isolation. Most educated Indians carry similar views about us. I was in New Delhi when the historic Babri Mosque was razed to the ground at the instigation of Sangh Parivar whose illustrious leader Mr L. K. Advani led the operation from the front.

During my stay I could take a privileged look at New Delhi's society but I did not find any Indian Hindu that I interacted with to have condemned the act. Many of them felt satisfied that Hindutva was emerging as the bonding force. I could see how an enlightened society was sliding to become a fundamentalists' society carrying disdain for the Muslims and nurturing acrimony towards those neighbours that did not want to hitch their cart with the Indian bandwagon.

Often, while talking to me, these enlightened Indians voiced their regret for 'creating' Bangladesh. Many even failed to exercise restraint when they were told that India only helped Bangladeshi freedom fighters to hasten their victory against the Pakistani occupation forces and that not without enormous gains like plundering materials worth several thousand crores of taka from a battle torn Bangladesh.

A broad majority of Indians confided to me that they have found a vast market for their qualitatively inferior products, in Bangladesh. Although Indians wear a holier than thou facade while negotiating trade deals with us, they actually do not like us to be equal partners and many of them would opt to dominate our economy. Succinctly, they want to eat their cake and have it too.

This infamous 'True India' should be cautioned not pelt stones

at others while being in the glass palace himself. He thinks we are poor. Has he not seen millions of rural Indians that are even barely clad? The proportion of the population living below the marginal level of nutrition is favourable towards Bangladeshis when compared with Indians.

If we take a stock of Indian promises made to us it will reveal they detracted most often, at times blatantly. We believe in peaceful co-existence with all countries and without malice or ulterior motive. It is with this end in view that we pursue a policy of friendship with all the neighbours. If this is taken as our weakness, then let it be known to all Indians that this time our brave BDR jawans have shown a glimpse of our intention and we shall not fail to repeat our bravado to dispel any aggressive design in future as well.

Ummei Khan
Gulshan

Identify culprits

I think we can take it as axiomatic that no Bangladeshi, whatever their political or religious convictions, would stoop on their own initiative to commit so heinous a crime as to explode a bomb at a Pahela Bahishak festival. So who are the culprits? The obvious first suspects have to be the Pakistani and Indian intelligence agencies (ISI and RAW) that are reputed to have been behind bomb blasts in each other's countries. Is it possible that these agencies have decided to export this horrible practice to our shores?

There may be a way to find out. It seems that each and every bomb possesses a distinct 'signature' which enables one to identify its perpetrators. Accordingly all the Bangladesh government has to do is to hire some foreign forensic experts who are aware of the characteristics of the RAW and ISI bomb makers and try to analyse the data available in Bangladesh. As there have, a been

a series of bombs in Bangladesh, forming part of a co-ordinated campaign, there should be enough of a body of data to enable us to know with some degree of certainty who has dared to soil our country in this fashion, and to deal with it appropriately.

Rafiqullah Bhuiyan
Magh Bazar, Dhaka.

A devastating bomb explosion turned the Pahela Baishakh function at Ramna Baramul into a carnage. This inhuman incident snatched away 10 valuable lives. It is a matter of extreme regret and sorrow. Failure to find out the culprits who were behind this heart-rending incident is another shocking story for the nation. We are busy in expressing deep shock. But, mere lip-service is not enough. We should come forward unitedly to resist these satanic forces.

Liaquat Ali
AB Hall, JU

A Question

Is there anybody to please make me understand what is meant by saying "the 30 percent equity each and 10 percent carried over interest" in the last PSC (Production Sharing Contract) for block 1 published on April 11?

Mohammad Forekan Alom
Dhaka

Appointment of ECs

I've read your valuable comments and counsel on the appointment of two Election Commissioners. I partly agree with you. On the other hand, I'd like to ask why should the ruling party consult the oppositions? Is the opposition a real side with whom the ruling party should hold a formal discussion on the above subject? Who are the real

opposition? Why don't they act responsibly?

The opposition has lost credibility to hold talks either with the ruling party or with the Honorable President who has appointed the two ECs. It's a great shame that the opposition members use official benefits yet make peoples' lives harder day by day. I firmly believe that 'politics' has become 'politics' for the opposition in Bangladesh.

Gopal Sengupta
Montreal, Canada

Inertia

I wish to point out that being an old reader of your esteemed daily, I am saddened to notice that of late The Daily Star has gone down in giving news. I had to go to other English dailies to get the news especially with regard to the recent border conflict with India. There are always a lot of spelling and typographical errors. Sitting back on your laurels, are you?

M. Ahmad
Uttara, Dhaka

Neutrality of ETV

I do not watch BTV news because of its partiality towards the government and presentation of false and fabricated information. I started watching ETV news considering it as neutral. But unfortunately, the closer we are getting to the elections, the more it is getting away from neutrality. Now it hardly demonstrates the opinion of the opposition but clearly explains the allegations made by the government against the opposition. The channel has not stopped telecast of the English news of BTV, the government mouthpiece enriched with false information.

The channel also airs programmes which try to establish Awami

League as a pro-independent force. But how can we consider a political party as pro-independent, when they are nurturing corruption, protecting killers and rapists, rewarding smugglers, bank defaulter and hijackers?

The ETV authority should realise that if they do not change their pro-Awami League attitude, people will reject the channel as they have rejected BTV.

Dr. Mahboob Hossain
The University of Asia Pacific, Dhaka

Opposition's tactics

I object vehemently to the irresponsible and callous utterances by the Leader of the Opposition, Khaleda Zia. What is she trying to do by calling repeated strikes to oust the constitutionally elected government of Awami League? Has she succeeded in removing the Awami League by her March 30th deadline? Does she remember that she held a mockery of an election in February of the year she was booted out of power when killers of Bangabandhu were allowed to contest the polls?

The Prime Minister had decided to relinquish power in April but the irresponsible utterances of the Leader of the Opposition have hurt Awami League's pride and angered the top Awami League brass. Now there is no way she can stop the Awami League from completing its electoral mandate. What does she intend to do now? Team up with Islamic fundamentalists and self-proclaimed assassins and propagate the carnage in learning centers, mosques and the streets of Dhaka, Chittagong, Khulna, Barisal and other metro areas? Promote medieval barbarism of the Dark Ages inside mosques? Turn Bangladesh into an Afghanistan or a Bosnia?

Javad
USA