to determine in the ultimate analy-

The trade-off of corruption

charges between predecessor and

successor governments has been

typical of many a Third World coun-

try -- in Latin America and nearer

home in South Asia. They usually

drag on without the results

the people would have liked to

see attained in the end, for the good



### Proposed fuel and utility price raises

Is it the inefficiency cost we are having to pay?

NLY in September last year, when the then AL government announced an upward revision of fuel prices across the board, BNP called a dawnto-dusk hartal in protest. The BNP in a reversal of role is now using the same argument which the AL government at that time had employed: why impel the government to lose a couple of thousand taka in 'subsidy' payments (to whom really, the consumers or the corporations)?

As for the petrol or octane prices, we have seen a double-standard at play with shameful regularity. When the international prices of crude or refined oil go up these are domestically hiked citing the compulsion factor. But this should carry an underlying commitment to reduce the domestic price if the international price went down. Yet this has never happened so far. Now the regional prices are being pegged on to, whatever that means!

For all we know, the huge pilferage in the gas and power sectors keep the losses of the corporations dealing with these sectors mounting all the time. So, the pertinent question is: are not the costs of inefficiency, corruption and wastage being passed on to the already overburdened shoulders of the consumers?

So, we urge the government to spell out the economic relationale behind their proposed steep raises in the fuel and utility prices. For, as we see it, these are bound to have a chain effect on production and services sectors of the economy. Unless we have concrete and convincing reasons for it we shall be opposed to burdening the consumers any more than they already are.

#### Save Ashulia now

Decentralised economic planning can reduce pressure on Dhaka

INALLY the conscious citizens of Dhaka have protested the systematic takeover of Ashulia, the stretch of land and water at the fag-end of the city which provides it with some breathing space. A few stolen hours at Ashulia re-energizes those who visit. But as it happens in any city experiencing a growth sprawl, every piece of land is up for grabs. And since there are no laws to protect the environment, open spaces are always vulnerable to greedy hands, individual and corporate. The land for house building has greater value than the quality of air we swallow, it seems.

The movement for the protection and preservation of Ashulia is actually an illustration of a test-case in rising needs of a city growing at a break-neck speed. We can't deny that there is a need for more building space as Dhaka simply can't afford to house its citizens within the municipal boundaries. And Dhaka doesn't have enough space to house them anyway. It's full of land demand with very little supply. Many people looking for homes and households inside Dhaka have already bought land in different landfills and that shows there is a part of the citizenry which is willing to discard the need for open spaces and plunge into building activities sacrificing such spaces.

But this crowding is the result of the failure to initiate economic decentralisation. That has pulled millions to

## **Corruption cases shouldn't be a road-block to parliamentary** politics and national development

Azad nor is it about whether he visited them on the Eid Day or the day after. The underlying significance of it is the government's throwing of a line of communication to the opposition right across the avalanche of negative signals otherwise beamed to them thus far. Although not in the same class, Sadeg Hossain Khoka MP, a dynamic BNP leader and minister in the present cabinet, had gone across to the home of AL leader and city mayor Hanif, garlanded his son

in the Second Great War context. Not by way of any wholesale rejection of electoral results as happened in our case There are a couple of other

incidents that have sent some positive vibes across the political or law and order spheres. Speaking of the missing rule of law, state minister for education Ehsanul Haq Milan caught up with a tender manipulator in the act using BNP label to cover officials. He promptly handed him over to the police personally setting

cases lodged against former prime minister Sheikh Hasina, exministers and government officials (43 more graft cases are said to be on the anvil); withdrawal of special security for Sheikh Hasina and her sibling Sheikh Rehana; cancellaof public holidays on tion Bangabandhu's birth and death anniversaries, 'police excesses' in dealing with AL leaders and work-

We read it as a positive trait of

the opposition that despite their

ers. etc.

Only a matter of time

The opposition's participation in parliament is only a matter of time with the former speaker and present deputy opposition leader Abdul Hamid strongly hinting lately at "joining the JS as part of a political strategy (read fighting corruption charges on a second front), no matter whether the government approaches us or not".

of democratic choice of leadership The opposition Awami League is and economic uplift of the couirate over a plethora of corruption ntrv

cases having been filed against

former prime minister Sheikh

Hasina and some of her senior

colleagues by the present govern-

ment. But do these drop as bomb-

shells upon them given the fact that

they themselves, during their

incumbency, took Begum Zia and

some of her colleagues to the court

on corruption charges? The only

difference could be in the timing

between the two episodes. AL

The two points

From the above follow two points which I would like to stress here with all the clarity I am capable of first, the cases can go on as the ruling party and the opposition settled down to playing their respective constitutional roles. In India, Bofors and Tehelka continued to dominate the media scenario but with the charges against sitting prime minister, cabinet ministers and high officials gone into at length and with great integrity of purpose as they carried out their duties unimpaired.

Here crops up the rationale for having independent anti-corruption commission in the likeness of what the USA and India have to divest the fight against corruption of any political influence.

Finally, unlike in the loan default cases whose pursuit had taken up a good chunk of the banks' time, the corruption cases should not be allowed to distract our attention from the pressing development agenda.

All this is said absolutely without S H Imam is Associate Editor of The Daily Star.

Here crops up the rationale for having independent anti-corruption commission in the likeness of what the USA and India have to divest the fight against corruption of any political influence... Unlike in the loan default cases whose pursuit had taken up a good chunk of the banks' time, the corruption cases should not be allowed to distract our attention from the pressing development agenda.

JUST ANOTHER VIEW

In the face of what the opposition Syed Khokan, Khoka's vanguished perceives to be a 'demolition drive' political rival in the last general being conducted against them by election, and eaten sweets together in a forget-and-forgive embrace. It the ruling party, the President's Eid drew appreciative glances as an visit to acting AL chief may not have example of good cross-party been guite the confidence-builder it behaviour. But unfortunately it has was intended to be. In fact, deputy not since been replicated elseleader of the opposition advocate where, not at least on a visible Abdul Hamid sounded rather acerscale.

bic saving. "The president made Magnanimity and defiance the visit (to acting AL chief) just to In victory, Sadeq Hossain proved iustify his visit to the Prime Minister 'magnanimous' but in defeat. The point here is not whether the according to the Churchillian apho-President Badruddoza Chowdhury rism, the vanguished is entitled to 'defiance' with the difference broke the protocol to pay those visits to Prime Minister Khaleda Zia though that such defiance was meant to be against Nazi Germany or opposition leader Abdus Samad

a precedent thereby. In another story, police officials rounded up two of their peers accused of spiriting away looted money after an identification parade conducted in a city police station pointed the finger unmistakably at them. Admittedly, these are exceptional flashes of good work, but all the same time they point to a certain rejection of the my-clan-right-or-wrong gloating attitude that has taken hold of the entire society.

Sense of persecution

What has, however, instilled a sense of persecution in the opposi-

#### government side urging them to join the parliament. Even Abdus Samad Azad after his post-Eid meeting with the president stated to newsmen that the latter did not convey any formal proposal to him seeking the opposition's presence at the parliamentary proceedings. The opposition has already made its willingness known about taking part in the parliamentary standing committee meetings. They are

The UN was involved in the Pales-

recital of government's 'oppressive

measures' they keep saying that no

formal proposal has come from the

starting the cases later in their tenure while the BNP has processed these earlier in the day. ready to send the names of their

any prejudice to the relative merits of the cases which are for the courts

entity

Palestine -- still a non-

It is a pity that Palestine has not yet been able to establish its identity as an independent state for some reason or other. And that's the

greatest failure on the part of the Palestinian Arabs which had reduced them to their present ianoble position. While the Jews declared a part of Palestine controlled by them as an independent state (Israel), immediately following the relinquishment by Great Britain of their mandate over Palestine on 14 May 1948, and it became a fullfledged member of the UN in 1949 the Palestinian Arabs continued their just struggle against the Israeli government and today they stand

world Muslims, was retold and repeated when the organization recently met at an 'emergency session' in Doha to discuss the volatile situation in Palestine, with the mysterious absence of Saudi Arabia and Jordan; it produced nothing but a 'tame' resolution expressing a 'verbal support' to the Palestinian people. A mere 'mole hill' out of a mountain! So the poor Palestinians will

ence), representing over one billion

continue to be terrorised by Israeli forces as long as they continue their struggle for independence. Just as Israel claims 'right to self defence' provided by UN, in its action to end Palestinian terrorists', similarly UN has granted 'right to struggle' for independence to any suppressed people, adopting all means including armed struggle. But it all depends how one defines a thing and how you look at it. Those at the receiving end are always the victims. As your editorial, tilted, "As Palestine Burns" (DS 6.12.01), has rightly said: "... What is terrorism is defined by who defines. The killings Israel, including Shabra and

The West's 'spoilt child' were imbued with the inspiration of the gospel truth that they were the 'Chosen People of God' and they had been assured of their 'promised land' which ultimately they claim to

have come true. So the longsustained pains and pathos had left a deep scar on their national 'psyche' whose manifestation is reflected on the large scenario of bleeding and burning Palestine today.

Israeli PM Sharon has already declared that hitherto Arafat is a "history" and the Israeli forces would remain on Palestine territory as long as needed to restore 'law and order', of course of Israeli liking. Meanwhile, America had vetoed in the Security Council another resolution, second one within a couple of

adopted at the conference to the Partition-plan: A trap utter frustration of the pro-Arab for Palestinians? groups, providing the last laugh to Israel. So when an all-time protective umbrella hangs over the head of Israel it wouldn't be surprising at all that it would go to any length as it has been nakedly displaying in

#### **Balfour Declaration:** Seeds sown

But there is an interesting backaround to the creation of the state in 1948, cutting a piece of Palestine territory. In this interesting process of establishment of Israel, stands out an almost forgotten episode when the 'seeds' were sown as far back as 1917 to take shape after about three decades in 1948. In fact,

Palestine now.

ised land' for the Jews. The Arabs

tine question since 1947, till then the territory was under the administration of Great Britain under a mandate of the League of Nations, predecessor of UN. In 1948, the UN General Assembly endorsed a plan, prepared by UN Special Committee

on Palestine (UNSCP), for the portion of the Palestine territory, with a population then of two million of which the Palestine Muslims constituted about 66 per cent, the rest being the ethnic Jewish community. This was obviously the first stage of implementing Balfour Declaration of 1917, providing for the ultimate creation of the 'prom-

So the poor Palestinians will continue to be terrorised by Israeli forces as long as they continue their struggle for independence. But just as Israel claims 'right to self defence', provided by UN, in its action to end 'Palestinian terrorists', similarly UN has granted 'right to struggle' for independence to any suppressed people, adopting all means including armed struggle... It all depends how one defines a thing and looks at it.

#### representatives to these bodies at tion ranks is the following catalogue the time of their formation of developments: twelve corruption

S H IMAM

chief Abdus Samad Azad and

helped stir the placid waters of

Dhaka's rather currently one-sided

political world. That he did so after

having met the Prime Minister

made it an extra bit more meaning

ful than perhaps would have been

the case otherwise

Rather acerbic

RESIDENT Badruddoza

Chowdhury paid an Eid visit

to acting Awami League

AMM SHAHABUDDIN

after Eid-ul-Fitr."

HE Jewish state of Israel, literally fathered and highly pampered by the West, particularly by the Anglo-American 'guardianship', now seems to be out of control and in frenzied thirst for blood of the Palestinian people. At least, their unchallenged activities, bringing down hell on the innocent people of Palestine and its leader Yasser Arafat, through reckless destruction and death, using both ground and air force, prove that. The Palestinians, including President Arafat, are now the 'hostages' in the hands of Israel which is now running its tanks into nooks and corners of Palestine 'to hunt down' the 'terrorists' which Arafat, according to

the city, as Dhaka is the only place where one can survive through one form of economic activity or another. The growth of Dhaka is in effect a great example of failed national planning. Had there been even growth many cities would have sprung up instead of one. It's almost like the autocracy of one city over all.

Till there are more growth zones in Bangladesh, Dhaka will continue to bloat and that will continue to put pressure on the many eco-necessary zones of the area. But nothing can happen in isolation and saving Ashulia will mean taking steps in many sectors including management of urbanization and decentralized economic planning.

But right now the Save Ashulia movement has already done a major job by pointing out the dangers and resisting the moves to grab vital land space. Now others must follow. Civil society has become energised and has in the last few years taken a number of positions to protect the city. This means that the government may be forced to become more accountable on land grabbing and other issues. And that's how all good news begins.

smoke out' and 'hunt down' Osama Bin Laden, the mastermind of all troubles. Israeli forces have practically 'holed up' Arafat in his own house.

them, failed to do as they wanted

Israel has declared "war against

terrorists" in its own way, perhaps

aping its 'godfather', now giving

finishing touches in Afghanistan. In

one respect, Israel has gone ahead

of Anglo-American coalition who

have not been able to trace out or

him to do

Incidentally, it may be recalled here that the Jewish people now living in an independent state. established on the soil of Palestine in 1948, have a long history, both ancient and modern, which tells the sad story of their ordeals that they had to pass through to reach their dreamland, to pose not only as a regional power' but also as a 'miniworld power'. The Jews who are considered, Biblically speaking, as the "Children of Abraham" had had worst days when they had lived as 'slaves' under the ruthless Pharaos in Egypt. Later they were rescued from this hellish life by their new leader and Prophet Moses who took them to the other side of the river Nile. Then they wondered for some forty years like nomads, until they

months, condemning Israeli 'atrocities' in the Palestinian territories. The earlier one vetoed by America, was on the deployment of UN observers to monitor and maintain peace between Israelis and Palestinians. Such over-stepping by America to 'save' Israel from criticism or condemnation by the UN Security Council undoubtedly bolster the mischievous motives of the 'spoilt child'.

The same blunt attitude was shown by America in September last year at the UN conference on global racism held in Durban, South Africa, when the pro-Arab groups lobbied hard for the adoption of a resolution identifying Israel as a 'racist' regime. America, along with Israel, withdrew from the conference and boycotted its proceedings as a protest. Ultimately, a much watered-down resolution was

the 'homeland' 'promised' to Jews was activated by their British (read Christian) 'godfather', the British Foreign Secretary Arther James Balfour, through the historic 'Balfour Declaration' when he had written a letter to the most powerful leader of then British Jewish community, Lord Rothschild, promising to help establish a separate Jewish 'homeland' in lieu of all-out Jewish support to the allies efforts in the World War I. Balfour, in his letter, categorically said that the British government "viewed with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national

homeland for the Jewish people and will use their best endeavours to facilitate the achievement of this object". So the seeds were sown very sophistically with a firm British commitment. And there was no proverbial slip between the cup and

perhaps misread the whole conception of the partition plan and they rejected the plan outright, while the Jewish agency, which was literally waiting in the aisle, seized the golden opportunity and declared the ndependent Jewish State of Israel. Since then Palestinian people, under the leadership of Arafat have been carrying on their struggle against Israel

However, UN continued its efforts since then to bring about peace and for a peaceful settlement of the issue, producing two famous resolutions, No. 242 of 22 November 1967 and No 338 of 22 October of 1973 and mounting a host of other resolutions, and declarations, peacemissions and peace-keeping forces but all were in vain. The deadly 'disease' has been spreading endangering peace and stability of the whole Mid-east region.

where they were three decades ago! Palestine today officially regarded as an 'Authority' and its 'President' as Chairman of the 'Palestine Authority', only enjoys an 'observer's' status with the UN, perhaps by courtesy, just as so many international NGOs do. In fact, the Palestinians have been buckled down as a result of a grand pro-Israeli conspiracy, leaving them at the mercy of Israeli fire-power. Israel's 'war on terrorism' against Palestinians seems to have reached its climax now.

When Palestine burns...

When Rome was burning Nero was fiddling', they say. So when Palestine is burning, for that matter, any part of Muslim world is burning, the so-called world Muslim leaders are not only fiddling but also fuddling. The sad and sordid story of the OIC (Organization of Islamic Confer-

EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR

Shatila (refugee) camps is not a terrorist act, but the Palestinians attacks are". In agitation like this, the most frustrated person, Arafat had to cry out saying that President Bush was "blindly supporting" Israeli atrocities on Palestine. Again, I am tempted to quote, in this context, from the same DS editorial which, inter alia, said: "While a few weeks back the US, which needed Arab support in the anti-Afghan coalition, had seemed a moderating force... It certainly looks different now having endorsed the (Israeli) attacks on Palestine ... The US can hardly do but cheer Israel on as it itself is just finishing up the Afghan campaign."

Is anybody listening? The big question is: How long the Palestinians will keep their head, when their neck is already on the line?

AMM Shahabuddin is a retired UN official

## TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE

#### Unnecessary imports?

It seems that the level of wilful distortion has gone down so low that even basic questions of everyday life are being thrown into quandary.

The NBR has recently slapped extra (regulatory) duty on 30 items saying those were "unnecessary imports". Very surprisingly indeed this list includes such vital and essential items as powder milk, paper, toilet soap, shoes, sanitary wares. etc.

How can the NBR try to redefine the necessities of life? This is wilful distortion by the administrative body to create a pretext for even further taxation to fill the government coffer, which is being depleted everyday by the money-squandering political nexus of this poor country.

#### A distressed observer Chittagong

#### "After the last Rickshaw dies"

It was such a moving article by Afsan Chowdhury who poignantly depicted the whole thinking of the powers that be. It's indeed a shame - whenever we have a problem with traffic management, the only thing we do is to bar rickshawalas on this

and that road. Some roads are made VIP roads, some are given such other interesting names.

We are such a shameless lot (I mean the ruling class only -- no matter who rules). One of my friends calls us Bingos -- I go even further suggesting that we are all "Fakinnir Putt" (children of beggars). Am I being very rude? Is there anyone amongst us who can claim the status of a VIP without really having an jota of the knowledge of how a VIP should behave? This is more so of the paper generals who are so much blinded by their colourful attire

and the perks they enjoy that they start thinking that it is a nation of idiots being rescued by them. What bigger idiots can you have? Mahboob Zaman

Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates

#### Aktel-a mobile telephone organisa-

tion I would like to join Rumi Ahmed in saying that the Mobile Telephone charges are not only exorbitant being almost seven times higher than T&T charges but BTTB has indirectly granted monopoly to such one or two firms

I think the government should examine such high rates and decide

maximum ceiling of charges to a reasonable level. The government should grant permission to at least half-a-dozen firms to bring in competitive rates. But it will be better if the government introduces cellular phones under BTTB to increase its please?

BTTB can swim better if its hands and feet are untied and earn more revenue

**Reshma Zafar** Nasirabad Housing Society, Chittagong

revenue

vants."

#### 'Bangladesh: Love it or Leave it!"

Esam Sohail's opinion (December 25), which guestions some of the Maulana Obaidul Hag's utterances. has impressed me a great deal. However, his terming the Maulana as a "government servant" is fundamentally a flawed description. Bangladesh has been suffering from a large number of problems due to the reason that it has govern-

ment servants, but no "public ser-So long as the concept of government servant will persist in the minds of those who are supposed to serve the public. Bandladesh and its people would continue to suffer at the hands of the government's

arrogant servants. Mr Esam traced the Baishakhi celebrations to a three thousand-year history. But I believe that the Bengali New Year was introduced by a Mogul Emperor hence it could not be that ancient. Could someone comment on it Mohammad Asghar Simi

California. Dhaka

#### Take this!

The reaction (December 24) of both Mr Barua and "Bhatnaturally" compels me to respond. Mr Bhatnaturally needlessly

takes umbrage at my perceived 'sarcasm' regarding India's insincere 'victimhood' complex about the 'terrorism" it supposedly suffers. Does Bhatnaturally proudly condone or champion the savage statesanctioned terrorism that his country unceasingly perpetrates against innocent Kashmiri civilians rebelling against Indian rule?

Unsurprisingly, yet quite ludicrously. Bhat cites the Washington Post's (a bastion of America's rightwing views) sympathetic nod to India's predicament.

Mr Bhat, again this unabashed lust for the West's approval and endorsement of anything your country does have never been starker than it is today. Your leaders

when the U.S. puts a Kashmiri militant group on its "terrorist" hitlist; and sulk or whine when you feel America cossets Pakistan at your expense. Do truly self-respecting Indians admire their leaders for abasing themselves and their country, when offering unconditional (yet entirely unsolicited) support to the U.S. campaign against Afghanistan?

Consider how the Indian public avidly voiced their support for the mindless U.S. war against innocent Afghans and the Taliban. Maybe some of that shameless zeal would be duly dimmed if these same deadly bombing raids were someday rained down on your own Indian cities and impoverished citizens.

Mr Bhat, in a Freudian slip, refers to "pip squeak" neighbours "jealous of" and "obsessed with" India's "successes". This is precisely the arrogant and condescending attitude that makes India, like Israel, a country that is so justifiably despised by all its neighbours. My temperate critique of India's duplicity and self-righteousness rankles Bhat and Barua into erroneously branding it as "India-bashing" Instead, both should read the weekly commentaries in Indian

magazines like India Today, Sunday

etc to know what resurgent "Islambashing" sounds and feels like I reckon an Islam-bashing

agenda would have consequences for India, no less severe than that for a U.S.-led West. India's presently contorted political posturing is not a sign of any responsible "restraint", but of a certain cowardice born of myriad intellectual, political and moral failures. Witness how your governing elite push and shove to trample on your received national history and attempt to recast it along

politically revisionist lines. In short, it's not "envy", but sheer "contempt" for India's odious policies and attitudes that compel the criticisms that you obviously resent. To Mr. Barua I say this: Hard as it

is to confront, the reality is that Kargil was an outright military debacle for India. I'll concede though, that conversely it was an admirable diplomatic coup in 'damage control' that India pulled off in the end.

Further, if you think my previous comments make me a "dreamer" needing to "wake up", consider how many would regard your truly risible contentions about Kashmir being "inseparable" from India, and Pakistan being obliterated from the global map should you fight a war with them. The bit about my becom-

ing a "civilised man" learning to "live in civilised society" is so beyond the pale as to obviate a sane riposte. Quite obviously, it hurts these two Indians to have India bloodied (though I pulled many punches) by a "pip-squeak" Bangladeshi daring to call their country's bluff. Saiiad Husain Dhaka

Purdah is compulsory?

This is in response to a concerned citizen's letter "Women in purdah". He wrote this letter in response to Mr. Ziaul Huda's letter, which sug gested that women should be in purdah.

In his letter, the concerned citizen has highlighted very important facts. He has severely condemned acid throwing on females, acceptance of bribes, cheating in exams, harassing witnesses and victims of crimes etc. I, being a humble citizen, do admire his intentions and thoughts in improving our society's standard. Like him, I also believe that by refraining ourselves from such misdeeds, we can have a society of peace and security. But, at the same time. I would like to point out something else as well. The concerned citizen has regarded purdah to be

women's personal choice. Well, I do not know whether he likes the system or not. but 'purdah' is not a woman's personal choice. It has been made compulsory for women by the One and Only Allah. Allah has ordered the females to be in purdah. And one cannot afford to take this as a personal choice or optional.

Sameer Ahmed Khan Mojlish, on e-mai

#### "India's woes"

This refers to the letters countering that of Mr. Sajjad Husain's regarding India's woes.

Without agreeing with Mr Husain should point out that even the Economist this week has an article about India pointing out how wars against terrorism draw people's attention away from domestic issues

In India's case corruption (the Kargil coffin issue), looming sectarian strife (the Babri Mosque/ Ram Temple issue), draconian laws in the quise of security that curtail civil liberties (POTO) and imminent electoral defeat for the ruling coalition in upcoming state elections (Uttar Pradesh).

MA. on e-mail

# and fellow Indians comically exult