Armed Forces and DCC elections

For a while on 25th April morning I was standing in the street near a voting centre watching army jawans and policemen impounding motorcycles, stopping cars and commandeering public transport.

It occurred to me that the vast majority of our people do not realise that the army and police are the servants of our

It behoves me to remind all that you should never answer a question or query from a jawan or a policeman unless he first does you the courtesy of giving you his salutations. Although a small thing it is important for us to know and appreciate ours right and privileges as citizens of this country. Even though those rights are honoured more in the breach than the practice.

So the lesson is first he will give his salaam and then ask his question. Do not tolerate anything less. By the way, for what bizarre reason did the army requested civilian vehicles on the voting day? Don't they already have enough of

"Rajuk wracks residential plots"

The article published on April 19 by Morshed Ali Khan was a

timely call and very thoughtful elucidation reflecting the voice of

the sufferers. Any sensible person with positive foresighted-

ness will definitely be concerned for such an unplanned con-

version of residential areas; which is likely to create enormous

has now reached Uttara, which was planned as ideal (?) resi-

dential area and model town. But unplanned commerciali-

sation of this area has created frustration among its habitants

who with a lot of expectations and hope dreamt for an ideal and

Thanks to a vested quarter both in Rajuk and the business

community Uttara is becoming another flotsam and jetsam of

Dhaka. In Uttara despite its large designated commercial area

with kitchen markets, shopping malls as per original plan,

Rajuk is recently permitting commercial structures under the

cover of non-residential use on all its roads 60 feet or more. It is

indeed a violation of civic right and betrayal of promise that

Raiuk offered to the plot owners initially. This type of law break-

ing will rather aggravate the situation of Dhaka. When we

wanted to build house it was clearly said that because of the

close proximity of the airport we couldn't have foundation more

than 4-storied. Now all around us many 6-storied buildings are

coming up with different commercial approaches loosing its

complete identity of a peaceful, calm so-called residential

model area. Who is responsible for the overall degradation and

I was delighted to read the report in your daily. The report was

so relevant at the moment when a jungle of high rise buildings

are creeping up in posh residential areas in the absence of

proper development code for high-rise structures. To make the

situation worse, as the report mentioned, residential plots

located on wide roads in thickly populated areas are given

permission to turn their plots into non-residential character as

has been done in many places in Dhaka. Besides, location of

schools and hospitals, especially in Dhanmondi residential

area has added to the woes of local residents generating enor-

In the first place a residential area should not be designed

without commercial and public facilities, like shopping centres,

schools, mosques, health facilities, adequate parking facilities

etc. While designing, free movement of vehicular traffic without

hindering the main stream traffic should be kept in mind and in

no case there should be any change of land use of the Master

Plan. If there were any genuine flaws in the preparation of the

Master Plan, though this kind of amendment should not be

tures, according to the international practice. Otherwise in no

time, this high-rise development will become a vertical slum.

mous noise and pollution not to mention the traffic jam.

With the commercialisation of Dhanmnodi and Gulshan it

urban problem leading to rapid degradation of the city.

their own?

Bastiat Dhaka

had the uncomfortable experience on April 24 night explaining my clients in New York why we did not go for production on April 25, did not reply to any emails and basically were out of touch with the rest of the civilised world from Thursday through Sunday.

She wanted me to explain why we have to shut down for city elections, since they just got a new mayor as well in NY and life went on as usual. Then I had to break to her that she can't call me on my mobile either. At this juncture she made the perfectly valid point that if we are so insecure in Dhaka, she'd better start worrying about her orders.

Our embarrassment of a government has enforced, in effect, a hartal in Dhaka and Chittagong today. And for what? So that BNP sponsored santrashis can be "elected" to run our cities

To the hundreds of crores of taka that will be gorged by the new ward commissioners as they feed off the trough, we should add the lost production of April 25.

One more reason, as if more were necessary, to avoid Sonar Bangladesh like the plague.

MA Dhaka

As usual the Home Minister is totally unable to guarantee the security at the polling centres during the DCC elections.

The fact that he does not trust his own police to enforce the law shows just how much control he has over the law enforcement agencies. The rest of the cabinet and the PM obviously agree with his judgement that the police cannot be trusted to keep peace during the elections.

Rather than trying to motivate and equip the police and other civilian law enforcement agencies to do their duty, we go for that



Protecting voters or candidates?

"Where are our leaders leading us to"

I refer to your wonderful commentary "Where are our leaders leading us to?". I read it with great interest and could not but fully endorse your view. I talked to a few persons and I was happy to see that every one shares the same view.

However we all agreed that the media, (all of them) should be objective and impartial. One thing which is noticeable that the court matters, does not get any importance in any of the newspapers. While news on crimes is reported on the first pages, the court verdict is rarely highlighted.

A disillusioned & concerned citizen Bangladesh

This is in reply to the letter by Z Rahman and K R Zaman (April 12) lauding the roles of Lee Kuan Yew and Mahathir Mohammed and

Unhappy co-existence

peaceful residential area.

this type of law breaking?

Ahmed Imran

Dhaka

suggesting that we need people like

Singapore is a city-state, not a country. As a result, although tried many times, no country to my knowledge has been able to copy them. Certain principles of Singapore can and should be duplicated. For instance civil servants are paid salaries comparable to the private sector pay scale. This is not unique to the Singapore model but is simply common sense. Other things like low taxes and a free port are also attractive. A city-state can possibly be run in an authoritarian manner simply because the needs and aspirations of the people are so similar. But a country, especially one like Bangladesh, where people have vastly different aspirations cannot. There are many aspects of the Singapore model that are unattractive, namely the muzzle on the press and the limits on personal liberty. Again, these may be possible in a city but not for a country. The

only thing we have in common with Singapore is that both AL and BNP hope to pass on the country to their sons and not thanks to their ability (unlike Singapore) but by their

birthriaht. Malaysia is a far more indisputably bad model. The collapse of the Tiger economies of Thailand, Korea etc. just proved the fallacy of the "Asian Model" of crony capitalism and state interference in the market. Do you really want a country where the President can throw his opponent in jail, beat him up and try him for sodomy? On a different note Mahathir's anti-western and antidemocratic outlook is unhealthy. It might have been fashionable when Nasser of Egypt was trying to unite the Arabs, but these days it just looks dated. He forgets that it was the British, the only western country to have won a guerrilla war in Asia, who saved his country from commu-

What we need is not some Caudillo type strongman. That is a common misperception. What we need is democracy, the rule of law, respect of property and liberty. Not another wannabe Ershad.

Dhaka

Corruption charges against the Shipping Minister

I was eagerly following the developments on the corruption charges brought against the Shipping Minister and read what the Minister has to say in his press conference. However, I do not understand the Minister's argument.

It's a serious allegation by both parties. Why would the Danish government conspire or plot against Bangladesh and bring charges against a Bangladeshi minister? DANIDA or Danish government is a committed European donor and has been helping Bangladesh since its independence. Why suddenly, they have to plot and bring charges

against Bangladesh. If their case is so poor as to what our minister wants us to believe. then why does their officials want the intervention of Justice Minister or Primer Minister? If it is the cost saving and smart use of Foreign dollars, then Bangladesh Government should show similar stand on all foreign aid projects.

We know how inefficiently donor's money are wasted by our ministers. There are lots of instances of what our ministers did in the past, in stead of using the foreign aid in the priority areas of poverty alleviation and other similar priority sectors, the funds were used for the political gains by the minis-

We know how India and China, value their foreign aids. While they treat foreign grants as Gold and make best use of it. Bangladeshi administration on the other hand, treat it as their shopping money. I can recall from my involvement in many UN funded projects, how ministers and government machinery misused aids for meeting their own self-interests.

As we all know in the recent Bangladesh Development Forum (BDF) in Paris, all donors insisted that Bangladesh should put their act together to improve the law and order, corruption situation in the country otherwise no aid will be given to the country. In the recent UN summit in Mexico, donors committed 10 times more funds than before to uplift the fate of poor nations, but they wanted more value for their money. If the BNP government is serious about its election pledges, if they are to stay for the long haul, they should act now and reveal the bottom of it.

We demand the immediate resignation of the minister and a thorough investigation of the allega-

Nur-ul Alam Port Melbourne, Australia

I have noticed that a few people are campaigning in favour of shutting down ETV. I have a couple of questions for them:

So far I know 'Baitul Muquarram Mosque' was built illegally to stop the north-south road towards further north in order to protect the properties of the then some influential

persons. Did we demolish this mosque after its construction?

Sobhan Bagh mosque has been built on the middle of the Mirpur Road. Should we demolish that? Shaheed Faruk's (Martyr of '69 Movement) grave is on the middle of

the Mouchak crossing. Are we going to demolish that grave to clear traffic The central Shaheed Minar was

built on a place, which was not

Pleasures of Pahela Baishakh

My heartiest congratulations

to the 130 million people of

Bangladesh for spontane-

ously celebrating and wel-

coming the Bangla

Nabobarsha 1409. By doing

so, we on the one hand out

initially allocated for that. (During

Liberation War Pakistani Military

demolished it with logic, according

to them, that the then government

did not authorise its construction).

Should we demolish our Shaheed

I can cite numerous such exam-

ples where we will notice that there

were some irregularities during the

creation, but later its good aspect

and intention has subsided and

overcame its irregularity. Courts,

Government, Parliament, Justice

System all these are for the people

ETV is for the general people. It has

occupied the heart of Bangladesh. If

we ask for a consensus definitely it

will come in favour of the ETV's

should honour public demand even

if there were some irregularities and

give their verdict in favour of ETV.

A request to BELA

Bangladesh Environmental Law-

yers Association (BELA) had done

good job by taking matters to High

Court wherever there has been

infringement on environmental laws

and standards. BELA's recent

achievement in getting a High Court

order issued on government to

strictly implement the law against

use of hydraulic horns by vehicles

For last few years Dhaka City has

been inundated with advertisement

billboards and hoarding signs on

most streets which had its natural

beauty lined with trees. Even resi-

dential areas like Gulshan and

Dhanmandi has not been spared.

Traffic islands and parks are now

covered up by high billboards

destroying the greenery, which

presented a God's gift to our land.

environment and Nature's gift.

This is a serious destruction of

It is obvious that some unscrupu-

lous officials of Dhaka City Corpora-

tion are rampantly leasing out space

to advertisers and gradually

destroying the greenery along the

streets of the city. It may not be out

of place to mention that a few years

ago similar situation arose in New

Delhi and the government there

took drastic action pulling down all

billboards and hoarding not only on

environmental grounds but it was

also discovered that the billboards

divert the attention of vehicle drivers

causing serious accidents. Adver-

tisements are only allowed in some

designated street roundabouts.

Only last month the mayor of

Kolkata also took similar action

pulling down all illegally set up

I would like to take this opportu-

nity to request BELA to take up the

matter with relevant authority and

save the city from environmental

degradation being caused by the

advertisers and their agents.

Ziauddin Ahmed

billboards.

has been widely welcomed.

M. Hossain, on e-mail

The authorities concerned

existence.

Dhaka

Celebrating Pahela Baishakh

"MiGs and helicopters"

write in response to the Letter "MiGs and Helicopters" by Mr Biggles (April 21), Whilst I agree with most of his points, I have a strong disagreement with his comment "To be honest, we have no need for the Army, Air Force or Navy.

rightly rejected the fatwa

given by the Khatib of Baitul

Mukarram Mosque Moulana

Obaidul Huq and some

Islamic clergymen against

Bangla Nabobarsha. And on

the other hand we foiled the

evil attempt of some so-called

secular people including the

intellectuals and cultural

activists to subvert the cele-

The more a person attacks

our heritage and culture the

more we will become united

and stand like a rock to safe-

guard and protect our beloved

Bangla heritage and culture

from our known and unknown

enemies both at home and

It is a complete and utter waste of

Yes, up until 1991, this was

mostly true but Bangladesh is now

the single most largest contributor

of manpower in the form of troops to

UN Peacekeeping operations

around the world. So, while I agree

that Coast Guard and Border

Defence should be increased

simply to inhibit smugglers. I do not

think that a large regular military

New Eskaton Rd, Dhaka

brations.

Iqbal Ahmed

scarce resources"

The one of the largest source of income for the nation second only to the Garments Sector and while FEER reports, irrespective of how incorrect, tarnish the coun-

should be portrayed as a deterrent

against India; Burma/Myanmar

On the other hand, the Military's

UN Peacekeeping operations result

perhaps but not India.

try's image; the military has succeeded in promoting the nation's image abroad. So much so, that I would like to see the numbers in the military increase to such an extent that a full ranking serving General together with a Naval Vice-Admiral and an Air Force Air Marshall be appointed. I am, therefore, a strong advo-

cate for increasing numbers in the Army, Navy and Air Force simply to increase their ability to send troops to serve as the UN's police force.

On a final note, I should stress how important it is for the military's press office to bombard the International Media of its operations abroad. This will, without a doubt increase the publicity of the nation's image plus afford an opportunity to procure more sophisticated weapons for use in UN Peacekeeping operations, without criticism from the larger nations for purchasing weapons that would be considered as being 'unnecessary' for such a poor nation.

Abdul M. Ismail Liverpool, England, UK

Mr. Biggles in his letter tried to remind us of India's superiority over Bangladesh in economic development and suggested that we didn't need armed forces at all. He went on saying that how Bombay, in his opinion, was superior to other developed cities.

First of all, economic prosperity cannot be the deciding factor for a country to raise an army to defend it. Had it been the case, only America. Japan and other European countries would have armies not China, Pakistan, India, Sri Lanka and

Mr Biggles claimed China to be a threat to India. This is nonsense. Chinese military development is aimed at emulating America. India is nothing but a pesky irritant for China. India has no external threat from any of its neighbour. The writer can argue that Pakistan pose a substantial threat to India. But Pakistan's military doesn't have the capability or the will to invade India. It's a purely defensive force to safeguard Pakistan's frontier.

Though the economic comparison between India and other nations in the world is beyond the scope of this discussion, the writer made a painstaking effort to do that in his letter. I think it calls for a brief analysis. India has a GDP of \$2 trillion (PPP), per capita income of \$2200(PPP), export earning of \$43 billion and external debt of \$100 billion. Now without going for first world nations let's compare India with a country like Malaysia. Malaysia, for its 20 million people, has a GDP per capita income of \$10,300 and export earning of \$100 billion. From this we can conclude, Indians living standard is nowhere near the Malaysians. Malaysia is not even a first world nation, it's just a mid-level income country. And India needs at least 30 years to reach even to Malaysian level.

Regarding Bombay being superior to other first world cities, well, the city budget for New York is \$42 billion, which is more than the half of India's total national budget. So. either the writer hasn't visited a first world city yet or he had no clue what he was talking about when he compared Bombay with first world

The writer found it needless for Bangladesh to have an armed force. Well, definitely India is a bigger country with a more powerful army and a larger economic base but that doesn't necessarily mean that we keep our frontiers wide open so that any body can come in and plunder us. I would strongly suggest

that the writer take a careful look at the outcome of Vietnam War in 60's and a China-Vietnam War in 70's. Both China and America were bigger and much more powerful than Vietnam but got their face rearranged during the war against Vietnam.

Maruf New Orleans, USA

The right kind of studio for US visa

I would like to draw the attention of the US Embassy in Dhaka regarding their visa photographs. Photos of some particular specification are required for a US visa. The instruction letter and form sent by the Embassy mentions a list of Dhaka studios which are 'able to provide type of photographs needed for US visa or passport application', as these particular studios 'have done good work in the past'. The form also mentions that the applicant 'may use any studio he/she wishes and is not obliged to use the listed

However the list of Dhaka studios and the certificate given curtail the liberty of the applicant. An American visa seeker would not like to experiment, would not take chances with any studio not listed, say his mofussil town studio. As a result he needs to pays some extra hotel bills in Dhaka for a quality photograph. This also discriminates against the mofussil studios, many of which can provide if not better but at least quality photograph required for a US visa. It would not be difficult to enrich the list with the names and addresses of mofussil town studios. The Embassy may invite works of mofussil studios for examination and enlistment.

I hope the US Embassy would consider the matter and act accord-

D A Kabir Choudhury

Sowing THE SEEDS. Price of peace or war?

An open letter to U.N. Secretary General Kofi Annan

It has become easy to criticise Israel and the Jewish people in the present Middle East crisis. People, who have rarely encountered the Jews, now turn on Jews like rabid dogs because the Arabs promote a false image of Israeli recalcitrance in dealing with the Palestinians. Mr. Annan, you know this image is unfair because you have been dealing with all the countries involved in your capacity as U.N. Secretary General. You are fully aware that just 18 months ago the Israeli's offered Arafat everything the Palestinian asked for, including 97 per cent of the land they asked for and they were willing to throw in another 3 per cent for the guarantee of peace. But the Palestinians refused their offer, Arafat walked away from the table because he refused the Israeli condition that they remove language from the Palestinian charter that calls for the elimination of Israel and the Jews. Our media coverage is as pro-Palestinian as European press coverage, but that news was too big to suppress. Even so, the media managed to make a peace token from Israel look like more Palestinian perse-

I am intimately familiar with persecution. It was not so long ago that in my own country, being black made me an enticing target for any white with a taste for bullied blood. My own streets are somewhat safer now, but should I depart my corner of the world, now I risk getting attacked for being Jewish anywhere my passport will carry me.

Europeans host rallies of screaming protestors as they condemn a minority that (gathered together from the world over) comprises barely enough people to fill an average-size U.S. state. These are the same European countries that acquiesced, abetted or stood idle while the Nazis slaughtered their Jewish neighbours. And when the truth of the Holocaust was shown to the world, the grandparents of the present generation of anti-Semites professed ignorance, or beat their breasts claiming, "I didn't do anything." If Germans and Italians and French, and Danes and all these other 'innocent' European countries were not Nazi sympathisers, where did their grandchildren learn to hate Jews? There are hardly enough of them left in Europe on which to form an opinion. And where is the single European country with the memory and the conscience to declare that killing Jews for

being Jews is wrong! That exiling Jews from their homeland is wrong! That a moral high ground cannot rest on terrorist acts. That if we stand by and hope the Jews succumb to terrorism and tyranny, we strengthen tyrants and terrorists to our own expense. Where are the Africans and South Americans and Asians to defend the Jewish people who have never enslaved them, raped their natural resources, occupied their countries or made war on their citizens as so many other countries have? I have heard none of their voices asserting Israel's right to peaceful existence.

The world stands against the Jewish underdog and feels profoundly smug about being with the 'in crowd'. No matter how many countries imprison or slaughter their citizens, no matter how many countries oppress their women, exploit and terrorise their pheasants and opponents, steal from their treasuries, allow the export of drugs, and let their children starve, none of this is as important as demonising one of the teeniest nations on the face of the earth.

Because this despised people, because this brainlessly despised people has the temerity to want to exist instead of submitting to global pressure to commit national suicide.

In the American western the good guys are always outnumbered by the tyrannical mob, as towns people cower behind their windows. Good always triumphs. But it is only when the outcome is obvious, that the towns people are emboldened to fight with the decent men. However, once I'd seen the town's cowardice, no late stage heroics could change my impression. I know global politics are not a Hollywood western, but the morality at the heart of the western plot is applicable. Ride with the mob, hide with the town people, or stand up for justice, Mr. Annan. If you're lost look for me, I'm the natural black woman in the white cowboy hat out in front with the vastly outnumbered good guys and cowgirls.

Mo Fleming

Plainsboro, New Jersey, USA

An Indian view on Palestine

This is in reference to the Palestine leader Arafat asking help

from India and sending his diplomat to India. I am Meeta Sanyal from India. Like other Indians, I too value the warm relationship shared between India and Israel. India is not interested in Palestinian's affairs.

In fact I want to say that "some nations" don't want India to maintain relationship with Israel or vice versa. They are looking at every possible ways to break this relationship. Thus Palestinians are asking for India's help. I feel that India must refuse this offer straightaway. Indians are worried about India being dragged in this matter by Palestinians purposely to solve their own problems. These Muslim nations are taking advantage of soft thinking of India's policy. India like Israel has witnessed many attacks by militants and there has been many damage here. Recently there was the attack on Indian parliament. Where was the Palestinian leader Arafat? Why did he keep quiet?

I don't know what steps the Indian Government will take in this matter. But I wish from the heart that India and Israel to strengthen their friendship with the times.

Let's see what happens. But I am 100 per cent sure that majority of Indians want India to be with Israel.

Meeta Sanyal

taken as a regular practice, this should be done in consultation with the development authority consisting of highly trained professionals in the field. It is very heartening to note that Bangladesh government is going to make a study to assess the traffic volume on city

roads, the study should not stop at this point but to proceed to find a permanent solution to our ever-increasing traffic prob-Save ETV I request the authorities concerned to frame proper Building Code for high-rise structures with the attention of leaving adequate distance in between, proportionate to the height of struc-

Urban Planner