industrial production is slowing down, unemployment is rising

revenue collection has fallen short

of the target and to cap it all, the

prices of daily necessities of life are

rising. It is indeed a grim picture. In

order to justify his failure to stimu-

late the economy Saifur Rahman

even blamed the State, which was

according to him, the biggest terror-

ists organisation. The Prime Minis-

ter is reported to have reprimanded

him for his tactless comment but

given the performance and track

record of the police force his com-

ment was not fully unjustified. Prime

Minister Begum Zia does not seem

to realise that the image of a country

is the end result of the subjective

impression in people's mind that is

Repressions of political oppo-

ents and minorities, extortion by

BNP-Jamaat musclemen, murde

and rape have contributed to creat-

ing the image of the country as one

that is on the brink of anarchy. When

policemen are sent into the

formed on the basis of the actual

events.



# Challenges for the new President

### BNP appears to recognise the need for a neutral head of state

ET'S have no illusions about it. Being President in Bangladesh is a very tough job. What is a mere Constitutional position has been turned into a most political one. His test begins literally from the word go. If he has learnt anything from Baddruddoza's experience then the first thing he has to do after taking oath is to rush to BNP founder President Ziaur Rahman's mazar, if he wants to keep his job. But that is when his trouble begins. Does he then go to Bangabandhu's mazar? He is damned if he does, and damned if he does not. Most probably he will not, and from that moment he will become unacceptable to the Awami League. Then will come his address to the nation after taking oath. The text of all President's speeches are, by law, written by the ruling party of the day. If we go by what we had seen so far the draft will be an extremely partisan one. This will further alienate him from the opposition. Thus his trouble begins, and then continues to mount, for no fault of his own.

The biggest challenge before the new President will be to keep the ruling party happy and yet gain the confidence of the opposition. Normally this should not be too difficult. But in Bangladesh it is. Opposition's trust will not come easy but that is one goal he will have be focused on achieving. BNP must help him in this. There is nothing that the ruling party stands to gain by forcing the President to be distanced from the opposition. The best way to do this is to allow the President to write his own speech within an overall neutral and non-partisan context. Just recall how much embarrassment the BNP could have saved former President Shahabuddin if it did not draft his speech the way it did. Everybody lost as a result. Former President Shahabuddin was hurt, the AL looked vicious and silly and the BNP extremely narrow minded. Let us remember that before Sheikh Hasina's government amended it, the President had some autonomy in writing his speech. President Biswas enjoyed that autonomy. Can we not revert to that practice, especially as it was in vogue during the previous BNP government?

In choosing an academic and a formal non-party person (he is affiliated with BNP politics but never joined the party nor has he been at its forefront) BNP can be said to have moved away from its track record set up by its two previous nominations -- Presidents Abdur Rahman Biswas and Baddruddozza Chowdhury. This shift is a very good sign indeed. While it cannot compare with the non-partisan stature of the Awami League's choice of Justice Shahabuddin yet it is a very good choice. It clearly indicates that BNP has recognised the need and usefulness of a neutral President.

Having recognised that need, the BNP now must help the new President to function as such. As we suggest above, BNP should encourage him to do the maximum to gain opposition's trust. We are aware that our opposition party itself is focused on only finding faults with the ruling party and may not respond to the positive gesture that nominating a person like Prof lajuddin indicates. However that should not discourage the ruling party and its allies to encourage the President to not only be neutral but also to be seen to be neutral. Our last word is directed at the President himself. Please be aware that the authority of the office of the President is as much a legal as it is a moral, if not more. Moral authority comes from words and actions and not from statutes and pomp. Every action you take and every word you utter must be devoted to only one interest-- democracy, the country, and its people, and not for the party that has nominated you. You have an extraordinary example in former President Justice Shahabuddin. The way the AL treated him later should not discourage you. Just think of his place in people's heart and in history and feel encouraged. You have a fellow academician President in neighbouring India. Dr. Abdul Kalam is already putting his distinctive mark on the Presidency of India as the "People's President". Within the very limited scope of our Constitution you can play the most significant role of the 'ultimate unifier' in our otherwise fragmented politics. This role is much more necessary now than it ever was. Please try to play that role. We wish you godspeed.

# Concern about image is futile unless the actual situation improves

government. Instead of getting embarrassed by such barbaric conduct of her police force, the report dated 22 August said, Prime Minister is anxious to pro-Prime Minister Khaleda Zia mote her image. What about the has called upon the people wheat scandal or for that matter, the to speak up against those who are jet fuel scandal? No one but the damaging the image of the country. head of the government can make a She made the appeal when a delespecial allocation of Taka 100 crore aation of the Hindu community from for untimely procurement of wheat Chittagong called on her at her that was just not there with the office. Her insensitivity to Hindu sentiment was remarkable. Perfarmers! Attempts are afoot to pass the buck on to some MPs and haps she believed that the memory officials. The image of the governof the minority communities is so ment cannot be enhanced by such short that the gruesome murder of scandals that daily fill the newspa-Principal Gopal Krishna Muhari and the senior Hindu priest have been per pages forgotten. Have the Buddhists

SHAH A M S KIBRIA

forgotten the sensational murder of

the Buddhist monk in Raujan? In

fact, reports about the possible

connection of BNP leaders with the

murder stirred people's conscience

both at home and abroad. Ignoring

these crimes against the minorities,

the Prime Minister wants everybody

to suppress these reports in the

interest of projecting abroad a bright

image of the country. Begum Zia,

who is serving her second term as

prime minister, surely knows how

Blinded by power, the ruling alliance is unable to see the image that they have projected in the last ten months. Brutal repression of political opponents, persecution of the minorities, extortion by the

crown was the visible icon of brazen and cruel extortion of the business community by the ruling party musclemen. It attracted the unkind attention of the press because of the ostentatious and tasteless display of power. But it was not an isolated incident. The wealth that has been amassed by the BNP stalwarts within a short time will not remain a secret. They seem to forget that millions of eyes are watching them.

The BNP-Jamaat government would like to cover up the grim reality of the law and order situation in the country by rhetoric and clever public relations exercise. They will simply deceive themselves but the image will not change. Like ostriches, they are seeking to hide their heads under the sand and live who do not believe in Western liberal democracy and who are secretly working to promote a regime in Bangladesh similar to the Taliban regime in Afghanistan. For tactical reasons they are lying low but it is only a tactical pause. They are waiting for the American attention to be diverted elsewhere.

Let us review the incident of the Danish under-secretary's public statement, making allegations of corruption against the minister of shipping. Did the government's angry reaction save our image? Obviously Hansen did not observe protocol in making the allegation publicly: he should have respected the confidentiality of bilateral relations between two friendly governments. The Danish government might have conceded a protocol

prospects. Perhaps it did damage the Awami League. This year it is damaging whose image? It has damaged both the image of BNP and of Bangladesh. This will not only undermine our prestige abroad, it might adversely affect the prospects of foreign investment in Bangladesh. BNP leaders were too shortsighted last year and Awami League leaders will commit the same mistake now if they try to make political capital out of the TI report. All the political parties, in fact the entire nation a should seriously reflect on the reasons for such a dismal record and jointly declare war against corruption that is giving our nation such a bad name.

Corruption is not only damaging the image of the country, it is sapping the strength and vitality of the

3/1 Begum Zia will run after a mirage if she thinks that the image of her government can be artificially created, promoted and protected without any significant improvement in the objective conditions. Image is nothing but the reflection of the objective truth and if the truth is ugly the image is surely going to be ugly too.

images' are created and destroyed. armed cadres of the BNP and gang Was the image of her government rape of women have contributed to brightened when the police entered tarnishing the peaceful and demothe women's dormitory of the Dhaka cratic image of the country. Do the University at midnight and assaulted the girls by pulling many leaders and policy makers believer that the rape of Mohima and Fahima of them out of their beds? Who and their tragic suicide have faded ordered the police to enter the from public memory? The picture of women's dormitory at night? baby Nawsheen dead in her father's Thanks to the internet, the report lap is indelibly engraved in public has been seen by both foreigners memory. The common people have and expatriate Bengalees all over not forgotten the heartless comthe world. It is no secret that the vice ment by the Home Minister who chancellor and the proctor were consoled the bereaved family by made the scapegoats for scandal suggesting that he was helpless for which, in all fairness, the governbefore the thugs whose gun killed ment was responsible. In fact, no the baby. Many more incidents of responsible police officer would crime perpetrated by the BNPdare enter the women's dormitory in Jamaat musclemen under the the middle of the night unless the patronage and protection of the raid was authorised by the highest government are piling up in peoquarter of the government. The ble's collective memory. All this is government may think that by creating an unflattering image of the directing the students wrath against ruling alliance. Expressions of the vice chancellor they have 'manprime minister's concern or anger aged the crisis' successfully. Actuwill not erase the image that has ally, they are just kidding themalready been created by the misrule selves. The common people are not over the last 10 months. The signifiso dumb that they would not see cance of the golden crown on the through their clever public relations head of a ruling party MP was not game. The incident has exposed lost on the common people. The the real character of the repressive

in a make-believe world while the situation continues to deteriorate Take, for instance, the article by Bertil Lintner in the Far Eastern Economic Review about the growing threat from militant Islamic elements. The government sent a spirited protest. A number of our patriotic editors wrote highly emotional editorials excoriating Lintner. Did it cut any ice? Instead, the Wall Street Journal reprinted the same article reiterating the points made by Lintner. Instead of making the fuss, the government ought to have looked at itself in the mirror. With two ministers belonging to a party that has a record of participation in the blood bath of our valiant freedom fighters in 1971, the government's protest sounded rather hollow. We have seen how the Pakistani dictator Gen Musharraf is suppressing in his country these very militant Islamic groups. The Americans are lionising him for his stand. Instead of reacting angrily against Lintner it would have beer better to go into the issue in depth and come up with all the relevant facts on the militant fundamentalists

mistake but did they say that the accusation about corruption was a mistake? No. Thus the damage to the image of the country was done. Instead of the nervous and angry reaction, the government could order an impartial inquiry into the allegation. Regardless of the outcome of the inquiry, the image of the country would have improved if it were seen that the country was capable of an independent and impartial inquiry to combat corruption. On the allegation of corruption. the BNP-Jamaat government may try hard to console itself by pointing the finger at the previous Awam League government. They should realize that the foreigners do not look at the picture in such watertight time-frame. By throwing mud at the previous government they are blackening their own face too! The latest report of the Transparency International should convince Begum Zia and her cabinet colleagues that they laughed rather too early last year when the TI report on corruption was made public. They thought such a report would damage the Awami League's electoral

economy and slowing down our prowth and progress. Investors are rightened and discouraged by the prevailing environment of lawlessness in the country. As soon as the foundation stone is laid for a new factory premises the local ruling party bigwigs appear with their demand for 'contribution' to some 'worthy cause'. The guns are barely concealed. The latest episode of Pran' is fresh in our mind

the high priority being given to agro-based industries and want to give special incentives to such indusries. When the demand of the BNP leaders of Natore for 'contribution' was not met, the factory had to be shut down. Has the BNP-Jamaat government responded to the appeals by the management of 'Pran' for help? No. It seems the government 'respects' the local BNP leader's 'right' to extort money from Finance Minister in his usual style is blaming the bankers government officials foreign donors for the failure of the economy to move out of the grip of deep recession. Exports are falling,

Government leaders talk about

such enterprises. The the truth is ugly the image is surely going to be ugly too. businessmen and even

women's dormitory of the University at dead of night and women students are manhandled, do we project the image of a civilized liberal Muslim democratic country? Rampant corruption at the high level has added to the image of a corrupt nation. Unless she is able to stop the repression, persecution and lawlessness and put an end to official patronage of corruption, the image will neither change nor improve. Is the government trying to deal with the wheat scandal truthfully? If so, the government should tell us who authorized the allocation of 100 crores to purchase additional wheat at the fag end of the season. Blaming a few members of parlia-ment, or officials, will only deepen the suspicion that the real culprits are being protected. Begum Zia will run after a mirage if she thinks that the image of her government can be artificially created, promoted and protected without any significant improvement in the objective conditions. Image is nothing but the reflection of the objective truth and if

Shah AMS Kibria is former Finance Minister and currently an Awami League MP

# **Japan-North Korea relations** Suddenly the door looks wide open

MONZURUL HUQ writes from Tokyo

NLY a few days ago when the Japanese and North Korean foreign office officials ended their two-day talks in Pyongyang on August 26, the signs of slow progress in the process of normalization of diplomatic relations between East Asia's two remaining Cold War outposts was visible but obviously not to the extent to feel upbeat. The two sides agreed to make progress on resolving outanding issues within a year's time to pave the way for the formal dis cussion on establishing diplomatic ties between Japan and North Korea to be resumed. As a year's time in diplomatic jargon also carries the possibility of running beyond a calendar year, nobody thought the outcome of the highlevel meeting to be a breakthrough n bilateral relations between the two countries in true sense. As a result, everyone was taken with surprise when the Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi announced last Friday that he would pay a one-day visit to Pyongyang for talks with North Korean leader Kim Jong III on September 17 with the aim of drastically improving bilateral ties. Koizumi's visit to North Korea will be the first ever by a Japanese prime minister and would definitely carry great significance for peace and stability for the whole East

taken to North Korea by the agents same table to discuss the possibilities of forging a meaningful tie. On Japanese side the prime minister made his position clear when he met Friday night with senior members of his main ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP). According to media report he told his party leaders that

of Pyongyang operating in Japan during 1970s and early 1980s. As Japanese people want to know about the fate of those fellow citizens, Japan is demanding an explanation from North Korea on the whereabouts of those went missing. Earlier the North Korean side

such a situation both countries would be in a position to harvest the benefit. But demilitarizing a nation in full military alert is a difficult task that needs more than a single one-day summit to achieve any portion of success. Moreover, North Korea's too Japan must be expecting posieconomy is also partially dependent on production and export of military

for North Korea to fulfill her expecta-North Korean spy vessel, sank in the East China Sea during a battle with the Japanese coast guard last December. Such issues are also bound to find their way in bilateral discussion between the leaders of Japan and North Korea, out of which

he intended to stake his political life ive outcome. always outrightly rejected such on the visit to North Korea. It is hardware including missiles, and If the Japanese position concerning the sudden announcement of obvious that a series of failures in allegation of its involvement in how far Tokyo's willingness to numerous attempts to initiate reform abducting Japanese nationals and cooperate economically with the summit meeting is more or less even refused to discuss the issue at Pyongyang can compensate for any clear, North Korea's true intention in in country's economic and political fields have somehow turned the any bilateral discussion. But the loss in that account would be an agreeing to Koizumi's visit remains popular image of a prime minister tor issue on which the North Korean somehow vague. Pyongyang's

tion of overcoming isolation in the international community. But the person who played crucial behind the scene role in

materializing the summit meeting between the leaders of Japan and North Korea is the South Korean President Kim Dae Jung. The South Korean leader repeatedly advised his North Korean counterpart to adopt a more flexible stance in discussions with Japan and suggested four points on which the

Asian region. Many in Japan are already asking questions about the real motive behind such an initiative by the prime minister and what prompted the two sides to decide suddenly to bury the past rhetorical attacks aiming at each other and sit in the

How far the outcome of Koizumi's planned North Korea visit will help defuse tension in the region is yet to be assessed. But the fact is, a sudden blow of pleasant cool wind through the door that remained close for too long is already conveying the message that the extended period of Cold War in East Asia might at last going to see its own end too.

into a person incapable of handling situation considered to be critical in nature. May be he is now ready to get hold of the last opportunity in an attempt to reverse that public misunderstanding. But as politics is never a game consisting of that much fairly black and white moves, we can easily presume the statement of the Japanese prime minister to be partially true and there are other points that he might have intentionally avoided to disclose

On part of Japan there are series of issues that the leadership in Tokyo thinks vital to resolve before moving forward towards a more cordial relationship with Pyongyang. Top most in the list is the issue of abducted Japanese nationals. Tokyo claims that at least 11 Japanese nationals were kidnapped and eign ministry officials of two countries and the Red Cross negotiation that preceded the official talks, Pyongyang had taken an unusually soft standing on the issue and agreed to help Japan in locating the whereabouts of missing Japanese nationals. Koizumi obviously wants to grasp this golden opportunity to prove to his fellow countrymen that their personal safety and interest is what the prime minister is principally concerned about. Any breakthrough in the abduction issue is bound to raise Koizumi's popularity rating at a time when he desperately needs

that. Secondly, there are issues related to Japan's own economic concern. A demilitarized North Korea can turn into an ideal ground for Japanese investment and in

leadership is bound to keep a watchful eye. But at the same time, any commitment of North Korea's willingness to postpone the country's missile development programme should be considered a success on part of Tokyo as Japan considers herself to be the main target of Pyongyang's such initiative. The Japanese prime minister must have his own calculation on how far he can gain in this particular issue and this also might have prompted him to take the decision to visit Pyongyang.

There also remains the unsolved problem of North Korean mystery ships that from time to time intrude deep inside Japanese territory and provoke angry reactions from Tokyo. In one such incident an unidentified ship, thought to be a

willingness to resume talks on normalizing bilateral relations with Japan became evident through a series of moves taken by its leadership. In July it held foreign ministerial talks with Japan in Brunei, which was followed next month first by the Red Cross negotiation and then by high-level meeting of foreign ministry officials. North Korea is probably trying to mend ties with Japan quickly to ensure economic assistance and also to pave the way for official dialogue with the United States, which termed the regime in Pyongyang as an 'axis of evil'. Pyongyang's official dialogue with Washington is supposed to resume with the visit of a special US envoy to the country sometime towards the end of September. Hence, the outcome of Koizumi-Kim summit would be vital

North had to soften its position. The first was that, North Korea should settle the dispute over the abduction issue by claiming the acts to be those performed by radical elements. He also advised his Northern counterpart to seek real benefits rather than pressing for an apology and compensation from Tokyo for Japan's past colonial domination.

Taking into account of such realities, the breakthrough in Japan-North Korea relations can also be termed as an extension of President Kim's Sunshine Policy directed towards North Korea. His term to the office might be drawing near to its closure, but this last achievement comes as another sign of his sincere willingness to see peace returning to the Korean peninsula as well as to the whole region. How far the outcome of Koizumi's planned North Korea visit will help defuse tension in the region is yet to be assessed. But the fact is, a sudden blow of pleasant cool wind through the door that remained close for too long is already conveying the message that the extended period of Cold War in East Asia might at last going to see its own end too.

## TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE

### English medium vs Bangla medium

I was going through the letter written by Arafat Hasan (September 4) on the recent debate regarding English medium school and students. What should I think as he said that people "need to stop making stupid tales" regarding English medium students? You have convicted all the people who wrote about it just to express their odd experience as liar. Do you have any other way to explain it Mr. Hasan? People have no enmity with English medium students. There is no reason to be hostile to them

"Stupid tales" about dress and accent hurt you. I am sorry for that. But every single person wrote upon it, talked about a part of the English medium students and these students are not small in number. Talking about one's dress up is really ridiculous. It is his/her personal

choice. But can you bet that people never cross the limit? You said that you have been brought up with a certain degree of freedom and you revel in it. Does a degree of freedom fluctuate with the change of Bengali to English medium? And lastly, it is true that many English medium students speak in an odd accent and this is not a "stupid tale" T. Rahman, Dhaka

Being a student of an English

medium school, I take great offence to some recently published letters in your newspaper. These letters portray us 'fast', 'ultra modern' 'suffering from superiority complex' and, to top it all, 'unpatriotic'.

I would like to state that most of the students of English medium schools (EMS) come from middle class families. Such families spend a major portion of their earning in sending their children to EMS just to

ensure good education. They have found out that EMS make the students internationally competitive This year alone EMS students from Bangladesh got admitted to Oxford, Cambridge, Dartmouth, Harvard, Cornell, Amherst, Vassar and many other famous educational institutes of U.K, U.S.A, Australia etc. No aspersion on Bangla medium students, I believe they are also very bright. However, due to the lack of the educational facilities, they miss out from availing such opportunities

at undergraduate level EMS follow Bangla books issued by the Board even though it is not in the O level syllabus. Like the Bangla medium students we had to study bochon, shomas, bagdhara, pad, shandhi, bakko shankochon etc. We have read Rabindranath, Nazrul and Sharat Chandra and at the same time we got exposure to world literature. It hurts me deeply when people

question our patriotism just because we do not study in Bengali medium schools. I have studied in English medium school all my life and I do not think I have come across anyone who thinks not being able to speak Bangla or failing in Bangla examinations "as cool".

I am surprised to read that English medium schools do not have competent teachers. If the teachers are so "incompetent", how can the students produce brilliant O and A level grades by competing with students from all over the world, in examinations that are conducted by London or Cambridge Universities? I hope people will stop this English medium school bashing and focus on demanding quality educational opportunities for all students of Bangladesh, both Bangla and English medium. I am proud to be a Bangladeshi. I am proud to be an English medium school and I believe that my school, Sunbeams, has given me the best education possi-

#### Chowdhury Rashaam Raiyan Sunbeams School

#### "Great Army'

Mr. Joyonto (August 21) wrote that the name of the Ershad Army Stadium was changed to Bangladesh Army Stadium. Did Mr. Ershad object to it? Did anyone else object to it?

About the COD (Central Ordnance Depot), it was built during the Pakistani rule. Get some more information about military explosives first. They are not built just to accidentally blow up a whole city. If they were so vulnerable then there wouldn't be any explosives. Go and ask other countries for cantonment maps, they wouldn't even let you enter the cantonment without a valid reason. Do you think they would let you take photographs on board especially the ones from Zia? I don't

think so!

How can maps of the cantonment be important when the main cantonment is separated from the COD by the airport road? How can they be important in the decision of whether ordnance depot should be placed (it was already placed more than 30 vears ago).

The most shocking thing is, how come you say the army had betraved the country when it is them who sacrifice their lives quarding the country! Wasn't it the presence of the army during the elections that made it a peaceful one? **Nafis Ahmed Farid** Dhaka Cantonment

Mr Mahboob Ul Malik (August 31) should not have concluded that A Military Person (August 28) was an army officer. He could be a navy or an air force officer; or a soldier, a sailor or an airman. Army officers make delicious scapegoats, even to retired army officers. But I share Mr

Malik's observations about the previous military person's letter. It was outrageous. I must apologise on behalf of him to the Worried Civilian (August 30).

EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR

I think the 'Army officer' did the right thing. Wasn't if distasteful of Mr Kim to raise the question of field toilet, of all things? The officer answered Mr Kim's letter with tact. After all, Mr Kim has no right to give incorrect information to the public.

So many accusations have been made against the army in this 'Great Army' debate! Not all of them were just. But Mr Malik didn't give us the benefits of his beautiful English by defending the army that once employed him. Sir, forgive me but aren't you supposed to carry your rank before your name up to your epitaph?

Another Army Officer, On e-mail

This is in response to Gora's concern that pride in our Army is mis-Dhaka

fouls up Pakistan. We are not Pakistan. We can be proud of our Armed Forces' role in ensuring the democratic process in Bangladesh by not interfering in politics in spite of the wrongs committed by the politicians. There has been times when frustrated laymen like me, have wistfully sought for a terror free, peaceful Bangladesh and find little hope in the politicians who are at the helm of our country's affairs. This painful initiation into democracy is needed as we mature, and our Armed Forces, by not interfering, is nurturing the process. We are proud of them. Look at the name and fame they have bought in UN peace

placed and compares with the well-

intentioned Army which controls and

keeping missions abroad. It is indeed a marvel of our minds that this debate began with a 'no entry' complaint! Sarwar Ahmed