

Corruption goes unchallenged

Citizens' watchdog bodies and independent anti-corruption commission needed

THE concluding session of the biennial conference of Bangladesh Economic Association (BEA) on Friday was devoted to *Economics of Corruption*, a topic of heightened public concern since TI's perception-based ranking of Bangladesh at the top of corrupt countries twice in a row. It's the citizenry who have to endure the suffering that corruption brings to all aspects of their life. That's why as the aggrieved party they remain most anxious to see it contained. We want this public concern, currently expressed in terms of complaints only, to be translated into a collective national concern. Ideally, the transformation we are looking for will have two elements: one, organised resistance against corruption via citizens' watch-dog bodies; and two, as a result of such public and civil society discourse and activism the government and the opposition of the day will be moved to take concrete action against corruption.

The flaws are basically institutional. Slimy attitudes at whose doorsteps we place all the blame for our misfortunes with rhetoric abandon and woolly vagueness are but the handiwork of a failed system. The watch-dog apparatuses through which we are supposed to keep corruption at bay do not simply work. The anti-corruption bureau has no will of its own; for, it has to work at the dictate of the chief executive. That's why it's a chameleon changing colour with each passing government. A statutory anti-corruption commission independent of the PMO's control holds the answer. Although the BNP promised its coming, a definitive headway is still awaited on the pledge.

The Comptroller and Auditor General's office being a part of the finance ministry is a toothless tiger. The CAG office's supervisory authority is not backed up by any mandate of autonomy. It is bogged down in auditing a hoary past, doing academic research, so to speak.

The public accounts committee of the parliament which should have been functional from the day the Jatiya Sangsad was inaugurated remains non-functional even to this day. It is a body that ideally needed to be chaired by the opposition to enforce answerability of the government at a crucial level. This committee is yet to be constituted, to say nothing of being functional.

All these missing links (including an Ombudsman's office) will have to be provided for so as to guarantee existence of basic safeguards against corruption in the very system of governance. Meanwhile, the civil society must go on hammering for an adequate institutional preparation to combat corruption and abuse of power.

Peace hopes rekindled in Sri Lanka

LTTE clears course by dropping demand for separate state

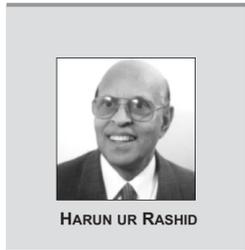
AFTER three decades of a bloody conflict that has claimed over 60,000 lives and devastated the nation of nearly 19 million people, peace in Sri Lanka suddenly seems a distinct possibility. The Norwegian-brokered peace talks in Sattahip, Thailand, culminated in an unexpected turnaround of the Tamil Tigers' position on September 19. "I wish to impress upon you that the LTTE (Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam) does not operate with the concept of a separate state," affirmed the top LTTE negotiator Anton Balasingham at the end of three days of intense dialogue. The remarks marked by far the strongest indication that the LTTE may be ready to stand down after staging Asia's longest-running internal conflict. The shift from a separate state to "regional autonomy and self-government" has certainly come as a relief, not only to the people of Sri Lanka but to the people of the entire South Asian region as well.

Credit certainly goes to Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe and his government. Despite strong opposition from President Chandrika Kumaratunga herself, the hard-line nationalists and also the Marxists, the government remained firm in its position and pursuit of peace through talks. Some of its steps such as withdrawal of ban on the LTTE had been construed by its political rivals as "kneeling before the LTTE and dancing to the tune of Western imperialist forces". One must say Wickremesinghe's perseverance has paid dividend. Sri Lanka now stands closer to peace than it ever did in the last three decades.

However, the process has just begun. The LTTE maintains that it is too early to discuss the question of disarming or decommissioning weapons held by thousands of Tiger rebels in the island's north-east. Prime Minister Wickremesinghe appears aware of the fact that the process might take time before it reaches its culmination. However, the path his government has chosen to get the space to broker peace puts it directly on a collision course with President Kumaratunga.

It has moved for a constitutional amendment to strip the president of her power to dissolve the parliament after it completes one year. The government says it "cannot go on with the sword of Damocles hanging over our heads". Maybe, there is a justification for the concern; after all, the president might subvert the whole process by dissolving the parliament anytime after December 5. The tension the move might create could also adversely impact on the peace process. Hopefully, nothing of these will happen and that the journey to peace would be crowned with success sooner than later.

Tamil Tigers change stripes for peace



HARUN UR RASHID

THE Sri Lankan government ministers and representatives of Tamil Tiger rebels met on 16 September for a three-day peace talks in neutral Thailand (at a naval base in Sattahip, 260 km south-east of Bangkok). The talks were brokered by Norwegian diplomats as they did between Israelis-Palestinians in the 90s. The talks were the beginning of excruciating negotiations ahead for months, even years. The purpose of this sitting was to focus on immediate rehabilitation needs in the war-torn areas of Sri Lanka and on setting an agenda for future talks.

The turning point came with the election of Ranil Wickremesinghe as Prime Minister last December. His party was successful because during the election campaign he advocated peace talks with Tamil

rebels as against the party of President Chandrika Kumaratunga who had taken a hard line against the Tamil rebels.

This was the first face to face talks in seven years. Peace was attempted before. Four previous attempts at peace had broken down because the two sides differed on the basic issue of establishing an

First, since September 11 attacks, the world has changed its attitude towards violent activities. The difference between 'freedom fighters' and 'terrorists' has become blurred. The claim of Tamil Tigers as "freedom fighters" was not convincing and they were perceived as "terrorists". The US is believed to have worked behind the scene with

the civil war.

Third, critical financial situations were adversely affecting the continuation of war. The war has cost the government up to US\$1.5 billion dollars a year in defence spending and billions were lost because tourists and investors stayed away from the country. For rebels, the flow of funds collected overseas by

Finally, Prime Minister Wickremesinghe was fully co-operative to accept some of their demands. The ban on Tamil Tigers' organisation--the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE)--was lifted, fulfilling one of the Tigers' prerequisites for negotiations. Furthermore, the war, along with a drought and global economic slowdown had sobering impact on

Sri Lanka is approximately two and half-times smaller than the size of Bangladesh. The population is about 20 million and the majority (75%) are Sinhalese Buddhists and Tamils (18%) are Hindus. In the regional context, Sri Lanka is comparatively better off than its South Asian neighbours in terms of per capita income and in a range of social welfare indicators such as life expectancy, literacy and income inequality.

Prime Minister Wickremesinghe had been in tour in the US to drum up foreign investment and aid for a US\$500 million dollar five-year rebuilding programme. The country has a relatively well-educated labour force which can play a pivotal role in rapid industrialisation in the context of Sri Lanka being one of the most open and market oriented economies in the developing world. Had there been no civil war, many believe that Sri Lanka would have emerged as affluent as Singapore.

The peace talks were a good beginning and they have a long way to go. Sri Lanka is a valued member of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC). We all hope that talks may result in successful end to enable Sri Lanka to follow the path of peace, progress and prosperity in the future.

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

BOTTOM LINE

Prime Minister Wickremesinghe had been in tour in the US to drum up foreign investment and aid for a US\$500 million dollar five-year rebuilding programme. The country has a relatively well-educated labour force which can play a pivotal role in rapid industrialisation in the context of Sri Lanka being one of the most open and market oriented economies in the developing world. Had there been no civil war, many believe that Sri Lanka would have emerged as affluent as Singapore.

independent state in the north and east of the country for Tamil population. To government, the territorial integrity of the country was non-negotiable while to Tamil Tigers, independence was the issue for which they had been fighting since 1983. Both stuck to their inflexible positions. However government was willing to grant full autonomy to the Tamil populated areas in the north within the framework of territorial integrity of Sri Lanka.

The question is why did the Tamil Tiger rebels change their position?

Norway and asked them to negotiate for peace with the Sri Lankan government. Tamil Tigers leadership saw that their violent activities including suicide missions were counter-productive given the changed world security environment.

Second, both sides became tired of fighting with each other for nearly 20 years. About 65,000 have been killed in this civil war. There were no military victories over one another and all communities suffered enough. They wanted to end

Tamil nationals had been hit hard by new laws of terrorism in Western countries.

Fourth, both sides saw that military operations against each other were an exercise in futility and would not go anywhere. The Tamil Tigers had witnessed that Irish Republican Army in Northern Ireland had shunned violence and started surrendering their weapons. They perceived that time had come to negotiate peace and build future for Tamil population within the territorial integrity of Sri Lanka.

both sides.

This time both sides were hopeful for a negotiated settlement. The optimism appears to be backed by the cease-fire (since February) that has kept the peace and led to the reopening of roads in rebel areas. This has allowed people to move freely for the first time in years and ensured a constant flow of consumer goods into rebel areas. Both Sinhalese and Tamil communities of Sri Lanka found the situation congenial to their lives and lent strong support to peace negotiations.

Baghdad imbroglio

KAZI ANWARUL MASUD

CHAPTER VII (article 39-51) of the UN Charter authorizes the UNSC to take military action "to maintain or restore international peace and security"; to determine the existence of any threat to peace; breach of peace or act of aggression; call upon member states to provide armed assistance and facilities etc. In a forceful speech to the 57th UNGA President Bush characterized the Iraqi regime as "a grave and gathering danger. To suggest otherwise is to hope against the evidence. To assume this regime's good faith is to bet the lives of millions and the peace of the world in a reckless gamble, and this is a risk we must not take".

In a sort of a Culpability Statement a la British FCO regarding Osama bin Laden, President Bush detailed Iraq's non-compliance of UNSC Resolutions (686,687 and 688 of 1991 and 1373 of 2001) and warned that "the conduct of the Iraqi regime is a threat to the authority of the United Nations and a threat to peace". He offered to work with UNSC for "necessary resolutions" but warned "the purposes of the United States should not be doubted. The Security Council resolutions will be enforced -- or action will be unavoidable". President Bush ended by saying "we cannot stand by and do nothing while dangers gather. We must stand up for our security and for the permanent rights and hopes of mankind. By heritage and by choice the United States of America will make that stand". President Bush's speech was unambiguous. If Iraq does not fall in line then it has to face military action. UN Secretary General described the Nine-Eleven terrorist attacks "an extreme example of global scourge, which requires a broad, sustained and global response". Differing with President Bush, he said that the response to terrorism can only succeed if full use is made of multilateral institutions. The existence of an effective international security situation, he argued, depended on the authority of the Security Council and there was no substitute for the unique legitimacy provided by the UN.

Perhaps the expressed reservations of the three permanent members of the UNSC -- France, China and Russia-- might have tampered

Bush's UN speech as no less the opposition by EU to military intervention before all avenues have been exhausted. Though details of possible UNSC resolutions are still unclear various options are being discussed. One is the demand to Iraq for unfettered entry and access of the UN inspectors or face military action for "regime change". Another one is the French idea of ordering Saddam Hossain to grant entry to UN inspectors or to go through multilateral military actions. The two do not appear to be very different in substance. Colin Powell reportedly indicated that regardless of international reactions to Bush's speech the US may elect to go-it alone.

In the context of possible unilateral and/or coercive coalition action one may try to enquire into increasingly acquired unilateral or UN authority in dealing with situations like the present one in relation to the ordinarily understood concept of sovereignty. Paul Taylor of London School of Economics has intensively investigated the erosion of traditional sovereignty concept (*The United Nations in the 1990s: Proactive Cosmopolitanism and the Issue of Sovereignty-1999*). He argued that the post-cold war era demanded of the governments that they change their ways to come up to international standard of behaviour as the international community -

argued (indeed it has already been done) that sovereign states to remain sovereign must remain accountable to international community and demonstrate to the satisfaction of the community the adherence by the sovereign states of the rules of the game followed by all others and infraction of the rules would have punitive result. The unresolved question would be the nature of the instrument to be applied-- unilateral or multi-lateral -- to bring the delinquent to book.

If the Iraqi problem is ultimately resolved unilaterally (with token participation by few) then questions may be raised later about the justifiability of the doctrine of pre-

the United States to give its support and understanding in the fight against terrorism and separatists' (*China's Tactical Gains and Strategic Losses after 11 September-Mohan Malik*). Britain solidly in the Bush camp despite British public's insistence to be presented with some solid evidence of Saddam Hossain's culpability should not pose any difficulty for Bush-Blair ménage. Tony Blair however has to take into account that Chancellor Schroeder's public rating has gone up (general elections are being held later this month) after his expressed opposition to military intervention. Nor can he be totally oblivious to reservations

public expression to existing simmering discontent threatening the ruling elites' already tenuous hold on purchased loyalty. If Reza Shah Pahlvi could be dethroned why not others? Discomfiture of these monarchs is further compounded by public perception of biased US policy on Palestine issue.

Conflictual relationship between Christianity and Islam is historical. Though Christianity predates Islam by six hundred years, yet it was Islamic civilization which first developed into a politico-military empire with cultural exchanges and long distance trade in advance of European maritime expansion (*The World at the End of the Twentieth Century-Tony Spiby*). Tony Spiby posits that in the Middle East western domination faced two main resistances: Islam the religion, and Arab nationalism. Resurgence of Islam after the demise of Ottoman Empire due to Iranian Revolution of 1979 also had extra-territorial effects. "Beyond the Middle East" writes Spiby "in other non-Arab countries, such as Pakistan and Bangladesh, the state has been partially Islamicized and even in multi-faith Nigeria, Islamicization has been mooted by its large Muslim population in the north. Much of this can be attributed to the spiritual model and the political potential projected from Iran by Ayatullah Khomeini".

So what should the world do? Neutrality (i.e. inaction) does not appear to be a viable option. Ironically some of the first clear formulations of the doctrine of neutrality were embodied in the Proclamation of Neutrality by George Washington in 1793; the American Neutrality Code of 1794; Kellogg-Briand Pact of 1928 etc. Clearly the present Iraqi regime has to be made accountable to the international community; their deeds have to be transparent; values practiced by them have to be universal. Despite Iraq's agreement to unconditional return of UN arms inspectors, branded by the White House as "a tactical step by Iraq in hopes of avoiding strong UN action... a tactic that will fail", President Bush is likely to get his way through for "necessary resolution" in the UNSC despite initial Russian and Chinese welcome of the Iraqi about face.

Kazi Anwarul Masud is a retired secretary to Bangladesh government and former ambassador.

An attack on Iraq is likely to have destabilizing effect in the entire Islamic world not because of any love for Saddam Hossain as is evident by strong condemnation by OIC and the Arab League of the Nine-Eleven horrific events and the total participation by the Islamic countries during the Gulf War. Problems faced by many of the Islamic countries are of governance...Attack on Iraq could give public expression to existing simmering discontent threatening the ruling elites' already tenuous hold on purchased loyalty.

Cracks however appear to have surfaced. EU has a Middle East Peace Plan ready for discussions; Australia and New Zealand are this time reluctant to blindly follow the US lead; the Arabs (for fear of internal popular dissent leading to chaos) are uniformly opposed to the use of their facility (except Qatar) for attacks against Iraq; the Saudis are furious over inclusion of the names of some Saudi notables in the US list of terror funders (Prince Naif has described it as politically motivated and orchestrated by neocon-servatives and their Zionist allies. Meanwhile Prince Saud al Faisal has conveyed his country's agreement to the use of facilities for military campaign against Iraq under UN auspices); President Musharraf is clearly disinterested in the US anti-Iraq military operations. He advised President Bush to secure international consensus particularly of the Muslim world before any attack on Iraq as many Muslims see US policy biased in favour of Israel. South Korea's Han Soong-Soo, immediate past President on UNGA said, "If there is one lesson we have learnt from this crisis, it is that with global issues such as combating terrorism requires consolidated global response. No single nation can resolve such far reaching global concern" (DS-September 11").

- equivalent of the divine order -- was something above the State. The growing intrusiveness into the affairs of the UN member states was resultant of entente among permanent members possibly at the instance of President Gorbachev. "It was not that the State was challenged" wrote Paul Taylor "but its claim as a moral absolute was challenged". Referring to "rogue states" such as that of Saddam Hossain he advocated the need for a strong trans-national authority in the international response equipped to act appropriately to deal with such regimes. Those who argue that actions against Iraq would run counter to the Westphalian concept of sovereignty need to be reminded that the concept has been in the process of evolution for quite some time either through pro-active character change of the UN and its agencies or through recognition by EU member states that the instrumental value of traditional sovereignty has lessened and that the pursuit of their interest can be better served through "pooling" of sovereignty rather than within the traditional framework. "May be the age of sovereignty is nearing its end" (Robert Jackson- *Sovereignty at the Millennium*). Multiple conditionality imposed upon the recipients by the donors is an infringement on their sovereignty. It can, therefore, be

emptive action. Pakistan may fear that India may do the same in Kashmir though neither Pakistan is Iraq nor India the US. Temptation may however remain. US unilateral withdrawal from the Kyoto Protocol; non-ratification of Rio Pact on biodiversity; cancellation of anti-ballistic missile treaty; opposition to ban on land mines and to the establishment of International Court of Justice--to name a few--do not speak well of the moral leadership of the United States. As against the supposed "malevolence" of the US in the given situation one is tempted to agree with National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice that Iraq would eventually want to blackmail the entire international community if the world were to wait till Iraq possessed nuclear weapons and then "we will have made a great mistake".

The US may be able to cobble together a UNSC resolution by tacitly agreeing to Russian claim to "pre-emptive measures" against Georgia, which is unable to deal effectively with Chechen rebels; and US acquiescence of Chinese dealings with Uighur "terrorists". Chinese Foreign Office statement of 18th September 2001 is noteworthy. It said, "The United States has asked China to provide assistance in the fight against terrorism. China by the same token has reason to ask

expressed by many other Europeans across the channel. Perhaps European hesitation is partly rooted in possible economic fall out of an attack on Iraq. Stephen Roach of Morgan Stanley (DS- 11th September) is of the view that given today's global economy being more trade-intensive and more US-centric, an American relapse pursuant to an attack on Iraq would have global effects as the world lacks the cyclical immunities that would prevent global recession sparked by a possible oil shock. This could partly explain investors' rush to buy gold as a safe haven.

An attack on Iraq is likely to have destabilizing effect in the entire Islamic world not because of any love for Saddam Hossain as is evident by strong condemnation by OIC and the Arab League of the Nine-Eleven horrific events and the total participation by the Islamic countries during the Gulf War. Problems faced by many of the Islamic countries are of governance. Barring a few (Bangladesh, Malaysia) most of the OIC member state governments lack transparency, participation, responsiveness, accountability and rule of law. Some are absolute monarchies resulting in disproportionate distribution of resources (command over goods and service) between the rulers and the ruled. Attack on Iraq could give

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



On Dr. Aftab's murder

Fondly we called it SMC (Sylhet Medical College). It was my own. A part of my soul still lings for it.

Sri Chaitannya preached his love and peace in this placid hilly place. It is Dhaka-Dakshin. In late 70's I strolled aimlessly in this rather sleepy Bazaar when I often visited my Aunt. It was pretty and peaceful. It was the Loving House of Sri Chaitannya.

It was a heart-full of distress of unseen proportion. A loving man of loving reputation was killed mindlessly in the Loving House of Sri Chaitannya.

Madam Prime Minister, how many more of this mindless violence is in order, before you take some action against these criminals?

I am not saying that these particular killers belong to BNP or to its lesser teams. But the democratic leader of a country, in such instances, has to shoulder the responsibility.

Mohammad Zaman USA

US and Iraq

There seem to be quite a few letters

and articles criticising the American plans for a regime change in Iraq.

We should look at this in perspective before screaming about American imperialism. In the first place, Saddam Hussein has had ten years in which he could have allowed UN weapons inspections and destroy his stockpiles of biological and chemical weapons. If Saddam Hussein were to comply with this not unreasonable UN decision, sanctions would be lifted and he could stay in power. But for the last decade he has continued to try and hide his weapons of mass destruction and flout UN sanctions as much as possible. If Saddam Hussein does not have bad intentions, why is he protecting his stocks of chemical and biological weapons?

How does this make the US the bad guy? Or are you saying that a dictator who has murdered thousands of Kurds, dissidents and anyone he suspects of being a threat and who keeps on trying to hide his chemical and biological weapons should be defended?

Then there is the call for a UN Security Council resolution. Who

died and made the Security Council the voice of the world? China is a member, it is also a dictatorship that murdered thousands of students in Tiananmen Square, repress and kill members of the Muslim minorities and Tibetans who demand rights.

Another member is Russia, also actively killing Muslim separatists in Chechnya. The same UN Security Council dilly-dallied over Rwanda, Bosnia and Kosovo. It was the opposition of Russia in the Security Council that protected Slobodan Milosovic and allowed his genocide to continue. It was NATO that stepped in to protect the Kosovars from the Serbs, not the UN.

I think we should be criticising the UN not the US and the UK.

MA Dhaka

"Bush, Bangladesh and 9/11"

This refers to "A Thinker's" response (9/19) to Mr. ES's letter.

I believe the person who is really suffering of "tunnel vision" is the Thinker. There are problems going on in many other countries in the

world besides Afghanistan, Palestine and Iraq (Nepal, Sri Lanka, India, Ireland, Columbia, Spain etc. and not to forget about our Hilly Chittagong). It's notable that the writer particularly mentioned about the Muslim populated countries. It's okay to have brotherly love for other Muslims but it's not okay to blindly side with anything that goes under the label Islam.

As an expatriate Bangladeshi I am extremely proud of my countrymen and strongly believe they'll eventually get out of this "tunnel vision" and realise that killing of civilians to achieve anything doesn't work, it never did and that applies to all parties. Bangladesh itself is the best example of that.

Shuja Canada

Attack on Iraq and "American Way of Life"

This is in response to the letter of 'An Immigrant', USA (September 18).

I truly understand your deep affection for USA, its leadership and its allies for their role against terror-

ism since you have been proselytised into the free spirited 'American Way of Life' 12 years back. I know how appalling the death of a single innocent American hurt you while the demise of thousands of children, women and men all over the world in the hands of allies of America is not worthy of a single drop of your tears. I know it is indisputably a bad maner to point a finger at our Uncle Sam who can get away with anything at their own sweet will and enjoy self proclaimed immunities. I also know that respect for every individual out there is granted by default irrespective of his/her race, religion, ethnicity or creed through the social statisticians and news headlines defiantly bear the truth to the contrary.

Mr. Immigrant, your approach to defend the US and its policies along with the exquisite life style that you so exorbitantly live was very poetic indeed. But what you really need is to strive very hard to acquire a rational and non-partisan attitude towards the putrefied world situation USA has caused around us.

A Man in Uniform Dhaka

Bring ETV back

There's no doubt that ETV brought a new dimension to our broadcasting arena. It was enjoying a huge popularity till it was shut down by the government.

Now with no ETV, there's a huge vacuum which BTV and other local channels fail to fill. What is the government doing about it? Don't they care about the viewers' need?

On behalf of a large number of viewers, I would request the authority to bring back ETV and this time with a proper license.

Sohel Hara Tophkana Road, Dhaka

'War on terrorism' or 'War on Muslims'?

With respect to the Middle Eastern crisis, the term "suicide bomber" has become a cliché. How many incidents have there been where a 10-year-old boy pelted stones at a tank? One does not need to try too hard to imagine the sheer frustration the Palestinian boy felt about the Israeli incursion into the territory that rightfully belongs to him and his many suffering compatriots. The

desire for independence in the juvenile was so intense that he was driven to let his frustrations out by throwing stones at the Israeli tank. Not surprisingly, this action was seen by the hard-hearted Israeli soldiers as being drastic enough to shoot the boy dead.

Does the Bush administration care? It is too busy trying to justify its unjustifiable decision to attack Iraq. It is gradually becoming obvious that Bush's "War on Terrorism" is actually a war on innocent Muslims. Maybe the illogical US raids on Afghanistan carried out in the aftermath of 9/11 were not embarrassing enough for Bush's administration.

HNC Dhaka

Donors worry over law and order downside

The law and order situation will not improve in Bangladesh, and will be deteriorating day by day, if the political parties of the country do not cease their dependency on party cadres; no matter whichever politi-

cal party is in power, is chided by the donor countries and agencies.

In fact, the political parties patronise criminals--the so-called party cadres--to suppress and down size the rival political parties. In this context how can we hope that the law and order situation will improve in this country?

The moment the political party in power will take firm decision to control the country not with the help of its party cadres, but by police force, the law and order situation will be improving.

Then the next step should be decreasing the number of people per police-- from 1350 to 500. The number alone is not all, the police force should be well trained, well equipped and must have respect for human rights.

Not MIG or frigate, but good governance will improve our prestige in the outside world. Under good governance the economic activities will increase in the country, which will ultimately help the country earn prosperity.

Faruque Hasan Dhanmandi, Dhaka