

Anti-corruption commission in the offing

Still there is room for improvement

THE JS passed a bill Tuesday night providing for an independent anti-corruption commission. The bill included a last-minute amendment eliminating any requirement of government approval to prosecute state officials. The obligation to seek government permission for prosecution was one of the fatal flaws of the proposed legislation, and we are gratified that this has been dispensed with.

At last we are going to have an anti-corruption commission in place of a department or a bureau and that too not as an appendage to the PMO. But while the commission is an improvement over its predecessor, the BAC, which had been hampered by the fact that it operated under strict government control and dogged by allegations of partisanship, the bill as passed still retains provisions that call into question its likely effectiveness.

Under the framework set out by the new law, a five-member search committee will come up with a panel of six nominees, of whom three will be appointed commissioners by the President.

There is no scope for opposition party participation in the selection process, although the previous idea of associating ministers has been dropped. The bill allows for the appointment of a search committee that might be stacked with government favourites. Altogether, the new body could be susceptible to government influence.

The final selection of the three commissioners is to be made by the President who is constitutionally bound to act on the advice of the PM. In addition, it is unclear as to what extent the commission will retain financial autonomy from the government. The latter's control over its budget could dilute its functional freedom.

However, the biggest question about the effectiveness of the new body comes from the fact that the government can withdraw any case against any person at any time. So, where lies the independence of the commission?

The whole point of this exercise was to create an anti-corruption commission that would be impartial, non-partisan and above politics. The introduction of bipartisan element into the body would not only make it independent and impartial but also self-sustaining and enduring beyond the five-year terms of governments. Let's endeavour to perfect the proposed body before it comes into operation.

Snap poll in Sri Lanka

Peace process in jeopardy?

SRI Lankan President Chandrika Kumaratunga and Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesighe have been locked in a power struggle for months. The feud entered the public domain last November when President Kumaratunga seized control of three key government ministries, and came to a head last week, when she announced snap parliamentary elections three years before they were due. This is going to be the third general election on the island in the last four years.

The current power struggle between the two revolves mainly around how to handle peace negotiations with the LTTE, that has been waging a guerilla war against the Sri Lankan army for the past two decades. It was the terms of the peace treaty that Wickremesinghe was poised to sign with the LTTE in November that she considered to be reconciliatory. It caused Kumaratunga to step in and exercise her authority to halt the negotiations.

The April election is thus being set up as a virtual referendum on the peace process, with Kumaratunga demanding that the voters be consulted before the deal that Wickremesinghe had painstakingly negotiated to be inked. There is no more pressing crisis in Sri Lanka than the resolution of the war between the government and the LTTE and it makes sense that the public approve any deal that will shape the country's political future.

However, the danger inherent in the obvious tensions and differences between the prime minister and the president might prompt the LTTE to conclude that they would be without a partner for peace and could pull out of the negotiation process. Already the cease-fire that has been in place since February 2002 is in jeopardy. Kumaratunga's new alliance with the JVC which oppose any kind of deal with the LTTE suggests that if her party does emerge victorious in April, then the peace process will be derailed.

The mutual accommodation that the prime minister and the LTTE had negotiated in the peace talks represented the best chance for a settlement. Common ground was found, concessions were made, and both sides were accommodative of the majority of the other side's demands. It is of critical importance that, whatever the outcome of April's polls, the peace process be kept alive and the advance made towards reaching resolution be not squandered.

DUET admission test

Dhaka University of Engineering and Technology (DUET), Gazipur, has announced that its admission tests will be held on May 10, 2004. I would like to appeal to the DUET authorities to allow the HSC passed meritorious students to sit for the admission tests, 2004. According to the Clause 42 (2) of 'Dhaka University of Engineering and Technology, Gazipur, 2003 Act' published in Bangladesh Gazette on July 19, 2003, HSC passed students should be given priority to sit for admission test at DUET. DUET should frame its admission policy accordingly. **Md. Mahbubur Rahman Shohag**

Sher-e-Bangla Nagar, Dhaka

Let the leader of the opposition speak

In a placid, friendly and pleasant atmosphere and get-together graced by many top BNP, Awami League MPs and other VVIPs organised by Dhaka Reporters Unity at National Press Club, the LGRD Minister and BNP Secretary General Abdul Mannan Bhuyian said when the Awami League was in power the BNP boycotted parliament and now it is the Awami League that has been boycotting parliament. He is right, but how can we get out of the deadlock? We do not like to go into any type

Of OPEC and Sheikh Zaki Yamani



NURURDDIN MAHMUD KAMAL

OPEC became an international spectacle of the first order in the mid 1970s. The eyes of the world fastened on its meetings, with their drama, pomp, and commotion. In the latest meeting held in Algiers on 9-10 February 2004, the Saudis purposefully and forcefully pursued their line against further price increases. The other members of OPEC knew that the Saudis would threaten to push up their production as 'swing producer' to turn the oil market to their favour in the name of price stabilisation. In fact the Saudis had never approved of the scale of the November-December 1973 oil price increase. They thought it was too large, and too dangerous to their own position. They feared the economic consequences. The influence of Sheikh Zaki Yamani was too difficult to ignore. King Faisal approved Yamani's gesture because he feared losing control over OPEC and over the basic decisions about oil, which was so central to the kingdom's existence and future. From those considerations flowed other concerns.

Saudi Arabia, a large country in territory, but small in population, was considered one of the largest oil reserves in the world. There was still another concern: Riyadh-Tehran. Riyadh felt that Reza Shah Pahlavi was too short sighted in his drive for higher oil prices, too fired by his own ambition which was encouraging him to claim hegemony over the Gulf. In August 1975, the US ambassador to Riyadh reported to Washington that Zaki Yamani had said that "the talk of eternal friendship between Iran and the United States was nauseating to him and other Saudis. They knew the Shah was a megalomaniac, that he was highly unstable mentally, and that if we didn't recognise this there must be something wrong with our powers of observation." Yamani sounded a warning, "If the Shah departs from the stage, we could also have a violent, anti-American regime in

Tehran." In four years the forecast came true in 1979.

Those who read about the developments of OPEC know well about Sheikh Ahmed Zaki al-Yamani who emerged as one of the shrewdest and most devious oil negotiators in the world. He became 'Mr OPEC.' As such he took the play away from the imperious, tricky Reza Shah of Iran -- and had no qualms about battling him on principles and policy. However, Dr Zaki Yamani had his own ambitions. In all the Saudi manoeuvres, the spotlight fell on Yamani. With his seemingly unblinking brown

Arab robes and looking like a twin to great Hollywood filmstar Omar Sharif, he (Yamani) held his pet Pomeranian dog in his lap and talked about the changes in modern Arabia." Dr Yamani told the Bangladeshi minister that he was cautious and calculating, "I can't bear gambling," he said. "Yes, I hate it. It rots the soul. I've never been a gambler. Never." In oil politics, the Bangladesh minister recalled, Yamani, insisted he never gambled. "It's always a calculated risk. Oh, I calculate my risks well. And when I take them, it means I've taken all necessary precautions to

consortium, that broke in on the majors in the Middle East. He became a legal adviser to Saudi Arabia's Income Tax department. Yamani cut his professional teeth on studies of Aramco's tax returns. He was known to be very loyal to King Faisal and shared with him the sense of Saudi Arabia's destiny to resolve the Arab-Israeli conflict.

Earlier, Yamani wrote commentaries on legal issues for various newspapers. That attracted the attention of a most valuable patron, prince Faisal, second son to Ibn Saud. Faisal invited Yamani to become his legal counselor, and in

insisted on paying the bill (the American's call it check). When he got it, he said, "You see? Why do you complain about oil at twelve dollars a barrel when a hamburger costs eight fifty?" Incidentally, a big-burger used to cost half a dollar in McDonalds! His hosts refrained from commenting that both Yamani's oil and 21 Club's hamburgers might be artificially over-priced. However, the point Yamani was trying to make highlights a serious grievance of all developing countries. Unless they receive an equitable price for their raw material exports, they cannot hope to

ists took the oil ministers hostage, and eventually embarked on a harrowing air journey, flying first to Algiers, then to Tripoli, and then back to Algiers, threatening to kill the ministers. Again and again, they said that Jamshid Amuzegar, the Iranian oil minister and Yamani had been sentenced to death. On the tense flight, Yamani spent the time playing with his worry beads and reciting to himself verses from the Holy Quran, convinced that he would soon be a dead man. Forty-eight hours after the initial assault in Vienna, they were released. Yamani became obsessive on the subject of security thereafter. Fahad later became crown Prince and Deputy Prime Minister, to whom he now reported.

At times, the Saudi policies infuriated the other exporters enough to bring down a rain of vituperations, often carefully directed toward Yamani and not the Royal family. One of the leading newspapers in Tehran castigated Yamani as a "stooge of capital circles, and a traitor not only to his own king and country but also to the Arab world and the third world as a whole". The Iraqi oil minister declared that Yamani was acting in the service of "imperialism and Zionism". To such rhetoric, the unflappable Yamani reacted with his enigmatic smile and unblinking stare.

In September 1986 Harvard University was celebrating its 350th anniversary. To cap the celebration, Harvard had chosen two people to give major speeches. One was prince Charles, heir to the British throne. The other speaker was the Saudi oil minister, Ahmed Zaki Yamani. A month later, in one evening, Yamani was back in Riyadh at a dinner with his friends when he received a phone call advising him to turn on the television news. An item at the end of the broadcast reported tersely and without any adornment that Ahmed Zaki Yamani was 'relieved' of his post as oil minister. That was the way he learned that he had been fired. Yamani had been in the job for twenty-four years. Still, it was an abrupt, embarrassing, and disconcerting end to a quarter-century career. Did he deserve such an end?

Nururddin Mahmud Kamal is a retired government official.

CHRONICLE
In September 1986 Harvard University was celebrating its 350th anniversary. To cap the celebration, Harvard had chosen two people to give major speeches. One was prince Charles, heir to the British throne. The other speaker was the Saudi oil minister, Ahmed Zaki Yamani. A month later, in one evening, Yamani was back in Riyadh at a dinner with his friends when he received a phone call advising him to turn on the television news. An item at the end of the broadcast reported tersely and without any adornment that Ahmed Zaki Yamani was 'relieved' of his post as oil minister... It was an abrupt, embarrassing, and disconcerting end to a quarter-century career. Did he deserve such an end?

eyes and his clipped beard, he became familiar the world over as the symbol of the new age of oil. The world sometimes confused his role and ascribed greater power to him than perhaps he had. He was in the final analysis, the representative of Saudi Arabia, albeit an enormously important one. He could not dictate or solely determine Saudi oil policy, but he could shape it. His style of diplomacy, his mastery of analysis and negotiations, and his skill with the press -- all gave him decisive influence. His power was augmented by tenure, the fact that he ended up being 'there' longer than anyone else.

The price of oil in the international arena went very, very high indeed. The light Arabian crude was sold at US\$34 per barrel, all time highest. The only oil refinery (Eastern Refinery, Chittagong) in country was dependent light Arabian oil. The government became very concerned. Air Vice Marshall Sultan Mahmud was the Petroleum Minister. Luckily, and coincidentally the minister was invited to visit Saudi Arabia. This was an opportune time to meet Zaki Yamani, he thought. So, in his official delegation Dr Waliuzzaman, Director, Bangladesh Petroleum Corporation, was included. On his return the Hon'ble Minister was describing the outcome and experience. He said, "I was impressed with his disarming, soft manner. Dressed in

reduce then to the minimum possible. Almost to zero." AVM Sultan Mahmud was very happy to have met Dr Sheikh Zaki Yamani and obtain concessions procurement of oil.

While Yamani was widely known as 'Sheikh', the title was, in his case, honorary, assumed by prominent commoners, which he was. Yamani was born in Mecca in 1930, the year King Ibn Saud allowed prospecting for oil and minerals to try and overcome the country's desperate financial situation. During Yamani's childhood, camels still thronged the streets of Mecca. Both his grandfather and father were religious teachers and Islamic lawyers; his father had been grand mufti in the Dutch East Indies and Malaya. This combination of learning and piety shaped Yamani's outlook and intellectual development. Yamani's own considerable intelligence was recognised early in Saudi schools. He went to the University of Cairo, and then to New York University and obtained a doctorate in international law. This was followed by a year at the Harvard Law School, where he studied international law. He also developed an intuitive grasp of the west, of the United State in particular, and of how to communicate and be comfortable with Americans. He wrote the contract for the 1957 concession with Arabian Oil, the Japanese

1962, when Faisal emerged triumphant from the power struggle with his brother Saud, one of his first acts was to fire the nationalist oil minister Abdullah Tariki. Faisal appointed as his successor the thirty-two-year old Yamani, whose initial task, in turn, was to end Tariki's confrontation with Aramco. Yamani did as was expected by Aramco and other international oil companies. By the time of the 1973 oil embargo by OPEC, Yamani had already been oil minister for eleven years and had developed considerable experience and skill, and superb negotiating talents. His voice was soft, forcing adversaries to strain and to be silent to hear what he said. He almost never lost temper, the angrier he got, the more quite he became. His manner of presentation was mesmerisingly irresistible to many, and absolutely infuriating to others. Yamani carefully crafted his mystique; he was the master of patience and of the unblinking stare. When required, he would just look at his interlocutor, without saying a word, until the subject was changed.

Shortly after oil prices were raised so astronomically, Yamani, who was in New York, was invited by a prominent banker to lunch at the prestigious 21 Club. Yamani ordered a hamburger, commenting that he didn't often have a chance to have one. At the luncheon's end to his hosts surprise, Yamani

pay the constantly inflating prices of the goods they import from the industrialised countries.

In March 1975, Yamani accompanied the visiting Kuwaiti oil minister to an audience with king Faisal. A nephew of Faisal followed the party into the small reception room, and as the Kuwaiti knelt before the king, the nephew stepped forward and fired several bullets into Faisal's head, killing him almost instantaneously. The reason for such a killing remained a mystery!

Yamani was very much a Faisal man, devoted to the king who had chosen him. The king, in turn, regarded Yamani a favoured protégé and rewarded him with extensive grants of real estate, which skyrocketed in value during the oil boom. Yamani's close, intense relation with the king gave him carte blanche in making oil policy, though always said to be under the final control of Faisal, and perhaps within lines defined by the Royal family, whose most prominent member, when it came to oil policy, after the king himself was his half brother, Prince Fahad.

In December 1975, the international terrorist known as 'Carlos', from Venezuela, led five other terrorists in an attack on a ministerial meeting in the OPEC building in Vienna. Three people were killed in the first few minutes. The terror-

Resolution of political conflict is imperative

Dr. M. S. HAQ writes from New York

THE nature, scope and outcome of pro and anti hartal activities in Bangladesh are, in an average sense and under the present context, not conducive to the advancement of progress and prosperity of Bangladesh, its people and the people of the world at large in an accelerated and sustainable fashion. The negative consequences of hartal have, among other things and in varying degrees, been:

- threatening the country's hard earned democracy which is still at a nascent stage of its development;
- affecting human rights and the right to life of Bangladeshis that are yet to be fully and satisfactorily ensured;
- constraining the efforts towards eradicating hunger, poverty, inequity and distribution related disparity from the country; and
- hurting the image of Bangladesh which is under a constant pressure from several fronts including the country's present corruption status.

In Bangladesh, political intolerance, as well as arrogance is on the rise. One of the reasons is: the political

A satisfactory resolution of the conflict could be a win-win situation for both the ruling parties and the opposition. Because it could, among other things, afford the opposition and the ruling parties an opportunity to demonstrate before the people of Bangladesh and others their willingness and effort towards resolving the conflict in a collective manner.

cal parties are not presently competitive enough to offer to people: something new and lucrative than those they largely inherited from the non-democratic era; or strategies that are more responsive to the requirements of an evolving global order; or both. Closely related to it are the facts that the country's election market is relatively less demanding and that the political accountability is yet to become fully instrumental in help guiding and directing the country's political activities in a more productive as well as responsible way.

The political culture of 'old wine in new bottle' in terms of election promises and their eventual outcomes has till now faced a little or no opposition from a vast majority of people due, among other things, to the latter's increasing preoccupations with the survival and coping activities.

A more or less uninterrupted continuation of the above culture in the country's political dimension is, in some respects, responsible for: the development of political shortsightedness of many Bangladeshis -- in varying degrees though; slowing down the cultivation of cutting edge politics in the country; and the marginalisation of the people's power, to mention a few.

Under the present circumstance, political reform is a need of the day. To that end, a more result-oriented demonstration of the attributes (etc.) such as: respect for people, as well as the rule of law; protection of the national interest, as well as image; fairness; cooperation; collaboration; innovativeness; mutual trust; foresightedness; honesty; peaceful co-existence and hard work for common good, at individual and collective levels, would afford Bangladeshis including the political

parties the latitude required for promoting and sustaining the reform mentioned in the country. The people of Bangladesh should be able to ensure the commitment of the political parties to reform agendas through their voting decisions and subsequent follow-up actions. The development partners should be able to support Bangladeshis in their effort to do so. In addition, the political parties should be able to deliver their commitments to the people and the partners through redefining inter alia their strategies, priorities, activities and implementation modalities in pertinent areas.

The impacts of hartal on the life, as well as living of Bangladeshis and for that matter the world people have both arithmetic and geometric rates of progression, relative to time and space. Further, the cost of hartal is increasing in the country due, among other things, to an increasing scarcity

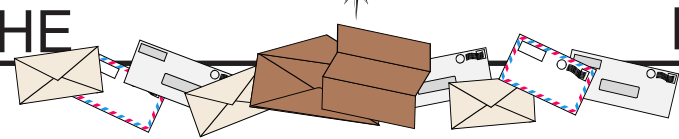
of useable and affordable resources for developmental purposes, the less than optimal utilisation of the available resources, the increasing replacement costs of the assets damaged during the hartals and the loss of investment opportunities in somewhat image driven environment of global competitions. Besides, the hartals are creating opportunities for the lawbreakers to destabilise the country, for example.

One of the strategies for dealing with the hartal could be to resolve the hartal issues through negotiations and other peaceful means in order, among other things, to eliminate the possibility of future hartals or their escalation or both. Given the recent hartals called by the AL and other political parties and the impact of the hartals on the wellbeing and welfare of the people, I believe the time is

now ripe for the President of Bangladesh and the Speaker, as well as the Deputy Speakers of the Parliament to intervene jointly into the matter with a view to resolving the conflict between the government and the opposition in pertinent areas. In the event, it is expected the people of Bangladesh and the development partners will be kept informed about the development and the outcome pertaining to the conflict resolution effort.

A satisfactory resolution of the conflict could be a win-win situation for both the ruling parties and the opposition. Because it could, among other things, afford the opposition and the ruling parties an opportunity to demonstrate before the people of Bangladesh and others their willingness and effort towards resolving the conflict in a collective manner. In case the conflict is not resolved, both the government and the opposition should be ready to explore other peaceful and cost effective means to resolve the conflict in the shortest possible time.

TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE



EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR

Letters will only be considered if they carry the writer's full name, address and telephone number (if any). The identity of the writers will be protected. Letters must be limited to 300 words. All letters will be subject to editing.

DUET admission test

Dhaka University of Engineering and Technology (DUET), Gazipur, has announced that its admission tests will be held on May 10, 2004. I would like to appeal to the DUET authorities to allow the HSC passed meritorious students to sit for the admission tests, 2004. According to the Clause 42 (2) of 'Dhaka University of Engineering and Technology, Gazipur, 2003 Act' published in Bangladesh Gazette on July 19, 2003, HSC passed students should be given priority to sit for admission test at DUET. DUET should frame its admission policy accordingly. **Md. Mahbubur Rahman Shohag**

Sher-e-Bangla Nagar, Dhaka

Let the leader of the opposition speak

In a placid, friendly and pleasant atmosphere and get-together graced by many top BNP, Awami League MPs and other VVIPs organised by Dhaka Reporters Unity at National Press Club, the LGRD Minister and BNP Secretary General Abdul Mannan Bhuyian said when the Awami League was in power the BNP boycotted parliament and now it is the Awami League that has been boycotting parliament. He is right, but how can we get out of the deadlock? We do not like to go into any type

of debate on the issue. It is of no use. The debate will never end.

What we strongly feel and seriously mean is that both the ruling and opposition MPs should jointly make our Jatuya Sangsad effective and lively to deliver public service and ensure accountability and transparency.

We feel that as a special case, whoever be the leader of the opposition in the JS, of Awami League, BNP or any other political party, she/he may be allowed to speak in parliament as long as she/he likes, but not for more than two hours at a stretch without any break on any day or night. Once she/he has spoken for one minute, five minutes,

ten minutes to two hours, the opposition leader may not be allowed to speak for the second time on the day. In this connection, we would request the JS in general and the speaker in particular to kindly frame the necessary rules.

No one should bother about the length and breadth of the speech of the leader of the opposition in the JS. Whether the speech is relevant, irrelevant, time consuming, interesting or boring, it does not matter. We are of the opinion that the presence of the leader of the opposition and opposition MPs is far more welcome than their absence from the JS on the allegation that the leader of the opposition is not allowed to speak

The special privilege and honour 'Speak as you like for two hours' should be enjoyed only by the leader of the opposition in the JS. We all must move with time and tide to make our democracy successful. **OH Kabir Dhaka-1203**

Learn to use space

President Bush claims to be sincere in his benign approach to teach millions of "foreign" humans some hard lessons. Now he has to come or go through the animals, who have presented the heads of states with the mad cow disease and the chicken flu (despite the appreciative

camera work on the surface of the planet Mars).

Next the trees, namely the vegetable kingdom might revolt with the new variations of GE (genetically-engineered) problems. The human genome is on the experiment list. Science is surely getting secular! The ancient mystics said that you should keep your heart empty. So that it could be filled up, from time to time, with the necessary inputs for harmonious living. Similarly, what is useful in a glass or cup is the empty space, which is used again and again for filling with water or any other liquid for drinking. Water, another miracle, always comes down to the lowest level. The new

millennium philosophy appears to be: the higher the better.

Alif Zabr

India-Pakistan cricket series

All cricket fans across the world are now waiting in a feverish mood for the upcoming India-Pakistan series. This series is very significant for many reasons. First of all, it should remove, or at least lessen, the political tension between the two neighbouring countries. Then again we can now hope for more cricket matches between them.

India-Pakistan cricket matches always generate huge excitement

and joy for the fans. So any attempt to prevent such matches will not bring any glory; rather it will deprive millions of cricket fans of some thrilling encounters. We should congratulate the governments of the two countries for taking this bold decision.

Cricket should be above all politics. As a true cricket fan, I am looking forward to a series full of crowd-pleasing cricket. And at the same time, I wish all the best to our Tigers now in Zimbabwe. I hope they will prove that the fine showing against Pakistan was no fluke.

Nazmus Saquib
Mayakanan, Dhaka.