

Commission on police brutality

The report should reflect the truth

WITH the formation of a judicial enquiry commission by the government to get to the bottom of the deplorable incident of police brutality on the sports and photojournalists at Chittagong stadium on April 16, the stalemate seems to have ended for the moment. Expressing regrets on behalf of the government for the incident, the state minister for home affairs announced that the one-man commission has been instructed to submit the probe report within the next fifteen days and the same would be made public accordingly. He further said that on the basis of the recommendation of the commission official action would be taken against the guilty persons.

While we view the latest development as a positive outcome, we feel the government's conceding to the demands of the aggrieved parties came about only after the latter took a firm stand against the police action and sought immediate intervention of the law of the land. There is a widespread impression in the minds of the people that if justice is now foreseeable it is only because the journalist community had taken to the streets in a body and boycotted coverage of the ongoing Australia-Bangladesh cricket match.

It is only natural that journalists should have easy access to places where things are happening and it remains the duty of the organisers and law enforcing agencies to ensure that the former may perform their duties efficiently. But the unruly conduct of some members of the force at Chittagong stadium who were supposed to keep law and order and extend support to the journalists grossly undermined the image of the police as a state organ. There is enough evidence to support the claim that the attack on the journalists in full view of the whole world was extremely vengeful in nature. It deserved immediate and sterner action. And while we are totally with the journalist community in seeking justice, we at the same time feel journalist professional bodies must all introspect and put their heads together to devise means to avoid recurrence of such incidences in the future.

Now that the commission is going around digging into the affair, we hope it will be able to perform its responsibilities without any fear or favour and submit the report in time. We also hope the report will reveal the whole extent of the wrongdoing and the culprits will be given due punishment in accordance with the pledge given by the government.

Abuse of domestic help must stop

People responsible should be given exemplary punishment

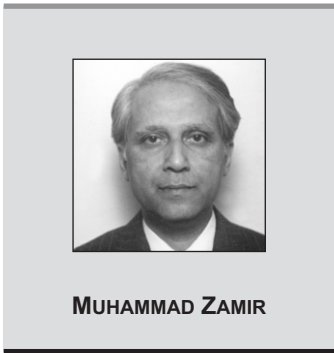
THE other day a boy and a girl aged 9 and 8, respectively, fled the house of their employer Moqbul Hossain in order to escape physical torture by the latter and his wife. They were working there as domestic help. Alam, the boy, told The Daily Star that he and the girl were not only pinched in their bellies by the lady of the house with her sharp nails but also were subjected to caning very often over trifling matters.

Abuse of domestic help is quite frequent in our society. They come from an environment of extreme poverty and neglect, and thus are almost helpless. The scale of incidences of torture by householders and inmates on them is much more than are actually reported. For fear of reprisals victims often continue to suffer silently. In the case of minors it is twice more horrific and tragic.

We therefore feel that tortures and abuse of domestic help, particularly minor children, should receive special attention of the administration. While all accused of the offence should be dealt with severely, exemplary punishment should be meted out to the abusers of minor children. One of the main causes of rising incidences of abuse of domestic help appears to be the administration's failure in bringing to justice confirmed offenders. In not too distant a past we saw reports of a number of severely tortured domestic help undergoing treatment in hospitals. No one knows as to what happened either to them or the offenders thereafter.

Domestic violence and torture has a social perspective too. Those who commit such crimes are sick in mind. It is thus important that alongside the administration our civil society particularly those involved with child and woman's rights (NGOs) also gear up their efforts in building a social awareness in this regard especially amongst the urban population, where most of such domestic help find their employment. The administration in turn should also, through the electronic and other media, embark on an extensive awareness campaign focusing on the legal and social aspects of the crimes.

Reforms dialogue goes nowhere



MUHAMMAD ZAMIR

THE latest episode in the exchange of letters saga was aired in the electronic media this week. Awami League has now indicated the five representatives who are expected to participate on their behalf, in the Joint Committee, to discuss the reforms proposals, as placed in the Parliament in the second week of February this year, by the Leader of the Opposition.

The government has approached the question of reforms in a typical bureaucratic manner. This was their deliberate choice. It was done with clear knowledge that the best way to kill reforms proposals would be to set up a committee, whose terms of composition and agenda would remain vague. They knew full well, that considerable time would be spent in thrashing out the procedural aspects, leaving little time for actual discussion on substantive issues and implementation of agreed decisions.

Progress in reform talks has been like the proverbial snail climbing a greased pole. Carrots were dangled and expectations rose – to be eventually dashed through spanners.

Nearly two and half months have

elapsed since Sheikh Hasina placed her demands for reforms in the Jatiya Sangsad. Many friends had advised the Awami League that this was the best course of action. It had also been pointed out that this was the democratic norm. Well, that was done. So many weeks later, the two sides have yet to agree on the procedural format. The whole process continues to become more complex by the day. The clock continues to tick away and we now have less than six months left before this administration completes its

denied by the other hand.

Ordinary citizens like us do understand that our government agreed to such a dialogue on the repeated suggestions of our foreign friends. It now appears that this course of action was agreed to by the government for two reasons – to keep the donor countries happy, and also, if possible, to keep Opposition demonstrators away from the streets.

What is clearly absent is political will. Otherwise, senior government political functionaries would not

people went a resolution of the persisting political crisis. They have their hands full with the sharp rise in the cost of living. Pervasive corruption and terrorism have tainted our national image. It is one thing to be on the Time magazine cover and claim that terrorism has been dealt with satisfactorily. It is another, when we read that the Australian government is sufficiently concerned about terrorism in Bangladesh, to propose the opening of a Federal police office in Bangladesh. Appointing expensive lobbyists will

tion of the main parties belonging to the Opposition will hardly count, or be treated as kosher.

Currently, things appear to have come to a boil, where the Awami League and other members of the 14-Party Alliance have suggested that they are unwilling to sit in a dialogue with representatives of parties who were associated in anti-liberation activities in 1971. This for them is a matter of principle. They are willing to sit with them as elected representatives in the Jatiya Sangsad, but not sit in a dialogue, in

progress.

It is time the government treats the whole issue of dialogue with some seriousness. No thought appears to have been given as yet to substantive issues and to the drafting of an agenda. These are basic first steps.

There are many significant questions that have remained unanswered. Some of these, like the preparation of the electoral rolls, have already become the subject of litigation in higher courts. These have to be resolved expeditiously.

The Election Commission comes foremost in this regard. The manner in which this institution is functioning reflects irresponsibility. It is already mired in a credibility gap – thanks to the Chief Election Commissioner. Instead of strengthening its independence, the past few months have seen the government deliberately embroiling it in all forms of unnecessary controversy.

The situation is sensitive. We must understand that uncertainty in politics will only ensure instability that can never be explained away by lobbyists. It will also affect our trade and impact on our competitive advantage. It will also certainly reduce potential foreign direct investment that has become so crucial for improving our existing infrastructure.

Reforms are required in order for us to move forward. Let reason, for a change, rule over emotion and partisanship – guided by an inordinate quest to stay in power for the sake of power, and not the welfare of the people.

Muhammad Zamir is a former Secretary and Ambassador who can be reached at mzamir@dhaka.net

POST BREAKFAST

Let the discussion and the dialogue be between the Awami League and the BNP. These principal political parties could brief others in the respective camps later. This will facilitate progress. It is time the government treats the whole issue of dialogue with some seriousness. No thought appears to have been given as yet to substantive issues and to the drafting of an agenda. These are basic first steps.

tenure and hands over power to the next caretaker government.

What we have today is a standoff where representatives of the Administration are persisting in double-speak. On the one hand we have the secretary general of the BNP urging the Opposition to continue their efforts towards dialogue. On the other, we have the Prime Minister, the leader of the secretary general's party stating that no reform is really required either in the electoral system or in the present format of the caretaker government. We have a situation where we are experiencing Kabuki theatre, where in a shadow play, one hand is offering a course of action which is being

continue to remind journalists that the government has a few months left of their tenure and that the Opposition will be unable to dislodge them by force from their current responsibility. Their spirit is one of confrontation, not dialogue or understanding. There is no hint of compromise.

The government will do well to understand that their clever politics through exchange of letters will not enhance their standing and support within the broad electorate. You can after all, fool some of the people some of the time, but definitely, not all the time.

The situation as it stands today is far from satisfactory. Common

also not ameliorate the sufferings of the common man. Absence of utilities – electricity, gas and clean water – has made daily existence tiresome for millions in the urban areas. In some villages, deficiency of fertilizers and electricity has led to bloodshed and turmoil.

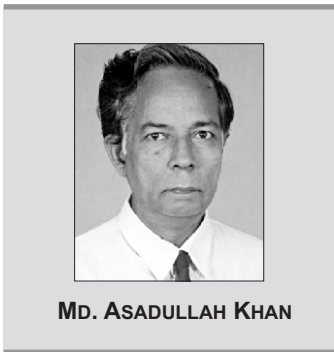
One can only comment that while Rome continues to burn, Nero is still playing with his fiddle.

We have seen how pre-meditated efforts have been undertaken to influence possible course of future events. In this context, it needs to be remembered, that bending the matrix and creating an uneven pitch will fail in the long run. Any election without the participa-

the context of the reforms proposals. This is so, because the Opposition is now convinced that these Islamic parties have been deeply involved in encouraging not only extremism, terrorism and militancy but also in working against the pillars of the state that are codified in the Constitution. They also believe that these forces have subverted secularism within the country.

Let the BNP consider taking the same course of action as has been done by the Awami League. Let the discussion and the dialogue be between the Awami League and the BNP. These principal political parties could brief others in the respective camps later. This will facilitate

Enlightened choice will bring about the best in the polls



MD. ASADULLAH KHAN

THE forthcoming parliamentary election in the country could well turn out to be a poll that marks a turning point in Bangladeshi politics. Exasperated with the experience of three democratic governments in 15 years, with one party coming twice in power and protracted bouts of non-governance, the voters in the country have a chance of either putting things straight or catapulting the country into an existential crisis.

In retrospect, the 2007 election may be a mere episode in the country's development into a mature democracy but it will be an occasion for the voters to exercise some real options: (1) Is single party rule preferable to unstable and shaky coalition of parties with divergent ideologies? (2) Can pre-poll coalitions provide greater stability than post-election arrangement of expediency? (3) Is religious identity espousing mainly radical views, policies and actions more relevant than actual governance? (4) Can the country afford either a PM or ministers who lack mass bases and countrywide acceptance? (5) Should professed ideology take precedence over the cohesiveness of the country?

These are complex questions with no easy answers. But it was the inability of the electorate to address these questions in 2001 that led to the present government becoming a non-performer in governance as well as in all sectors of development activities. People are afraid that the repetition of the same drama in the forthcoming election will have a tell-tale effect on the body politics of the nation. With the parliamentary election due in about eight months

from now, we will hear much in the coming months about "the people." Every politician willing to contest in the forthcoming election including the incumbent MPs and those waiting in the wings with huge black money will be wandering about the country telling us how much his heart bleeds for the people, how it is only for them that he works, and how it is only their interest he cares about.

Alas! how can these politicians, almost all of them incumbent MPs, who will be contesting in the next polls, do it in such a critical period of

has put the agricultural practices to a grinding halt. Boro production in this season that is critically dependent on power for operating the well to provide irrigation water to the crop fields is constrained for shortage of power. Compounded by the fertilizer crisis that is essentially necessary to augment production, the farmers have been pushed to the wall.

The simmering frustration in having their grievances met through these long four years of alliance rule has forced them to come out in the street and press home their demand through agitation in some remote

a way that puts the whole nation to shame.

Conspicuously true, if these people were literate, the lack of these amenities would be the big issues in the forthcoming election and our politicians would have thought hundred times before they had allegedly laced their own pockets. The sad commentary is that Bangladesh is a poor country because poverty has become a constituency which is carefully nurtured by politicians of every hue. Think about the fact that our politicians and bureaucrats talk about

time for the nation to speak to its conscience.

With the country reeling under the trauma of bomb blasts and shortages of everything other than human misery, and government measures providing little succour, the prospect of a catastrophic situation looms large. The debilitating results are now showing up. Undeniably true, the country's politics-cum-bureaucracy is a blight on the nation. The dual tier now exists not to serve the people but to feed itself and, sadly enough, the poor taxpayers have the privilege of

politics is not reflected merely in electoral battles. For instance, the criminalisation of politics can be directly linked to politicisation of criminal investigation. It is an open secret that if a member of the parliament, political worker and party loyalist have a long criminal record but escape punishment in the law courts due to some lacunae in the law or lapses in the investigation methods, inept police action or manipulation of evidence. Unless the EC must be manned by people of strong morality, integrity, dedication and commitment with no further ambition for future posting or promotion after completing this stupendous job. The country now needs a vigilant EC and not a vigilante EC. This is not to suggest that the commission should give up their arms before the battle has begun. Let us look back to the events in the conduct of polls in India in the yester years. During his term as CEC, TN Seshan, despite his occasional over-zealousness, made it apparent that existing norms are enough to confront electoral malpractices. With the country mired in political squabbles, election commissioners are sentinels of the constitution. When they wield the big stick, politicians, otherwise used to having their way, cower. With the parliamentary polls eight months away, there is still time for the parties to discover the virtues of rectitude and ostracise criminals within. Nevertheless, if every party simply makes apparent its stand on a handful of crucial social and economic issues, the electorate will be better equipped to make its choice and save itself and the nation from further catastrophic situation.

But the battle is a larger one. To truly combat the criminals who rule them, citizens will have to address issues such as autonomy for bodies like ACC, EC, CID and Tax departments and the qualities of lower judiciary that seem to be eroding fast. The EC must be manned by people of strong morality, integrity, dedication and commitment with no further ambition for future posting or promotion after completing this stupendous job. The country now needs a vigilant EC and not a vigilante EC. This is not to suggest that the commission should give up their arms before the battle has begun. Let us look back to the events in the conduct of polls in India in the yester years. During his term as CEC, TN Seshan, despite his occasional over-zealousness, made it apparent that existing norms are enough to confront electoral malpractices. With the country mired in political squabbles, election commissioners are sentinels of the constitution. When they wield the big stick, politicians, otherwise used to having their way, cower. With the parliamentary polls eight months away, there is still time for the parties to discover the virtues of rectitude and ostracise criminals within. Nevertheless, if every party simply makes apparent its stand on a handful of crucial social and economic issues, the electorate will be better equipped to make its choice and save itself and the nation from further catastrophic situation.

With that objective in mind, the nation is looking for an independent election commission with no partisan bias and fully neutral and non-party caretaker government that will take every possible measure to ensure a free and fair poll. People's concern about criminals entering the Parliament and hope that parties will field candidates who are persons of probity and excellence are also unexceptionable. People are looking for an EC that will make every possible effort to strictly enforce a code of conduct like the Representation of the People's Act now in force in India with the agreement of the political parties. The EC through enforcement of such act after scrutinising the related papers and the background of the prospective candidate will ban a convicted criminal and black money holder from contesting the election.

It must be recognised that cleansing the country's over-tainted polity is the primary task of the EC. Surely, the nexus of crime and

Md Asadullah Khan is a former teacher of physics and Controller of Examinations BUET.

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.

Police attack on journalists

A picture is worth more than thousand words. But I strongly feel that the two pictures you published (CMP DC punching and three other cops beating that veteran journalist) are stronger than a million words.

My hearty sympathy for the old journalist and others who got hurt or insulted. I urge you to remain firm on your demands that the authorities bring the culprits to justice. Please rest assured that we consider this barbaric police action much more serious than getting the coverage reports on BD-AUS cricket series. I am a staunch fan of BD cricket and cricket in general and follow almost all the related reports but this atrocity is a bigger deal to me.

Hope this time we can force the government take the appropriate actions and justice gets served in its purest form.

Mahmudur Rahman

On e-mail

This seems to be a great and practical way of image building. Where do these characters come from? Sorry, to ask that, because these are the very policemen who had been working around us. Well, aren't they part of our society? Because, our society used to be a place where there used to be some respect for each other, not to speak of for the elderly.

Such an incident in a cricket field, a place of sport and sportsmanship, is of course not going to enhance our image greatly even more with the hiring of lobbyist (a value addition!). When will we learn to tolerate and respect. No matter, how much the country is growing, if we loose our values, we loose everything. Take a look at the young people, do they look like policemen or party cadres? Just change the clothes and everything looks clear.

Reader On e-mail

Projector in classroom

We are the student of Social Welfare and Research, Dhaka University. Every year our institute arranges some classes by the experts of UNDP and the ministry of food and disaster management on Natural Disaster. Like other years this year also it arranged and we were astonished to see the use and effectivity of using multimedia projector. What we did not properly understand by only lecture, we understood that by the help of multimedia. Our special thanks to S M Morshed Sir and our Director A S M Atiqur Rahman for arranging such important classes. Mainly we are very much grateful to Morshed Sir for his kind efforts. We are surely benefited with these classes.

When the world is benefited with the use of modern technologies, we

are far from the modern technologies in our study. It is great shame, that a student of private university gets all kinds of facilities while we are not getting minimum facilities in our class rooms though we are the student of Dhaka University known as the Oxford of the East. We may hope to have minimum one multimedia projector in our institute so that we can continue our study with modern technology.

Mohaimin On e-mail

Bridge over the Karnaphuli

Every morning I have to cross the road bridge over the Karnaphuli on way to my workplace. The smaller buses, the most convenient mode of transport, use this bridge made of wooden planks supported on steel structure. As my bus enters the bridge, I can hear the deafening noise produced

by those planks clattering against one another. There are some blanks in between the planks which pose a serious threat to the safety of the passengers. Looking through the window of the bus, I can see some workers who are busy repairing a worn out plank. However, there is another bridge over the river --the rail bridge that is a century old structure. Apart from the trains, bigger buses use this bridge. The fact remains that we do not have a bridge over the river, which could facilitate our journey to the southern part of Chittagong. Finally, I would like to call the road bridge the wooden woe of Chittagong. Should the authorities take notice of all this?

Md Zabed Wai Patya, Chittagong

Dialogues on election reform

The dialogues between government and opposition about the proposed election reform in Bangladesh are again hanging in uncertainties. Although, the burden of holding a fair and fruitful negotiation lies more with the government than with the opposition parties, but opposition parties also have responsibility to make it happen.

The pre-condition set by the opposition for the dialogue with the government is not helpful to anybody. The opposition can achieve much from the dialogue than by not attending it.

The ultimate victims of this political stand-off will be the people of Bangladesh and nothing is responsible for this other than the ego of the politicians of our country. I hope that the leaders of the fourteen parties opposition will shed their own ego and accept government's offer for dialogue for the election reform in the greater interest of the country.

Mahabub Choudhury

Millford, Mass, USA

Seeing off the PM

The Daily Star recently reported that that VVIP flight of Biman carrying the Prime Minister and her entourage to Turkey was seen off by the Finance and Planning Minister, LGRD and Cooperatives Minister, Health and Family Welfare Minister, Dhaka City Mayor, Chiefs of the three military services, diplomats, and senior civil and military officials.

Is it really necessary that the ministers and service chiefs see off (and welcome back) the prime minister every time she travels? Other than the embassy representatives of the country she's visiting, is it necessary that diplomats see her off? Can't the prime minister travel without it being a celebratory event? Who sees her off is less important than her travel.

When the leaders of countries like UK, US, China, India, Russia, France and others travel abroad, the reason

for travelling happens to be the story, not who showed up at the airport, if anyone even did show up.

For that matter, is it necessary to say that the flight is a VVIP flight? Just because the Prime Minister is on board? Can we not, at this point in time, simply say 'the flight carrying the Prime Minister'? Or does the press (and government) believe we'll think less of those onboard if they're not identified as VVIP?

Why can't the press simply report the story as: "The Prime Minister departed yesterday for a four-day state visit to Turkey on board Biman Bangladesh Airlines. She is leading the Bangladesh delegation to official an talk, which are expected to include trade and investment between the two countries..."

M M Haque Dhaka