Eyeing on National Consensus

In the upcoming dialogue with the political parties the caretaker government may try to forge a consensus on issues of national interests, newspaper reports, quoting three advisers, have said. The dialogue will be aimed at building an atmosphere so that the ongoing process of political reform continues after an elected government takes over after the general elections. The issues that can be raised include: Hartal, making the political institutions effective and the drive against corruption. Along with these, solving ways to pre-election problems like "reforms in political parties to ensure financial transparency and practice of democracy within the parties, nomination of honest and efficient candidates for polls, code of conduct for the parties after withdrawal of the state of emergency and creating a congenial atmosphere for free and fair election might be raised", a Daily Star report has said. As soon as the dialogue with the Election Commission finishes, the government may declare the date of the talks with the political parties. While many observers believe that the talks should evolve around strengthening democracy, only time can say if it will be able to do it or not.

The Leaking Saga

What is it with exams and question papers in Bangladesh? It seems that there is invariably someone involved with the administrative responsibilities who is very magnanimous and concerned about the students' future. So much concerned is this person that he/she will go to any lengths to make the question papers available to the students (for a price of course) in advance of the examination. As infuriating as it must be for the hard-working student, it really is nothing new in this country.

For the students appearing for the National University examinations this year it was déjà vu three times in a row. When on the evening of January 28 rumours spread like wildfire that the English Language examination papers were leaked the students went berserk. The examinations had been held once before on November 11 just to be cancelled later following a previous question paper leak. The questions for the English comprehensive examinations of the honours part-2 course for the bachelor's degree were leaked on January 11 and the exams were cancelled for the second time. The third turned out to be just a rumour, but with questions and examinations, no one can ever be too sure.

There is a revolting culture for question paper leaks it seems. The BCS question papers were leaked four years in a row. During the BNP rule apparently one JCD leader earned Tk 2 lakh in a matter of days just by selling copies of the leaked question papers of the 27th BCS preliminary examinations held in 2005.

It is an understatement to say that our education system needs major reforms but if the authorities don't take notice of these great shortfalls our students will fall way behind in international competition and the job market in our country will be full of unqualified and corrupt people.

The Never-ending Probe

A discussion at the Poet Sufia Kamal Auditorium of the National Museum on Monday resurrected past discontent among Awami League members about the murder of former Finance Minister SAMS Kibria at a rally in Habiganj on January 27, 2005. The discussion was in commemoration of the third death anniversary of the former minister's death, organised by the Bangladesh Foundation for Development Research (BFDR). The masterminds behind the grenade attack that killed Kibria have still not been punished and, according to AL members and Kibria's son, Dr Reza Kibria the alleged involvement of the BNP-Jamaat government is being swept under the carpet, while the sole blame is being put on Harkat-ul Jihad al-Islami (Huji).

While the AL members believe that the Huji was indeed involved in the attack, AL leader Abul Mal Abdul Muhith also alluded directly to former bigwigs of BNP, claiming that former BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia, her son Tarek Rahman, Motiur Rahman Nizami, Lutfozzaman Babar and Saifur Rahman, were all in some way connected to the planning of the attacks and asked that they be tried.

The attack on SAMS Kibria in 2005 was, very much like the August 21, 2004 attacks on an AL rally in the capital, was seen by the public as an attack on democracy, in which opposition leaders were, one by one, being eliminated. AL leaders have expressed their discontent about the slow progress of the case and the probe and have been trying for the last three years to bring this case into the light and try those who are responsible for the bloody attack that will be remembered for years to come.