

Adopting a national charter

The nation is passing through a critical juncture. As such, it would be proper to cooperate with the government instead of finding its faults. By now the government should understand that even the best of rules and regulations do not bring good results without cooperation of the people.

A.B.M.S. ZAHUR

THE chief adviser addressed the nation on May 12. The main points that emerged from the speech are: A formal dialogue with the political parties (May 22) and a fresh assurance about holding the national election in 2008. It indicates that the CTG is passing through a critical period. However, it could not clarify:

- The date of lifting of emergency, reform of political parties, and
- Participation of the two chiefs of the major political parties in the dialogue.

We hope that things will be clear after the proposed dialogue is over.

The leaders of major parties (except a part of BNP) expressed disappointment because, to them, "it failed to reflect the hopes and aspirations of the people." The AL and the pro-Khaleda faction of BNP are totally disappointed because the speech

did not indicate the date of lifting of the emergency and release of the two detained former premiers.

The present political situation reminds us of the observation made by the veteran political thinker Professor Rehman Sobhan that exit from power of the CTG may be difficult. Thus, we cannot have high expectation from the pre-dialogue speech of the CA.

Even the outcome of this dialogue is not certain. What we can gather from different reports is that there exists some sort of lack of confidence and mutual trust between the CTG and the political parties. Because of inadequate freedom of the media, we have no one to clarify as to why such a situation has been created. A number of questions agitate our minds. They are:

- Is the CTG really bent upon re-establishing true democracy in the country?

• How far is the CTG determined about the reforms of political parties (particularly about their democratisation)?

• How can the so-called "indifferent national unity" be transformed into national unity to achieve the goal of holding a free, fair and acceptable election as per the earlier announced roadmap?

• How can mutual respect among political parties for each other as well as cordial and effective relationship among them be attained?

• How can the culture of "lackey politics" be eliminated?

• How can the people be restrained from participating in destructive politics?

No doubt, the CTG, supported by the armed forces, saved the nation from disaster. Like other caretaker governments, it was established only to carry on routine functions of the government for 90 days or so. It was absolutely necessary to put the derailed

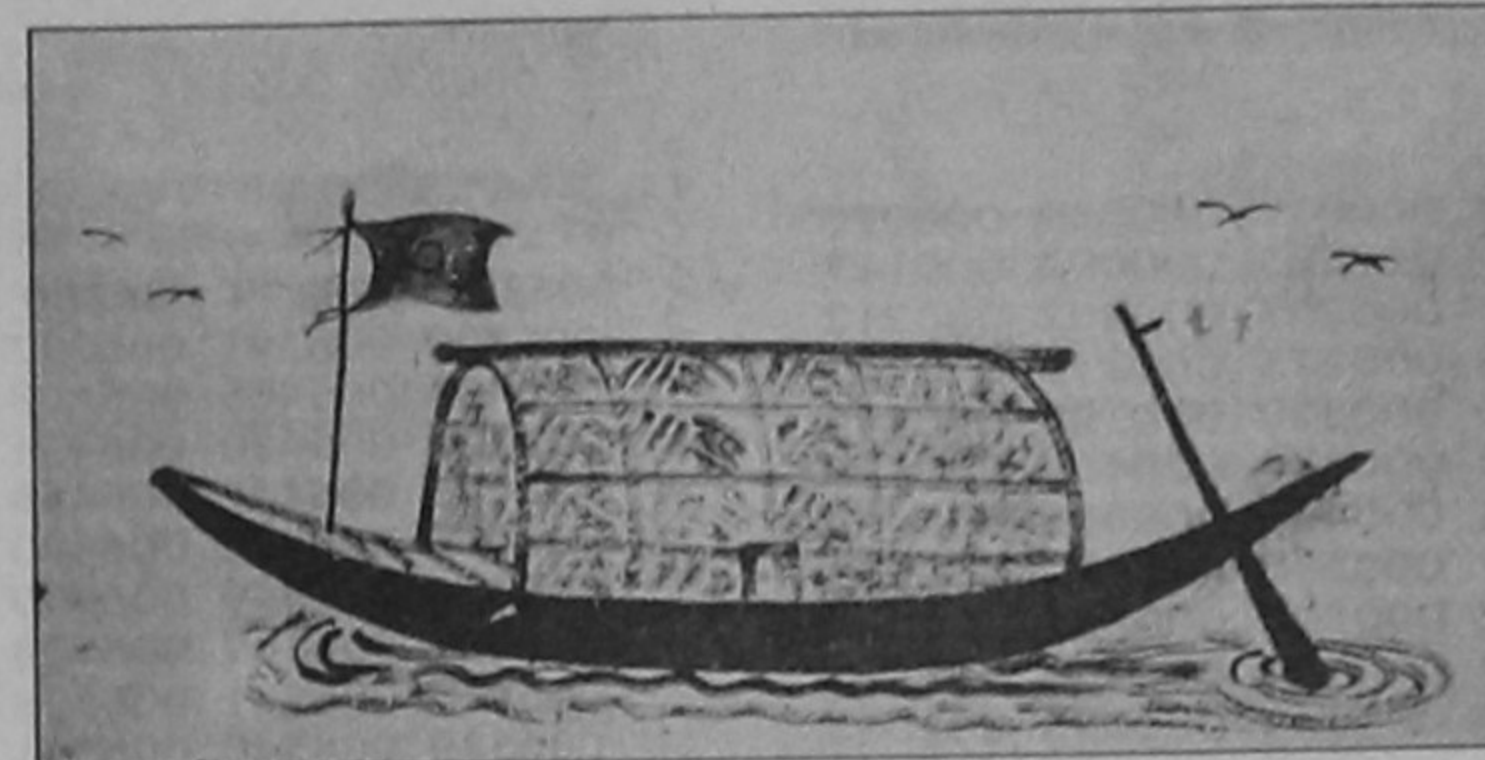
nation back on track. Thus, it had to work more like an interim government and less like a non-party neutral caretaker government.

We are grateful to the CTG for handling so many reforms and natural calamities with such a crippled and politicised administration. We should not be miserly in appreciating the fact that we could see some glimpse of good governance during this period.

In appreciating the performance of the CTG, let us not ignore the good deeds during 1991-2006. The roots of democracy were seriously damaged by the dictatorial regimes of Ziaur Rahman and H.M. Ershad. Both the ladies who headed the democratic regimes after abdication of Ershad lacked knowledge and experience of running a democratic state.

Whatever we say about these ladies, the people who are deeply attached to the two major political parties may never leave them, because they are aware of the contributions made by the two ladies in consolidating their respective parties.

Thus, it is difficult to ignore them for the dialogue. However,



Come together

this does not mean that these ladies are above the law. Rule of law must equally be applied to them.

The nation is passing through a critical juncture. As such, it would be proper to cooperate with the government instead of finding its faults. By now the government should understand that even the best of rules and regulations do not bring good results without cooperation of the people.

It would be relevant to point out that effective cooperation from the media is essential for developing a clearer understanding of the good wishes of the government. In fact, the media can generate better understanding between political

parties and the government

The political parties, it appears, are not hopeful about a positive outcome of the dialogue. The caretaker government is aware of the need for reaching a satisfactory understanding with the political parties, particularly the major ones.

Both the parties will have to be flexible. For negotiating with the politicians, a change of attitude of the CTG is needed. It will have to accept that without experienced politicians a parliamentary democracy cannot run.

The people of Bangladesh have changed appreciably during the last 16 months. No longer is the power of muscle and money as effective as it was



before 1/11. At the same time, it has to be agreed that true democracy is only possible where the level of literacy is fairly high and percentage of poverty is low.

The political parties, particularly the major ones, must realise that they should love the country first, then their parties and then their leaders. They must appreciate the need for establishing democratic parties within which democratic practices prevail. No longer do our people want destructive politics. The politicians must remember that establishment of this government is due to their mistakes.

The present government has reached the final stage of its

performance. To restore democracy through a free, fair and credible election, it is essential that the politicians agree to reforms done by the CTG.

For the benefit of the party and development of democracy and the country, all the political parties may seriously consider reforming themselves to become democratic and modern.

They should no longer consider the CTG as their opponent. It is simply a non-party and neutral caretaker government. The earlier they receive power from the caretaker the better for the people and the country. We wish a successful end of the CTG, with good name and dignity.

A.B.M.S. Zahur is a former joint secretary.

Birth of Israel brings misery to Palestinians

Violence began with the birth of the State of Israel. There is no end in sight to the violence. Palestinians became refugees in their own land, as hundreds of them left for Gaza and other Arab countries and Europe to save their lives. Jews who escaped from persecution of Nazi Germany and Russia were gradually settled in the newly established state.

MOHAMMAD AMJAD HOSSAIN

THE celebration of 60 years of the establishment of the state of Israel on Palestinian territories was marked with mixed feeling, rekindling memories of the killing of hundreds of people on both sides when the UN partitioned Palestine into Arab and Jewish states in 1947. It may be recalled that a similar massacres took place in the sub-continent when the British partitioned India into Pakistan and India in 1947.

However, the genesis of the Arab-Israeli conflict dates back to Britain's Balfour declaration of November 2, 1917 -- named after British Foreign Secretary Arthur James Balfour -- that turned the tide in favour of establishing a home for the world's persecuted

Jews in Palestine. Jews were handed an official declaration of British sympathy for the Jews persecuted by Europeans. Arabs denounced this declaration, which was incompatible with the promises made to Sharif Hussein of Mecca.

In 1916, there had been a number of exchanges of confidential letters between Sharif Hussein -- self-proclaimed King of the Arabs -- and Sir Henry McMahon, the British ambassador in Egypt to discuss the terms for joining the British to drive out the Ottoman regime in exchange of recognition of the independence of Arab countries except Aden.

Britain had accepted the proposal with the exception of certain areas she felt were not purely Arab lands. Lt. Col. T.E. Lawrence, who distinguished himself as Lawrence of Arabia because of his valour and

negotiating skills during Arab revolt in favour of the British, pointed out the deception made by the British against Arabs in the following words: "The airy birds of promise so freely sent to the Arabs in England's days of need were homing now, to her confusion."

Israel declared unilateral independence on May 14, 1948 without going through the United Nations. The UN adopted a plan for the creation of an Arab and Jewish state with Jerusalem having international status. The General Assembly of the UN appointed Count Folke Bernadotte of Sweden on May 14, 1948 as UN mediator to promote peaceful settlement of the situation in Palestine. The area was under the administration of Great Britain, as per mandate of the League of Nations, following the defeat of the Ottoman Empire.

UDI came on the same day

when the Jewish terrorist group, the Stern gang, assassinated Count Folke on September 11, 1948 in Jerusalem. The trend in Israel was to stop peaceful settlement of the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians. It was followed by the assassination of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin by a right wing Jewish fanatic to sabotage the Oslo peace treaty signed by Rabin with Palestinian authority chairman Yasser Arafat in 1993.

Incidentally, the United States was the first country to recognise the provisional government as the de facto authority of the Jewish state within a few minutes after declaration of UDI. According to Richard Holbrooke, former deputy secretary of state, President Harry Truman recognised the newly born state by himself without going through the process. Neither the secretary of state nor the congress approved.

President George W. Bush attended official ceremony of the 60th anniversary of the state of Israel in Jerusalem on May 14 to show fraternal feeling towards a strongly ally in the Middle East.

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The announcement of UDI was followed by a war between Arab states and Israel. The state of Israel fought for Jerusalem -- holy city for Muslims, and Christians -- during "Israel's war of independence" in 1948. That war led to at least 700,000 Palestinians to take shelter in the Gaza strip.

The six-day war in 1967 brought debacle to Arab countries, particularly to Egypt and Syria. Israel occupied the West Bank, Gaza Strip and Golan Heights. The 1973 Yom Kippur war followed. In 1982, Lebanon war saw the massacre of Palestinian refugees at Sabra and Shatila near Beirut. Defense Minister Ariel Sharon was alone responsible for the massacre of Palestinians and in expanding Jewish settlements by confiscating more lands.

He was instrumental, as prime minister, in carrying out massacre of Palestinians in Gaza Strip and the West Bank during the last half of 2002. The envoy of the secretary general of UN described the devastation, in Jenin in particular, as horrible beyond belief. He was reported to have said that the Jewish state had been morally repugnant.

Israel is a tiny state of barely 200 square miles, but its survival is remarkable in view of the war with five of its Arab neighbours since 1948. Lebanon, another Arab neighbour, has been a target of Israeli attack since 1975. In 2006, Lebanon was attacked four times by Israel. UN Security Council condemned Israel. The world body initiated no action. Only two Arab states recognised the state of Israel since the defeat in 1967. Israel is militarily much superior to the combined forces in the Gulf region, and the only country in the Middle East which is a nuclear power.

Palestinians have been subjected to humiliation by Israeli troops time and again, but no Arab country has accorded military support to the Palestinian cause.

None of the Arab countries is democratic, including Israel. Israel could be described as a military regime rather than a dictatorship one. All Arab countries have, more or less, experienced coups, assassination or uprisings. These countries, therefore, remain vulnerable to external pressure.

Israeli apartheid and the latest assault on Gaza strip are supported by the US administration because of Israel's vital role in Washington's project of Middle East domination. That is why Israel receives more military and economic aid without any string from the US -- over \$5 billion annually -- than any other country could think of.

While a great hue and cry is heard in the mass media in the US about one captured Israeli soldier, the same media pays no attention whatsoever to the 9800 Palestinian political prisoners being held illegally. At least 335 of them are children. This is the state of conflict between Israel and Palestinians. The illegal arrest of political prisoners, its gross discrimination against non-Jews in Israel, its continued expansion of territory illegally, expropriation of water resources,

and cowardly treatment of Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza strip show that Israel does not believe in human rights.

Weeklong festivities saw clashes between Israeli Arab protesters and Israeli police in Jerusalem. In Bethlehem, villagers marched with a huge key to symbolise the hope of Palestinians refugees about returning to their homes, which are in Israel. There is indication on the ground that the road map for bringing peace in the Middle East is likely to meet the fate of Reagan peace plan, Camp David Plan, Mitchell report, and Oslo peace treaty, which have been thrown into the trash bin of history.

60 years of pain and frustration could be alleviated if the US and other players in the West and Middle East understand the underlying trend in the politics of Israel and the Jewish lobby in Washington, and bring justice and fair play in resolving the conflict once for all -- for the sake of Palestinians, Arabs and the Israeli too.

Mohammad Amjad Hossain, former Bangladesh diplomat, writes from Virginia.

Where leaders are made

Rangita de Silva-de Alwis from Wellesley College says this course will "provide an alternative discourse to challenge prevailing norms on gender in Asia and help students become a vital part of Asia's new role in global, social, and economic development, or what Susan Roosevelt Weld refers to as 'Asia Rising.'" Rangita de Silva-de Alwis is the senior adviser for international programs at the Wellesley Centers for Women (WCW) at Wellesley College in the United States.

SAUSHAN RAHMAN

AFTER much anticipation, Asian University for Women started its journey on April 5. With the aim to bring out the leadership quality of the students, the university is offering international quality of education to the students. This private educational institution aims to help underprivileged girls to become educated, self-employed and ready to face any challenge that comes their way. The university is the brainchild of Kamal Ahmed, a Bangladeshi born corporate lawyer working with the Asian Development Bank.

The university will be following a liberal arts curriculum, and some of the courses that will be offered are IT and Sustainable Development, Environmental Engineering, Public Policy etc. But one of the fascinating features of the institution is that all the second year students will be required to take a course in Women Shaping Society. Rangita de Silva-de Alwis from Wellesley College says this course will "provide an alternative discourse to challenge prevailing norms on gender in Asia and help students become a vital part of Asia's new role in global, social, and economic development, or what Susan Roosevelt Weld refers to as 'Asia Rising.'" Rangita de Silva-de Alwis is the senior adviser for interna-

tional programs at the Wellesley Centers for Women (WCW) at Wellesley College in the United States.

The curriculum of the university is going to be more action oriented than text-book oriented. A.U.W.'s vice-president for academic planning, Dr. Hoon Eng Khoo, says: "We have an innovative curriculum. We, the faculty, will help them to develop certain qualities such as leadership, the ability to solve problems, etc. Here they will learn that they are capable of doing anything. They have the ability to change things and be good leaders." Dr. Regina Papa, the head of admission says: "In a co-ed school the girls are always the back-benchers, and they are forced to be the back-benchers. It is difficult for them to fight and come to the front. Here they will

not face such problems. They will be the front-benchers all the time."

The students will begin with a three-year undergraduate program, followed by a by two years of specialised graduate professional training. The courses in the undergraduate program include mathematics, natural and physical sciences, social sciences, and arts and humanities (including philosophy, literature and languages). The students will be offered graduate professional training from a selection of five programs -- public policy, education, management, environmental engineering, and computer science. Apart from that there will also be a pre-SSC program where the students will be taught English and IT.

This university welcomes students from all around the

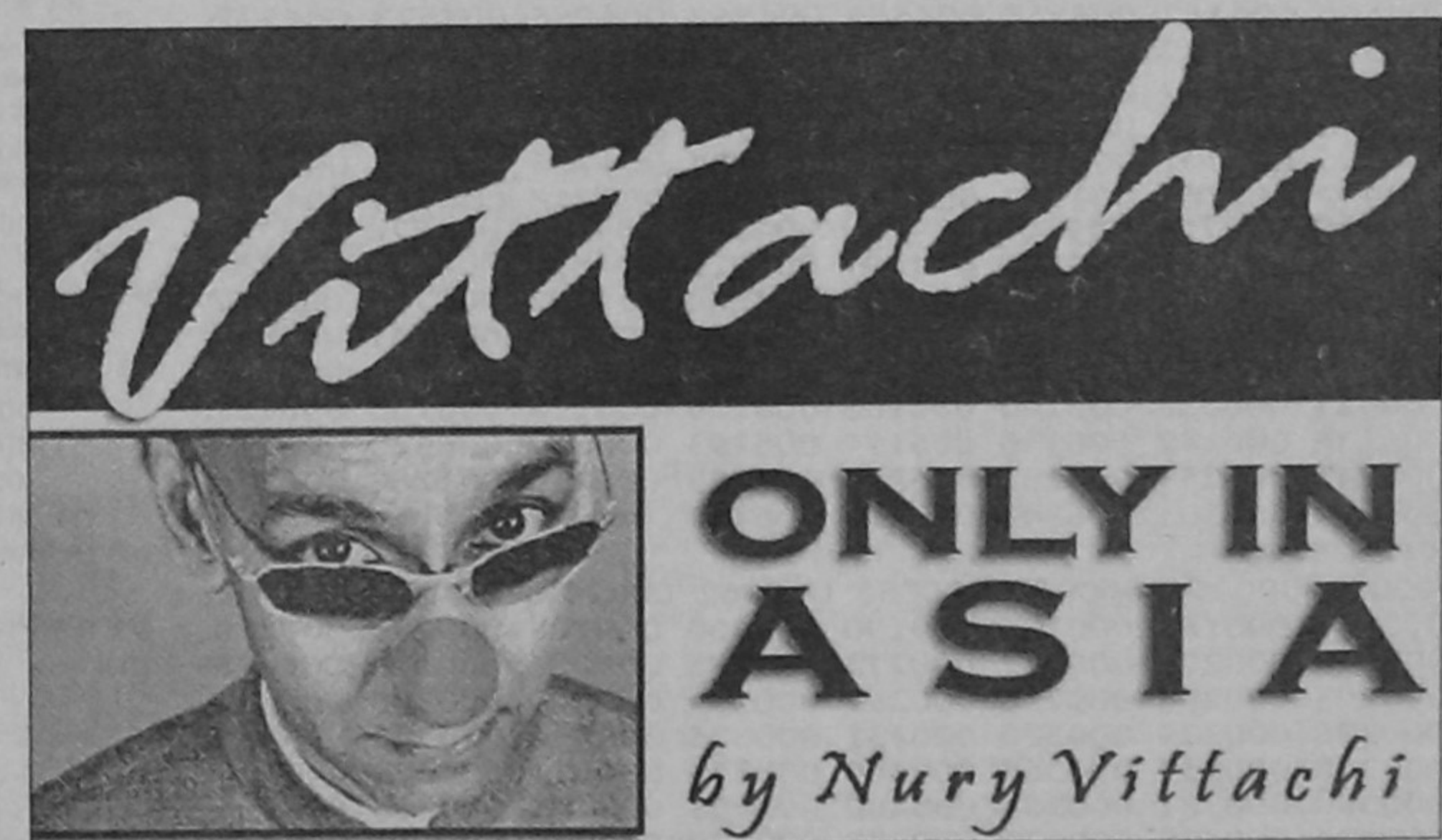
globe. Asian University for Women began its journey with 131 students, among whom are 60 young women from Bangladesh, 30 from Sri Lanka, 19 from India, 11 from Nepal, 8 from Cambodia, and 3 from Pakistan. Young women from all around the globe, regardless of caste, religion, nationality and ethnicity, are welcome there. There are Hindu, Muslim, Christian and Buddhist students there. It is not just a place where people of different religions have united, the ethnic backgrounds of the pupils are also diverse. There are Tamils and Sinhalese from Sri Lanka; Malayalis from India; Newar and Chhetri students from Nepal; Chakma, Punjabi and last but not the least, Bengali students. This cultural diversity will help the pupils meet people from around the globe.

The faculty hopes to recruit at least 500 students per year. Per year it will cost \$10,000 (Tk 700,000 approximately). The students will be given scholarships based on need. The university will provide 50% of the students with scholarship.

This institution has an excellent extra-curricular facility. It has a gym, athletic facility, centre for performing arts, places for meditation, computer center, etc. Other than that, the students can also take karate lessons for self-defense.

This university will guide its students to be future leaders and role models for the future generations. The institution will grow in terms of number of students and campus. In the near future it will be a vibrant open-to-all institution.

Saushan Rahman is editorial assistant, The Daily Star.



The world's fastest swimming trunks hit troubled water

JAPANESE men are furious about a rule that prevents them from wearing Speedo swimming briefs. The government of their country has forbidden them to wear the things during the Beijing Olympic Games later this summer.

They have not banned them for the obvious reason that they make most men look like beach balls balancing on golf tees.

They have banned them because they are not patriotic. Speedos are made in Australia. Japanese competitors must wear Japan-made swimming costumes.

The guys from Japan are furious. In the same way that most men believe red sports cars are speedier than those of other hues, they believe Speedos go faster than normal trunks.

The row started in February when the Speedos company released its latest pair of briefs. It looked exactly like any other pair. What made the difference was the

blurb that came with it. This is the Speedo LRZ Racer, it said, "the world's fastest swimming costume." It was created "with the help of NASA."

Well, on behalf of readers, a friend of mine examined them to see if there was obvious NASA input. There were no rockets, fuel cells, turbo-chargers or loose O-rings, designed to fall off in mid-flight. Then he noticed the price-tag: US\$800. That was the only bit that reminded him of NASA. It is well known that you can sell anything to big US government organizations if you give it a grand enough name. To take an extreme example, bits of grime from your underpants, if labeled Malleable Organic Multi-Purpose Substance, can be sold to the Pentagon for thousands of dollars a gram.

Anyway, a couple of months later, sports reporters revealed that the winners of nearly all recent major swimming competitions had been won by swimmers wear-

ing "the world's fastest swimming costume."

The international swimming community en masse immediately decided that the blurb was true, and a mahogany log wearing a pair of Speedos would move faster than a trained Olympic-grade swimmer in normal costume.

Several swim teams said the wearing of Speedos should be banned under anti-doping laws. The Olympic Games senior doping inspectors ("the dopes") refused to countenance this claim, unless critics could show that the swimming trunks were being consumed in tablet form. (Actually, the Japanese wouldn't put this past the Aussies.)

The argument took a new twist a few days ago when Yamamoto Corp, a Japanese rubber firm, announced that it had invented a suit that could swim faster than the Speedo. It is now at the testing stage, which presumably means the Yamamoto pants are doing the

butterfly stroke by themselves in a secret pool outside Tokyo somewhere.

Meanwhile, many respected observers (that's a common journalistic phrase meaning "I") believe the entire dispute is due to the well-known male psychological phenomenon known as "price-envy." If it's expensive and related to sports, men will rush out and buy it. I mean, think about it. Eight hundred US dollars for a pair of swimming trunks. It's ludicrous. I mean, you'd pay US\$800 for a pair of sneakers?

What? You just did? Huh. Well, my answer is this. Why not remove humans from the equation? The Speedos and the Yamamoto pants can challenge each other.

I reckon the Japanese pants will win the race, but the Speedos will win the drinking games afterwards.

Briefs of a different sort can be found at www.vittachi.com.