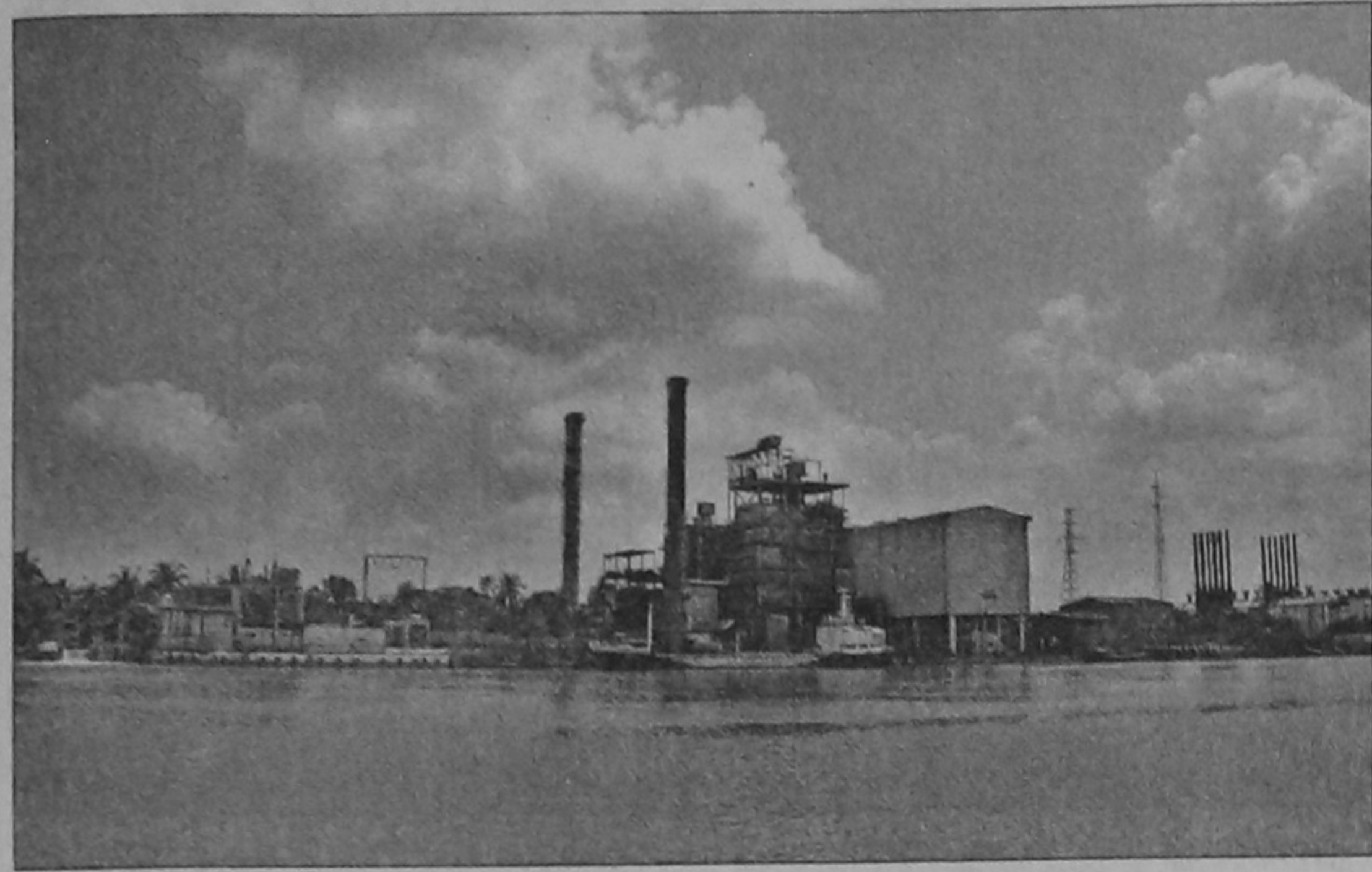


Letters will only be considered if they carry the writer's full name, address and telephone number (if any). The identity of the writers will be protected. Letters must be limited to 300 words. All letters will be subject to editing.

Power failure



Power failure is a burning issue. People are suffering as electricity is snapped frequently. Students suffer most when electricity goes off for hours together. Every day power supply remains disrupted for 5-6 hours in most of the areas in the city.

The government has to do more than what it is doing now to tackle the problem.
AKM Anisul Haque
Department of English
Metropolitan University
Bangladesh

Pharmaceutical industry

The govt has declared pharmaceutical industry as the thrust sector. That's good news, no doubt. The country has a commendable track record and has achieved almost self sufficiency in pharmaceuticals production. Currently, at 700 million dollar, this industry has attracted huge public and media attention. Over the years, the sector has attracted overseas buyers, mostly in unregulated markets, and it has earned good reputation as a quality drug manufacturer. I am talking about top manufacturers. It is indeed encouraging when we hear about its tremendous export potential in the dailies, talk shows. With recent certifications of top 3-4 pharma facilities by major drug regulatory agencies like UKMHRA, TGA etc, the sector has reached new heights. I am not contradicting the popular notion but would like to draw your attention to some of the ground realities. The country certainly has huge potential in the pharmaceutical sector. But what have we done to realize that potential? Since the DOHA declaration, six years have elapsed. How far have we progressed in terms of infrastructure development or competitiveness? Nothing mentionable. After many years of tiring efforts by the pharma industry association, the govt has just allocated land for the proposed central API (active pharma ingredient) facility. Isn't it quite a big lapse when the time factor is critical? Again, the industry is yet to have any bioequivalence testing facility which is mandatory for product registration in developed markets, and there is mounting pressure from even semi regulated markets for such compliance. Unless you prove that your medicine is equivalent to the originator brand in terms of safety and efficacy, by conducting bioequivalence testing in human subjects, you cannot make any foray into the regulated markets like US, EU, Australia etc. The cost

of doing such test is exceedingly high in developed countries ranging from Tk 70-90 lakh per study; in India it costs around Tk 40 lakh. A central bioequivalence facility in the country can largely benefit the industry by saving foreign currency, at the same time this will significantly improve the quality of our medicines. I know the govt and the industry are currently working on this. Again the same question arises- why is the delay in taking action? Couldn't this be done much earlier? By the time the central API and bioequivalence facilities are ready, there is no clear timeline though, 2016 is knocking at the door -- the waiver period will expire without any real benefit to the industry. Having so many advantages, as many experts say, how is the industry equipped to realize them is a million dollar question. When we have generic drug producers like India and China, we will have to make double the efforts required to enter any export destination. Is India sleeping? India has over 100 US FDA-approved pharma plants, the highest number outside the US; and they are increasingly focused on R&D.

This is pharma industry and India is far ahead of us in terms of know how or scale of operation to be competitive in export markets. Not only manufacturers from Israel, India or China, the ever increasing number of generic players are fiercely competing in the 75 billion dollar generic drug markets. As of now, there is little infrastructure in BD to support this industry to compete even in African countries where Indian companies have already set up plants taking advantage of LDC status of those countries -- particularly for HIV drugs. Here we don't understand the issues of TRIPS well as to what we are allowed to export and how to take maximum benefit before the deadline expires. Nobody could clearly explain where we are now and what would be our competitive advantages in the export market. Say, for exam-

ple, we can produce any new patented drug without the permission of the patent holder. Fine... but where will we get the raw material or API for this formulation? India or China are no longer allowed to manufacture the new drugs, and we are mostly dependent on them for our APIs. The only possible way is to produce those APIs in our own country with our own skills. Do we have that? Although we are producing some of the old and conventional APIs like amoxicillin, cipro, ranitidine, paracetamol etc on a commercial scale, we are far from synthesizing the new and patented drugs. So, the question is capability as well as availability.

To build up the capabilities we must start from the university which is the skill development workshop, we must improve our education system with practically oriented advanced courses having adequate laboratory facilities. There should be more industry-university alliance and collaborative research between universities at home and abroad to promote research activities.

If we cannot have the degree of competence developed back in the university level, we cannot compete in any way- in the long run. This is largely a knowledge based industry- unlike many other industries such as RMG the cheap labour or conventional wisdom is not enough.
Shawkat Haider, PhD
Pharmacist and Molecular Biologist
Shyamoli, Road 1, Dhaka

Fuel price hike...

The fuel price in our country has been hiked between 34 to 66 per cent. The new price is petrol Tk 87/1, diesel 55/1 and CNG 16.75/c.m. The authorities concerned have said that they had no alternative because the government could no longer afford to give the staggering amount of subsidy to the sector. Even with the price hike, the government will have to spend Tk 100 billion in subsidies on fuel over the next financial year, which is 40% of government's developmental budget.

If we try to detect the actual reasons, we can easily find out that price hike in world market is responsible for this situation. Before 2003, the price of crude oil in world market was only 25\$ per barrel. Now the price is 146\$ per barrel. So it is jumping up! The price increase has created a difficult situation for the people because 40% of them earn below one dollar per day. The country is already experiencing rising food prices. The price of rice nearly doubled over the past three years. So it is obvious that the prices of daily commodities will increase once more. As an additional suffering, transportation costs will also increase significantly. This will drive millions of our people into abject poverty.
G.M. Musa
Executive
Stamford University, Bangladesh

Radio and television

In western democracies, radio or TV broadcasting is not in the government's hands. Why should our government own any electronic media? The government ownership results in more disservice than providing neutral views/information to people. On behalf of the government, these media provide only the regime's views and development stories, as if all steps were good and for the people.
The CTG should address the issue.
Prof. Shamsul Alam Mohan
One-mail

Upazila election: legal questions

We have heard arguments and counter arguments regarding holding of the upazila election before the general election. The government and the EC are showing one major reason and one major strategy to hold it before the GE. These are:
a. The elected government did not arrange the upazila election during their tenure of office in three terms. Therefore, there is no guarantee that they would hold the same after the GE.
b. The EC is contemplating a staggered upazila election in three or four batches. They cannot hold the election or declare the entire schedule in one go because the voter lists are not ready for all 464 upazilas. It might be finished by October (?)

My observations are:
a. The elected government did not hold the election using their discretion to do it or not to do it. Now the EC is using its undefined authority to do it, bypassing the contention of the major political parties that this attempt might further derail the roadmap and a political base would be created by this government to manoeuvre the entire election process. The political parties are using the political history to assume their viewpoint, may be their broken house needs more time to repair and to participate in the election. Likewise, the argument of the EC is also based on assumption. There is complete absence of legal issues. Like the former elected government, the EC is using its discretionary power and forcing the upazila election before the GE. We are aware about the court rulings to hold the upazila election. But whose duty is it to ensure enforcement of the court orders- the government alone or the legal system as such?

The elections are constitutionally mandated and the rule of law must prevail. What we see is a law of assumption and misuse of powers. There is no fundamental difference between the two except in the character of the government.
b. The EC is contemplating to hold a staggered upazila election as indicated by many in the media. The reason, as I see it, is incomplete voter list and problem of logistic and full proof security arrangements on election day and before or after if the election all over the country is held on one day. I will raise a definite question: whether the existing election laws have empowered the EC or the government to do so. If they can do it without a legal challenge, I can say safely that they would follow the same in case of GE and the Union Parishad elections. If I take the shelter of law of assumption, my assumption is based on the flip-flop and undemocratic character of the government. Their think tank is not democracy friendly. They might go to any lengths to present the nation a hybrid form of democracy.

Therefore, my final recommendation is: please seek legal clarification from the appropriate court of law. Take some quick action, because the think tank is busy preparing the blame game.
A reader
One-mail

Jamaat's FF front!

It is alarming news! A Jamaat-Shibir stalwart was seen kicking a valiant, old freedom fighter on the back because of uttering the truth to a TV channel while leaving the gathering. The gathering was arranged by the Jamaat-Shibir - well-known as collaborators (in 1971) or their loyal progeny. My question is how the collaborators could collect a number of freedom fighters forming a front named 'Jatiya Muktiyoddha Parishad' (National Freedom Fighters' Council)? Don't the freedom fighters know them?

Bangabandhu knew Mustaque well but he trusted him, keeping the first and wartime prime minister Tajuddin Ahmed at bay. History proved that he was wrong. A politician like Aatur Rahman Khan could be allured to join Ershad. He became the prime minister for some time and had to write about his nine months' agony in a book. How long should we let history repeat itself?

All genuine freedom fighters should come out of the Jamaat-Shibir led front. And the law enforcers are there to take the man (who kicked the freedom fighter) to custody.
MAS Molla
BAAS, Dhaka

An assault on the nation

An assault on a freedom fighter means an assault on our motherland and this is exactly what some operatives of the Jamaat-e-Islami and its students' wing Shibir did on Friday with success. We ourselves are to be blamed for this. Had we driven out these Razakars from our soil in 1971, then they would not have existed today.

The Jamaat followers are enemies of Islam. Does Islam allow killing innocent people? This is exactly what Jamaat activists did in 1971 and now they are doing it again. We need a real patriotic leader who will take stern action against the Jamaat supporters because these people are enemies of both Islam and our country.
Akbar Hossain
Khilgaon
Dhaka

The scene we saw on TV -- a freedom fighter being kicked by a Razakar, was really appalling, daunting and agonizing. The government has not taken any action against the perpetrator of this heinous crime. The present govt is neutral. Consequently, it can bring all such culprits to book. Freedom fighters are recognised constitutionally. Therefore, it is not a political issue to be dismissed lightly.
It is a moral duty of the CTG to address the issue.
Md Forkan uddin
Chittagong

Damaged road

A month has passed since we saw Cantara Wali Ruhl's letter on the damaged road of Khilkhet, but the authorities have not responded to it.

We, the residents of Khilkhet, are very much disappointed with their attitude.

There seems to be no end to our sufferings.
Tojo and Shihab
Khilkhet, Dhaka

CTG and price hike

I was really shocked by Dr. M. Hussain's letter about the rule of the CTG entitled "Our mistakes" published on 11/07/2008.

I would have hoped that the educated people would have a rudimentary understanding of the effects of high oil prices on diesel, fertiliser, petrol and rice prices. Shouldn't we understand that all these are either directly or indirectly dependent on oil prices? So when the price of oil increases, the prices of all these commodities are bound to rise. What can this government do about this?

Dr. Hussain wrote that in Egypt and Europe the prices are kept low through government subsidies. Then why were there deadly protests in Egypt recently because of high prices of essentials? Why are there protests in France, UK, Italy, Belgium and Spain over high prices of fuel? He then writes "We must return to pre-11/11 as soon as possible". Is he a supporter of CORRUPTION and feudal politics?

Nabil Ahmad Siddiqui
Sadhinatha Saroni
Dhaka Cantonment
An O level candidate

Iran and Israel

On Wednesday Iran test-fired no less than nine missiles, including one Shahab-3 intermediate range ballistic missile IRBM with a 1,250-mile range. In a second round of exercise more long-range missiles were shot into the Persian

CU shuttle train

As a former student of Chittagong University, I always feel proud of being part of two of its unique characteristics. Besides the natural beauty, the university has a shuttle train--only a few universities like Kent, Indiana have the same feature. Disappointingly, rather than being a vehicle to higher education, the shuttle service has become a death trap.

Every day 6,000 students travel by the shuttle train, which has the capacity to accommodate only 1200 passengers. Therefore, many students are forced to take position on the roof or even the two sides of the locomotive, which poses a grave risk to their lives.

We want neither air-conditioned metro service, nor intercity luxury coaches.

Our demand is very modest. We only want to go to the university safely and timely. It is not our perception, rather belief that the authorities can fulfil the demand for the well-being of thousands of Chittagong university students.

Mohammed Abdul Baten
University of Stockholm
Sweden



Gulf by Iran's Revolutionary Guards the next day.

Last month, the Israeli air force practiced what American intelligence officials called "a rehearsal for a possible strike" on Iran. The United States and British warships have been conducting naval manoeuvres in the Persian Gulf, meant probably to support such a move by Israel. In this context it is not hard to interpret the Iranian decision: the test-firing of missiles may be a move by an alarmed government in Iran to deter Israel and the United States from carrying out any airstrike.

To quote Hossein Salami, a commander of the Revolutionary Guards, "The aim of these war games is to show we are ready to defend the integrity of the Iranian nation." The government in Tehran described its missile capabilities as having the range to reach Israel, making it clear to the Israelis and their allies that they could not get away with any airstrike cost free.

Thomas Fingar, the deputy director of national intelligence for analysis and head of the National Intelligence Council, said, "I think Iran has a hedgehog strategy: mess with me and you'll get stuck." And he may be correct. The huge range of Shahab-3 along with its conventional warhead weighing one ton and other missiles with "special capabilities" along with torpedoes and surface-to-surface missiles may all be meant to show that any attack on Iran would be heavily retaliated.

Yet, Israel did not balk. In response to Iranian missile tests, it showed off the latest spy plane Thursday. "It has the most sophisticated early warning and intelligence devices to date" said Assaf Dargan, a spokesman for Israel Aerospace Industries. While explaining the Israeli might, he

attributed the plane as "capable of reaching all destinations required by the air force."

This flaunting of strength by both Iran and Israel has once again peaked the tension between these two countries and, if cooler heads fail to prevail, is likely to drag the whole Middle East into a dangerous road with catastrophic consequences.

M Abdul Kabir
Dept of CSC
North South University

A visionary leader

For over a couple of days, I have been a bit worried about the future of the country. Several reports in your newspapers shocked me a great deal. The report shows that the Election Commission (EC) has accepted nominations filed by mayoral and councillor aspirants having criminal records.

Some of them have been convicted by local courts but they are out on bail. Now they are seeking re-election in full speed. Most of the contenders in question are incumbent ward commissioners belonging to the Awami League (AL) and the BNP.

One of the main objectives of this military backed caretaker government was to drive away politicians with criminal records, so that the people could vote for honest, hard working and visionary candidates.

Now what purpose has been served if these same, old criminals run for elections again?

We need a visionary leader.
Minhaj Ahmed
Uttara
Dhaka

Level playing field

We have been listening from different political parties, differ-

ent political leaders even from different ambassadors regarding the "Level playing field" for the parliamentary elections since the BNP-Jamaat alliance handed over power in 2006. What I understand regarding the level playing ground is that all parties and individuals want a fair election and as a law abiding citizen I also want the country to have a fair election.

Since it is the job of the Election Commission, I believe that they are working in the above area and probably they will be able to hold a free and fair election. What I have failed to understand is that some political parties and some of the leaders, who have not won a seat in the last couple of elections, are demanding the same from the government and the Election Commission. I think their demand is pointless.

Since the topic of level playing field has been raised and the present government and the Election Commission are working on this issue, I feel the EC should also come forward and announce that the parties which have not won a seat in the last three elections will not be eligible for registration with the EC.

They will have to restart their political carrier by taking part in the upazila level elections and step by step (if they win) they should reach the JS level.

The government and the Election Commission should take up this agenda and if necessary they can go for a referendum as elections are all about the people's choice. Bangladesh is for the entire Bangladeshis, and not for any particular political party or family.
Sohel Ahmed
Dhaka

"No vote"



Last week I went to my native village. My mother has not done any higher education like graduation or post graduation. But she is a conscious woman, I must say. This time we were talking about the voting system. She was talking about the 'no vote' system. She was very upset for not having 'no vote'. But now the government is going to introduce this process in the election. This process will help the people to express their views regarding the candidates.

The Election Commission (EC) should launch a strong awareness campaign. About other restrictions, my opinion is that only making law will not help. Enough powers should be given to the EC. Again, it will be tough to ban other wings of a political party.

However, the initiators deserve praise for amending 'The Representation of the People's Order 1972'.
Pallab Kumar Hazra
MA in English
Dhaka University

US double standards

I am appalled to learn that the United States is contemplating an attack on Iran to stop the latter's nuclear programmes.

Iran repeatedly said that its nuclear programme is only for peaceful purposes. Has not Iran got the right to have nuclear weapons as many other countries possess it, including Israel?

Recently, Iran tested long and medium range missiles. The US and Israel are making an issue of it, but when Israel showed its might with its fighter planes swarming the sky, there was not a word to be heard from the Bush Administration. It looked on

indulgently.

Israel could get away with anything, their behaviour with Palestine shocked the world, but the present government of America is not doing anything to mitigate the sufferings of the people of Palestine. I hope the next US President will be a little humane and find a peaceful solution.

Iran is not doing harm to anyone, so, why should it be attacked?

It seems that to stop the whimpering of Israel, the Bush administration will go to any lengths.

We request the US to be rational and refrain from

acting unjustly, because injustice never pays, it boomerangs. President Bush has done enough harm in the eight years he has been in office,

there are only a few months left. Does he want to be remembered as a cruel man?

Nur Jahan
Chittagong

