ANCING at a function in her school, Mohua Pal could hardly imagine that soon fate would put a permanent end to her performance as a promising dancer. As the youngest and the only sister after four elder brothers, Mohua was and still is adored by everyone in the family.

At the age of nine, suddenly one day, Mohua developed an agonising pain from her waist downwards. She never experienced this sort of a continuous pain before. Its seriousness made her parents go frantically to all the leading hospitals in Chittagong, from where they were urgently sent to Dhaka. Coming to the capital from their home town, Mohua was initially at the PG Hospital and was later moved on to the physiotherapy section of the Suhrawardy Hospital.

Mohua came to the Centre for Rehabilitation of the Paralysed (CRP) at the age of 14, when the Centre had just started, and she was affected by transverse myelitis (tumour in the spinal cord). This was after she had fallen ill for five to six years. After her treatment at the CRP, she went back to her village and stayed there for a few years as a follow-up patient. "I was more at home with the social workers who visited me in Chittagong, when I was the Centre's follow-up patient. Though my family were all very cooperative and encouraging, I felt that people from CRP understood me better. My communication with them was without any barriers," she recounted.

Later she returned to the Centre, this time to work to help in the rehabilitation of other people. Today, Mohua welcomes everyone at her Centre with a charming smile and lends the required assistance. No one notices her complaining even under tremendous pressure of work.

She now works as the secretary of the CRP, and has recently completed her secondary school. Mohua actively participates in various games including basketball. In her job, she has proved herself to be very competent ever since she has taken over. She represented the country at the UN conference, in May 1990,

N a short talk at an Iftar

L madan, I made the unso

licited suggestion that for the

development of free and inde-

pendent media in the country,

it might be a good thing for

Bangladesh to do away with the

ter of State for Information

who had graced the occasion

as the chief guest. And I

with for past 15 years. (The

Bangla term used is 'prabeen'

and I am not quite sure if it

have been on excellent terms.

We even have an unspoken un-

that while I will refrain from

his part, will ensure that the

next time a government leader

is allegedly defamed by a

newspaper, the matter will be

taken up by the Press Council,

instead of by a criminal court.

standing has worked to our

mutual satisfaction, we will

move into new areas of coop-

eration.

When this unspoken under-

reception here during Ra-

## A HOME THAT REHABILITATES THE PARALYSED

Rahat Fahmida

on the Decade of the Disabled Person, in Helsinki.

Shyamal, aged 28, was a carpenter before he fell from the third floor of a building and broke his back. He has continued to develop his carpentry skill at this Centre. And surprising as it may sound, he also captains the CRP's wheelchair basketball

Jobeda came to the Centre for Rehabilitation of the Paralysed after becoming paralysed from waist down after a mud wall was made to collapse on her by her husband and in-laws. She was brought to the CRP for treatment accompanied by her toddler daughter. And here she has learnt to operate weaving looms and sign her name.

We find all of them in this home and many more Shyamals and Jobedas. The Centre's goal is to prepare a patient to return home, wherever possible to his or her previous job, hopefully to lead a full and normal life. One of the success stories of this is Mohua Pal.

The Centre for the Rehabilitation of the Paralysed (CRP) is the only one of its kind in Bangladesh which opened in 1979. Before that it was a different story. Paralysed people either died in hospitals or were sent home to eventually become street beggars. Amongst the affluent they only became an agonising responsibility.

An inspired British physio-

came to Bangladesh in 1969 as a volunteer to work at a local hospital. She saw the problem of the disabled and within a few years, with the support and cooperation of her local colleagues, hit upon a solution. Ten years later, they had raised the necessary funds to open a 35-bed Centre. Since then their Centre has treated 1,000 patients.

Initially this Centre was located on Dhaka's Old Airport Road, from where it has moved to its own plot in Savar a few months back. There the Centre has built temporary accommodation for the patients

therapist, Valerie Taylor, first and the staff, until it can afford to build its own building. This Centre strives to rehabilitate a patient physically, mentally, socially and economically. The average time a patient spends at the Centre is five months and in that time he/she will have developed or learnt a new skill which can be used to earn money.

The Centre's involvement with a patient does not end the moment the latter leaves. Instead, a social worker keeps in touch to ensure he/she is settling down at home. The Centre intends to expand this aspect of its work as part of its outreach programme teaching aids on such subjects as how to raise goats.

Recently, a 12-seater baby taxi' has been converted so that it can be driven by a disabled person. It will be used to take a team of people from CRP out to the villages of former patients.

take with them teaching aids and in this way paralysed people would be able to move around the world. This will also be the first of its kind in Bangladesh.

The Centre at present caters for 55 men and women.

There are even four disabled members on the staff. It concentrates on those paralysed as a result of an accident. The most common causes of spinal injury are fall from trees and road accidents. There are other causes such as spinal tumour, and polio. The Centre's physiotherapist, occupational therapist, social worker, counsellor, nurse and doctor - all work closely together to aid a patient's total rehabilitation.

The wide range of activities a patient can undertake include daily exercises, reading and writing, looking after orchids, goats and ducks, tailoring, sewing, painting, metal work, weaving, shop-keeping, making fishing nets and paper bags and helping in the Centre's kitchen.

All wheelchairs used by the patients are made in the Centre's own workshop. A special low-level wheelchair or 'trolley' has been developed for those who cook and eat in the village at ground level because they have no chairs.

Over twenty different handicraft items, made by the patients, are sold to the public. These are not only supplied in the local market, but are exported to the United States, Australia, Canada and Japan.

Sports play a vital role in the rehabilitation programme of the disabled.

Basketball is a hot favourite along with swimming, table tennis, badminton and volleyball, which they play with great enthusiasm.

In September, 1986, Saleh Ahmed represented Bangladesh at the first world games for disabled youth held in Nottingham, England. He won two silver medals for javelin and shotput. He had come to the Centre after being paralysed because of a fall from a tree. He can now walk with the aid of crutches.

by Madhab, who is another disabled member of the staff. Madhab, the Centre's tetraplegic counsellor, discovered his talent as an artist after an accident left him paralysed at the age of 14. He paints in water colours and enamel paint using an adapted hand splint. His paintings and Christmas Card designs have been sold worldwide.

CRP's first priority is to raise the necessary money to construct a building of its own, with the provision for more than 200 patients. It aims to deal with the patients suffering from spinal injuries, stroke, and children suffering from cerebral palsy. It would like to build a sports stadium and workshops to produce medical equipment and mobility aids.

The Centre receives no money from the government and the continuation of its pioneering work depends on the generosity of individuals and institutions. A separate fund has been set up to build the long-cherished new Centre. Members of the Trust of CRF are drawn from leading socia' figures and philanthropists . Eminent neurologists voluntar :ily spend a few hours in a wee k with the patients and look int o their problems minutely and with care. Valerie, who thought up this scheme, is the project coordinator.

As Jean-Paul Sartre, a famous French Philosopher once said: "Anybody, at ar iy time, may equally find himse alf victim or executioner.

"Man can will nothing 1 inless he has first underste jod that he must count on no one but himself; that he is ale ane, abandoned on earth in the midst of his infinite respt insibilities, without help, wit h no other aim than the one he : sets himself, with no other de estiny that the one he forges for : himself on earth."

But cooperation from a fellow brothers is a necessity. In all societies around the world paralysed people are considered to be objects of pity. They are not treated a s normal human beings, which results in paralysing them ment ally, too. We cease to think that they are like the rest of u.s, e xcept that they are victims; of disabiting

the Bang la desh Bank caused an 1 iproar here

accident.

I was all wrong. The "mischief maker' in the edito-Bangladesh Bank, but one w hich should be

rial was not the as much above reproach as, say, the Privy Co puncil. The target of the Time: s attack is the

dence . . . . . I t is not a magical nostrum to ct are a nation's inflationary he abits overnight. There is no e vidence that the

Strong st .uff, but perhaps not so releva nt to our situation. No, wait for what the Times says in the next paragraph When a got sernment disagrees

with a central bank it wins, as democracy c lictates it should. . Central be unks are only independent with ren it suits democracies to tr eat them as such. Central be inks do not meet electorates. '(Italics minef

these extracts and rubbing

Clockwise: Madhab, a disabled, painting from his bed; Physiotherapist Valarie Taylor with two of her wards; and Mohua Pal who first came as a patient, presently serving as Secretary of the Centre.





They also have art classes and singing lessons, conducted

> URING thie week when with the publicat it in of its list of "defaulters", I s aw this title over an editorial if 1 The Times: "THE BANK MAKES MISCHIEF."

I was furious. This London newspaper had ne ) business to comment on our is aternal situation in such an objectionable manner. I decided I to send in a protest direct to, the British High Commission ner or refuse to attend the Que :en's Birthday reception.

Bank of England I. The editorial | relates to the Bank's opposit ion to the government's move a to cut the interest rates. The Times is pretty angry with the Bank and makes a num ber of observations which or ar local experts may find inter esting. The editorial, inter a lia, says, "Total nonsense surr ounds the issue of the central | bank indepen-

Federal Rese rve or even the Bundesbank do better jobs-at running their economies . . . than the polit tically subservient Bank of Jar van and Bank of France.

If officia is of the Ministry of Finance or the Minister Saifur Rahman h imself are reading

comfortin g thought.

their han is in glee, let me hasten to add that the case for upholding the independence of the Bi ingladesh Bank is much, mu ch stronger than the one for ple acing this institution under the : dictates of a Ministry. The situations in Bangladesh ar id Britain are quite different. A London-trained technocre it, Minister Rahman probably knows this better than this writer. That's a

## A Memo for Minister Nurul Huda; Spotlight on The London Times; and Attack on Another Central Bank

Ministry of Information. Here, one problem is, how do we establish that our un-In support of my conspoken understanding has tention. I referred to the dereally worked ? A colleague veloped countries and a few developing ones, like Thailand suggests that one of these and Singapore, which seem to days, I should say something manage very well without such nasty about the Minister rather difficult because Mr ministries. Instead, they let their ministries of communica-Huda is really a nice person tion help the electronic media and see where I am taken to. with its infrastructural develbefore the Press Council or to a sub-jail set up in Gulshan for opment. In my view, it is primarily me, in recognition of my age, an administration, anxious to seniority in the profession and keep a close watch on the memy erratic health, in that dia, when it should be the order. I am afraid, it is a bit of other way round, which needs a gamble, which could result in an effective ever-vigilant Minmy tending the garden in the istry of Information. sub-jail and growing Rajanigandha for the rest of my natu-Then, I noticed a look of ral life. 'My World' will then dismay and surprise on the literally shrink into a twoface of Nurul Huda, the Minisroom house and disappear as a

changed the subject, but only after pointing out that the Ministry of Information would INCE Minister Huda is a remain very much on the nice young man, I shouscene as long as the media ld be as helpful as poshere had problems in keeping sible by inviting his attention its own house in order. to a few problems which have been screaming for the Minis-This time, Minister Huda put on his broad grin, while try's attention for some time others, mostly journalists, gave past. Since the media is still me a sullen look. But all apenjoying a little honeymoon plauded, in a display of politewith the elected government, ness towards a senior newsnot to mention my unspoken man, a somewhat undefined understanding with Mr Huda, I will discuss these problems in category that I have been stuck

In the first place, the Ministry must decide how the memeans 'senior', 'elderly' or just dia, especially the Bangladesh Television (BTV) should pro-Since then, Mr Huda and I ject the activities of the Government, indeed those of the Prime Minister Begum Zia. In derstanding which the Ministhe process, he can correct ter may not be quite aware of the impression that the BTV coverage of the administration launching any campaign for the is a bad carbon copy of what abolition of his Ministry, he, on we had seen a year ago.

the gentlest possible term.

column. The former will be my

loss; the latter a gain for my

Here, an easy way out is simply this: Cut down on the TV coverage of cabinet meetings and of such other gatherings where officials sit with blank faces listening to ministers (as this writer had suggested some weeks ago); do not cover solemn religious functions, like the Umrah, performed by national leaders,

including Begum Zia, since they should not be meant for public consumption; reduce the time usually given to public meetings addressed by minis-

ters; and so on and so forth. It is all quite simple and straightforward.

However, this simple solution raises a number of problems which would undoubtedly worry our friend, Minister

The reduction and elimination of the coverage just mentioned would surely create a vacuum. How do you fill it?



State Minister Nurul Huda Unspoken Understanding

that the BTV coverage of Hussain Mohammad Ershad, based on an excessive exposure of the ousted president, became increasingly sickening to the majority viewers in Dhaka and other cities. But how did it go down with the common people in small towns and upazilas? Did it alienate the viewers or did it improve the standing of the dictator among the kind of people who elected him to the parliament from as many as five constituencies in Rang-

It is possible that looking at these two problems, many backroom advisers to the administration would assume that while it might annoy the educated class, the current TV coverage of the government activities would yield longterm political dividends for the BNP Government.

WORLD

Bangladesh.

Minister Huda can either fall in line with this "keep-thestatus-quo" group or develop his own approach to the situa-

If his choice falls on the latter course, he can request, say, Prof Rehman Sobhan to set up another Task Force, this one to look into the reorganisation of our media. At the same time, the Ministry can secure video films of TV newscasts from a number of neighbouring Asian countries and see how they cover the activities of their government leaders.

There is really no question of playing down the projection of the government activities, especially of the Prime Minister, through our electronic

It is all a question of deciding on the right focus, the right dimension, the right scope and the right style. When all this is done the right way, the administration should get much greater political dividend than the backroom advisers can visualise within their present narrow frame of references.

Memo to Minister Nurul Huda (continued)

What are the other problem areas facing the State Minister for Information ?

The reorganisation of the Bangladesh Sangbad Sangstha (BSS) presents by far the biggest challenge. The agency must move to decent premises; it must be computerised and it must raise the level of its editorial and technical op-

It must also improve on its revenue position and, among other things, set up bureaus in places which generate of special interest to

As a challenge, a close second is the future of the two Trust newspapers, under a system which is a dismal legacy left behind by the Ayub regime.

There are all kinds of solutions, but none, I am told, will work. The two papers can be privatised, turned into cooperatives or given away to the two major political parties, the BNP and the Awami League, with all their assets and liabili ties. Since the two papers share the same printing press, the third solution should go a long way in improving the relations between the two parties, paving the way for an agreement on the form of govern-

Other challenges include the need to expand and mod ernise a number of other media-related organisations. We will bring them up another time, before the patience of Mr Huda with me is totally exhausted.

N avid newspaper reader, with a modest jou-▲ I rnalistic background, this writer takes a certain morbid pleasure in picking up errors in all kinds of publications, except the one he works for. After all, finding mistakes in your own paper is hardly a pleasure. It is a painful duty, an agonising chore, the cause of a rise in blood pressure and the source of controllable, incurable tension.

In search of this morbid pleasure, I spent several hours last week in glancing through some recent copies of The

Times of London. The exercise produced some unexpected rewards and helped in raising my spirits.

In the issue of the paper of Thursday, May 23, the paper's correspondent in New Delhi, Christopher Thomas reported the offer made to Sonia Gandhi to take over the presidentship of the Congress (I) in a front page report under a six-column headline, "Party Picks Gandhi's Widow."

It is all straightforward, a

for his unique conclusion from another source: "In a possible sign that she might not be more than a figurehead, Pranab Mukherjee, a party spokesman, said, 'The question of acceptance does not arise'.' (Does it mean the "acceptance" is taken for granted or there is no question of Sonia accepting

correspondent finds support

On Friday, Correspondent Thomas dutifully reported the rejection of the offer by Sonia



It is the Bank of England which is under fire: "Total nonsense surrounds the issue of the Bank's independence."

little too definite that leaves no room for any doubts ! (Whatever happened to the 'doubting Thomas'?)

In the third paragraph, Correspondent Thomas provides a new angle that we had all missed: "The decision was, however, binding (on Sonia Gandhi)". Since this line appears without any quotation marks and is put in without any source, one assumes that it is the correspondent's own inference, perhaps based on what Congress leader, Jonathan Reddy, said earlier about any lack of communication of the offer to Sonia Gandhi "because she is in grief". (Well, that's news ! Isn't

Two lines later, the Times

humiliating blow to the party", said the report. One would not be surprised if The Times Editor sent a

note to his man in New Delhi,

"Her rejection is also a humili-

ating blow to your reporting."

"Her rejection came as

Whether Messrs Thomas and Mukherjee still often get together to exchange notes is worth finding out for the Times Editor !

What a pity that it is all in The Times which this writer has patronised for decades. Back in the mid-fifties, then a student in London, he often went without his afternoon snack to keep up with his subscription to this great newspa-