

The Drift Must End

The University of Dhaka is passing through one of the most critical phases in its 70-year history. In a conversation published in this paper yesterday, Vice-Chancellor of the university Dr Maniruzzaman Miah painted a sad picture of the country's highest seat of learning: violence pervades the campus, financial constraints prevent expansion of academic facilities, an unhealthy atmosphere of lack of incentives driving bright young teachers abroad, cycle of violence creating session jam and uncertainty for students. On top of that, fate of elections to the Dhaka University Central Students Union (DUCSU) now hangs in the balance.

But it is not only Dhaka University. Educational institutions all over the country — from Barisal Medical College to Pabna Edward College — are being gripped with paralysis. Violence and uncertainties are now the orders of the day, rather than studies and exams.

Friday before last, the Prime Minister chaired a grand conference of political parties to find a national consensus over the issue, and this paper welcomed it as a good start. However, we are under no illusions as to what transpired at the meeting. As Dr Miah said, the meeting failed to produce the breakthrough we so badly needed. The political parties merely reiterated an often-stated position, that campus violence is a problem (rather like a seminar of cardiologists agreeing that heart attacks are bad for one's health). An anguished Dr Miah had wanted, even expected, the participants to issue a categorical statement saying they would expel anyone bearing arms from their parties. Unfortunately, nothing of the sort happened.

Now, what exactly is the problem with our political parties? Why is it so difficult for the Bangladesh Nationalist Party, the Awami League, the Jamaat-e-Islami, the Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal and the rest to put the national interest above party politics and come clean about the whole sordid affair? The time to shuffle around the problem is long over and we simply have to recognise now that by allowing the paralysis to continue, we are actually pushing tens of thousands of our boys and girls — this country's future — towards a life of uncertainty.

What is most baffling is the role played so far by the Ministry of Education. The Education Minister, Dr Badruddoza Chowdhury, has failed to give the impression that he takes the problem seriously enough, nor that he has any plans to tackle it in any constructive manner.

We agree that the problem is first and foremost a political one, requiring the good will and efforts of all political forces active on the campus. However, Dr Chowdhury, being the deputy leader of the House and the No 2 man in the cabinet, is a political leader of some stature. Therefore, there is no good reason why he should not be able to tackle the problem himself, calling on the help of the Home Ministry whenever required. Besides, since the education sector is his direct responsibility it is expected that he and his ministry should make the greatest effort, so that the children of this country can have a proper education and a future they can look forward to.

At the same time, there is a suspicion that the education ministry is not maintaining liaison with the university and college authorities regarding efforts to combat the prevailing situation. The absence of any high-level government contact with the Vice-Chancellor of Dhaka University is a mystery.

With the police unable to combat an essentially political situation, political parties unwilling to shoulder any responsibility and the government seemingly indifferent, a sense of drift and aimlessness is setting in.

The eventual cost the nation may have to pay as a result of this near-anarchy in the education sector is too great to even comprehend. It has now become imperative that the government takes university authorities into confidence and, along with other political parties, tackles the situation head-on. Dr Miah's suggestions published in this paper provide enough food for thought, but what is needed now is action.

Biman Must Pull Up its Socks

The Biman employees were told the other day by the State Minister for Civil Aviation and Tourism that they better pull up their socks if the airline is to become competitive as an international carrier. The warning could not have come sooner. Unlike India or Pakistan where the airlines can bank on a captive domestic market, Biman essentially has to depend on its international routes to make money — and there, it is competition all the way.

The national carrier of Bangladesh has to operate within modest means. Its fleet is not of an optimum size. Its network, though growing, is still comparatively quite small and its infrastructure weak. Biman remains afloat mainly on the support it gets from the expatriate Bangladeshis in the Middle East and in UK. Coupled with this rather assured traffic, Biman is able to attract European budget travellers coming to the East. The traffic from this sector has been on the rise, and may turn out to be quite a lucrative market if Biman can maintain its schedule and treat the transit passengers — it is obligatory for East bound passengers from Europe to stop over in Dhaka — a bit better. From hours of waiting at the airport, to lack of proper hotels, to frequently lost or mislaid baggage, the woes of Biman's budget travellers are many.

However the minister the other day spoke of another kind of problem, one that is common to many other state enterprises in Bangladesh — indiscipline. The minister appealed to them to maintain a congenial atmosphere, referring to the recent instances of indiscipline and interference in the administrative affairs by the union. It is open knowledge that there is a severe lack of accountability of the Biman employees.

In the recent past there has been a gradual deterioration of Biman's service. Starting from sales, to maintenance, to engineering, to administration Biman is in dire need of leadership. If one compares Biman with Thai International or Singapore Airlines — two of the best in the region — one can understand the challenge of the task ahead. But it is only in reaching such a standard and maintaining it over a period of time that we can compete in the international market and make Biman the type of airline that we wish to. In this effort the cooperation of the staff of Biman — both professional and general — is a prerequisite. What we lack in facilities and equipment, we will have to make up through hard work.

US Moves to Slow India's Nuclear Programme

Ted Morello writes from United Nations

THE United States Congress has taken its first step towards instituting an even-handed policy towards India and Pakistan over their nuclear weapons installations. The move reflects Washington's growing concern over a nuclear weapons threat in the war-prone Indian subcontinent.

The action comes as President George Bush's administration is warning the United Nations of nuclear proliferation elsewhere, but especially in Iraq and North Korea. Congress has long imposed aid penalties on Pakistan for its perceived nuclear weapons programme. The so-called Pressler Amendment states that before US aid can be released to Pakistan, the president must certify to Congress that the Islamabad government does not possess a nuclear explosive device. It is very likely that Congress will extend this same condition to India.

The restriction has cost Pakistan US\$575 million in American military and economic aid during this fiscal year. Islamabad, which insists that its nuclear programme is only for peaceful purposes, complains that the restriction is discriminatory since India, which exploded a nuclear device in 1974, is not restricted by the amendment. Nor is Israel, Brazil or South Africa.

This latest move by Congress is considered a victory for Islamabad since India and Pakistan are now at an equal disadvantage on issues combining aid and nuclear activity.

The United States is on the point of withholding aid to India, the idea being to bring pressure on that country to open its nuclear programme to inspection. This is good news to Pakistan, which has had its aid flows restricted for years already because of its nuclear programme, putting it at a disadvantage in its arms race with India. However, the effectiveness of the new US policy towards India may be limited.

In view of its 1974 explosion, India would probably not earn the necessary no-nuke certification. But in order not to close the door on aid entirely, the lawmakers have used the phrase "additional nuclear devices." This means India would not be penalised for devices already in its arsenal.

The effectiveness of the policy is questionable also because US aid to India amounts to only \$22 million, and an Indian spokesman has said that New Delhi would forego US assistance if the

conditions under the Pressler Amendment are attached. Last October, Bush refused to certify Pakistan and this automatically led to suspension of America's \$575 million aid package. Bush's decision was a reaction to intelligence reports that Pakistan's secret

nuclear plant at Kahuta, 12 miles from Islamabad, had moved closer to assembling a nuclear device. Pakistan refused to open the plant to inspection and Bush was thus unable to assure Congress that Pakistan had no nuclear arms. The Pakistanis insist that they do not possess such weapons, but the claim is not persuasive. After India exploded its "peaceful" nuclear device in 1974, Pakistan's then prime minister, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, vowed that "we will eat grass if necessary" to develop a deterrent. He launched a crash programme to overtake India and sent the Indo-Pakistan arms race on to a new and more deadly course.

Recently, however, Pakistan has proposed a scenario for ending the deadly competition. It includes:

- Simultaneous accession by the two nations to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.
- Simultaneous inspection of each other's nuclear facilities by the UN's International Atomic Energy Agency.
- Mutual inspection of each other's facilities.
- A joint declaration re-

nouncing acquisition or development of nuclear weapons.

• Establishment of a nuclear-weapons-free zone in South Asia.

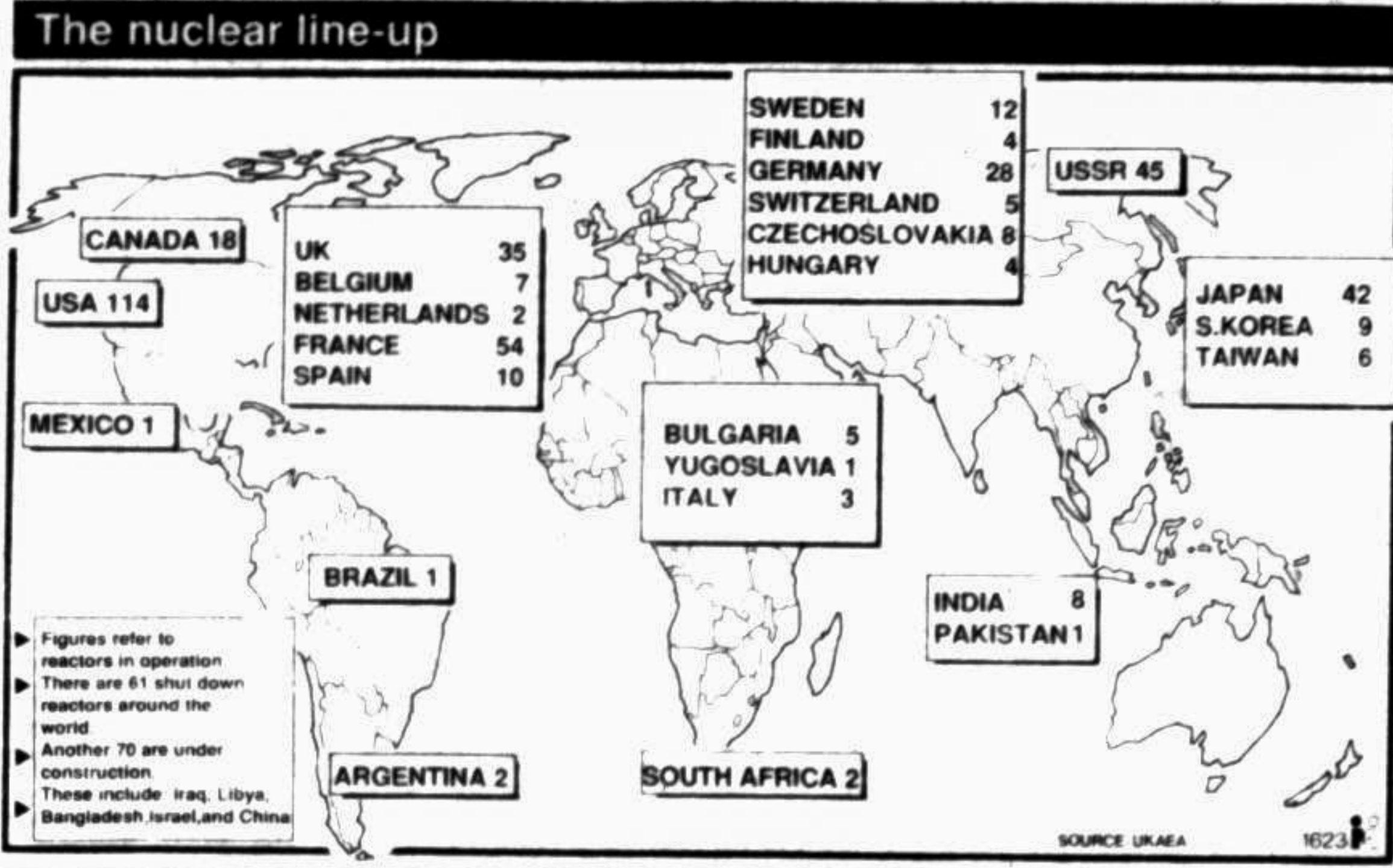
India has rejected all these proposals, citing a nuclear threat from China as the reason.

In June, Pakistan's Prime Minister, Nawaz Sharif, unveiled a proposal which called on the US, USSR and China to mediate talks between Pakistan and India aimed at keeping South Asia free of nuclear weapons. Again, the proposal was rejected by New Delhi.

However, it struck a sympathetic note on Capitol Hill. California Republican Robert Lagomarsino proposed extending the aid-nuclear linkage to New Delhi. He argued that since India fired the starting gun in the nuclear weapons race with Pakistan, its aid should be conditional as well. The majority of his colleagues agreed.

Lagomarsino's initiative was adopted despite the efforts of a strong pro-India lobby led by Congressman Stephen Solarz, a New York Democrat and chairman of the powerful House foreign affairs subcommittee for South Asian and Pacific affairs.

In a statement, the US Department of State characterised the nuclear-free-zone proposal as "constructive" and praised the privatisation and other economic reforms instituted by the Sharif government.



Opting for the BEPZA Model

by Helaluddin Ahmed

ANGLADESH Export Processing Zone Authority (BEPZA) was setup by an act of Parliament in 1980 for attracting foreign capital and technical knowhow and for boosting exports through establishment of export-oriented industries in special zones with special facilities. Earlier, Foreign Private Investment Promotion and Protection Act, 1980, was enacted for promotion and protection of foreign private investment. As per these acts, BEPZA came into existence as an autonomous statutory body in 1983 — entrusted with the responsibility of setting up and operating Export Processing Zones (EPZs) in the country.

Accordingly the first EPZ in Bangladesh, was established in the Port City of Chittagong and it became fully operational in 1984. Development of another EPZ at Savar, Dhaka is progressing fast and it is likely to become fully operational by the end of 1992.

BEPZA currently enjoys a unique administrative arrangement in that it is not under administrative control of any particular ministry or division. As per the BEPZA Act it is treated as a body corporate. Its highest policy making body is the Governing Board headed by the President. The Ministers and Secretaries of various ministries such as Industry, Commerce, Finance, Planning, Foreign Affairs, Energy and Ports and Shipping are ex-officio members of the board.

The general direction and administration of the affairs of BEPZA is vested in the executive board which exercises all powers and performs all functions. It is headed by a Chairman who also acts as the ex-officio Secretary of the

Governing Board. In discharging its duties the executive board acts in accordance with the guidance, orders and instructions of the Board of Governors. The executive board is aided by a consultative committee which consists of members nominated by various ministries, trade associations, shareholders, BSCIC, Port Authority, Water and Sewerage Authority, development authorities and the Divisional Commissioner. In addition there is a post-sanction clear-

ance committee where the Controller of Capital Issues, Register of Joint Stock Companies, and General Manager (Exchange Control) of Bangladesh Bank serve as members. The clearance committee assists the executive board in matters of registration, capital issues, and foreign exchange transactions of sanctioned industries. The executive board is empowered to form additional committees to assist it in its day to day work.

The administrative set-up of BEPZA is unique in Bangladesh because unlike other public enterprises of the country it is a totally independent and autonomous body without being attached to any particular ministry or division. This facilitates prompt, timely and effective decision making and allows it to provide one-window service to the investors within amazingly short intervals. This is all the more surprising in a country where time-lag is order

of the day in government bureaucracy. The BEPZA Act stipulates that the policies formulated, orders given and instructions issued by the Governing Board shall be considered to be the Government order and shall not require formal approval of concerned ministry or division for implementation. This self-contained mechanism free from string-pulling by other layers in the government hierarchy

separate entity free from the clutches of administrative dictates and what followed was quite magical. Since September, 1986 as many as 57 industries were sanctioned out of which 31 are already operational. Of the total proposed investment of 589 million US dollar, US \$270.71 million has already been invested. The export volume during the period was as high as US \$116.37 million, a com-

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parable performance indeed in such a short interval of time. What is quite apparent here is that an independent BEPZA entity appears to be many times more effective than when it was placed under the administrative control of Ministry of Industries or President's Secretariat.

Example can be cited from the past where due to delay in granting approval BEPZA lost golden opportunities for bringing in immensely viable investors from countries like Germany Hong Kong, etc.

If we make a comparative analysis we see that public enterprises like Board of Investment and Public sector corporations fail to function properly because they lack the autonomy and freedom which BEPZA enjoys. The reasons are straight-forward. These enterprises depend on their controlling ministries for formulation, approval and implemen-

tation of decisions which lead to the red-tape syndrome and a chronic, acutely persistent time-lag. There are myriads of steps in our bureaucratic decision making hierarchy. What results is duplication of effort in the whole decision-making process. For instance, firstly the field organisations reach a decision which is arrived at after scrutiny through various decision layers within it. Secondly this same decision is reviewed and reexamined by the controlling ministry, again

the field itself. The net result is unnecessary delay in decision making, superiority syndrome of ministerial executives, tendency to arbitrarily impose decisions on subordinate officers (often unjustifiably) persistence of red-tape culture, spread of bureaucratic lethargy and so on.

To make our bureaucracy more dynamic, suited to present day needs of society and attuned to a market-oriented competitive economy (where time is a crucial factor), this duality in administration has to be removed and in its place a responsive, responsible and output-oriented bureaucracy has to be installed. For this to happen the field organisations have to be empowered with full-decision making powers on matters related to the field, flexibility in their operations, and made independent and autonomous, answerable only to the masses and their representatives, not to any artificial bureaucratic setup on top of it.

The BEPZA model can easily serve as an example for all other public enterprises of Bangladesh and instead of attempting to bring it back into the unwholesome fold of other public enterprises, efforts should be made to do it the other way round, that is to re-model our public enterprises in line with BEPZA with only a coordinating role for relevant ministries. Let human ingenuity, human drive, initiative, innovativeness and creativity be given a chance to flourish and succeed.

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To the Editor...

Letters for publication in these columns should be addressed to the Editor and legibly written or typed with double space. For reasons of space, short letters are preferred, and all are subject to editing and cuts. Pseudonyms are accepted. However, all communications must bear the writer's real name, signature and address.

Public sector enterprises

Sir, I have gone through Mr M A Baaqui's article "Public Sector Enterprises — Disinvestment can Offset Losses" published in your daily on July 5. The causes of losses in the public sector enterprises are partially enunciated. If the government interference in public sector enterprises could meaningfully be restrained the industries could run on profit. Is one such step to check loss. But disinvestment of public sector enterprises is not an all-cure to offset such losses. So long the government of Bangladesh have disinvested as many as 500 industries. As a result of such disinvestment more than 100 thousand employees and workers were rendered unemployed. If I remember correctly, in 1984 the Ministry of Industries conducted an investigation to find out how these disinvested industries were faring in their respective fields of production. It was found that almost 50% of the disinvested units were closed, many of them importing raw materials and selling that outside to realise the amount paid as instalments to the government. As a result, the government was also being

deprived of revenues in many ways. Many of those units were found to have been diverting their fund to other units under them. So many jute mills and textile mills were returned to the Bangladeshi owners. None of them could show miracle in their respective fields of production and management. Many of the jute mills were closed down long early. But, reportedly, some owners of such units were taking loan after loan against hypothecation of 'stocks and stores', practically which were not there! So disinvestment cannot give any solution. Solution lies elsewhere. To tell the truth, the trade union activities in the public sector enterprises should be stopped for a specific period of time, or have some effective checks.

Redundant workers be re-trenched and absorbed in the up-coming industries so that no unemployment is created. In the process the real wages of workers/employees be increased substantially so that they can feel financially secured. Over time payment be restricted by passing ordinances, as is done in India. If such drastic measures could be initiated the public sector enterprises could sustain. Otherwise, disinvestment of

public sector enterprises would create unemployment and even help spread corruption among the different levels of the government organisations.

The government may also be requested to institute an investigation to find out how much revenue it received from those units which were with the public sector corporations, prior to disinvestment, and how much revenue it is receiving from those units after the disinvestment. This can bring the exact picture of difference between the public sector and private sector managements to light.

Md. Gholam Mustafa Motylheel, C/A, Dhaka

Allegations and counter-allegations

Sir, With utter dissatisfaction we notice that a section of officers and employees in certain offices have involved themselves in lobbying authorities for promotion and transfer. In some cases, corruption charges against certain officials have been raised by their rival groups taking advantage of the recent political change. This sort of allegations and counter-allegations seriously affect the organizational climate. People are now more concerned about these instead of properly discharging their duties for which they are being paid.

Hence, we would request the respective Ministries to form impartial inquiry com-

mittees to verify allegations brought against the officials. We want that good and honest people be protected and dishonest and corrupt people be eliminated, not through lobbying but through official procedures.

M. Zhidul Haque Assistant professor, Bangladesh Agricultural Institute, Dhaka-1207.

BUET admission

Sir, The Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (BUET) has just completed the written admission test on 10th July and the Almighty knows when the admission test results will finally be published. These HSC passed students seeking admission passed from four Boards more than a year ago. Many of their colleagues and many of them too have started their higher education in different institutions. Some of the departments of Dhaka University could not start classes since many of them will leave DU, it selected by BUET.

It is just unfortunate to observe that admission tests in all institutions could not be held within three months of HSC result publication; in that case every body knows where to choose. In the context of accountability as uttered by many a top brass, who is accountable in this context.

Sadik Alee Maghbazar Dhaka.

OPINION

Students, Politics and Literacy

What happened to the once-upon-a-time adult educational programme called "Each One Teach One"? Many of the students seem to have nothing better to do than indulge in spurious political agitations and demonstrations, which are actually outside the domain of legitimate extra-curricular activities of the student community. These activities are now veering towards violence, with use of firearms.

The numerous political parties have at least succeeded in one aspect: lure the students to work for their own political interests. This is gross misuse of apprentices who are potentially skilled personnel under training, namely the students (the majority are teenagers) undergoing a course of studies for a future career; and such mis-exploitation is very much against national interest.

After one batch leaves, the succeeding batches are used; thereby spoiling the budding career of many. Making them unfit for any profession — and encouraging dropouts at the tertiary level. It is neither here nor there; unless politics is recognised as a genuine profession in the LDCs, which it is not. This is a curb but realistic observation.

The glamour of politics still sway our youth. Ironically speaking, in the present context, there is nothing in a political career, except opportunism, especially for the have-nots in the LDCs. It is an attraction only for those who are seeking short-cuts in life. A

real and genuine life-long political worker or politician must be solvent, to be able to pay sincere attention and concentrate to the country's problems — and not try to solve his own problems in the process. In the history of human progress, the short-cut philosophy has never paid dividends, except for short temporary periods; and then the castle tumbles down (including those of the mighty BCCI, the Ershads, and the Marcoses).

The educational authorities, the NGOs working in the rural areas, and the social welfare organisations could make use of a large number of the students during the vacation periods to send them to the rural areas, for each one to teach one adult to become literate. No doubt such schemes were tried several times during the last four decades, but somehow it never became a 'hit'.

Now there are attempts to reach a political consensus to remove violence from the academic campuses. This is the right time to prepare schemes to keep the students engaged with extra-curricular activities which are of benefit not only to the students themselves, but also to the nation, especially the illiterates in the rural areas.

To encourage response and participation, some incentives could be considered, as credit marks for field work in the rural areas; and some pocket money against contingency expenses.

A. MALUWAZ Dhaka