The present House is bet-

ter-balanced, with the majority

party having enough seats to

theoretically ensure stable

government, while the opposi-

tion is sufficient in numbers. and with a strong-enough

sense of purpose to enable it

to play a vigorous, even ag-

Dhaka, Saturday, August 3, 1991

Plight of Ordinary **Students**

"The situation at Dhaka University had gone beyond the control of university authorities." That was how Vice-Chancellor Professor Maniruzzaman Miah explained the closure of the country's highest seat of learning Tuesday last, following clashes between heavily-armed students affiliated to the majority and main opposition parties in parliament. "It is a political problem, requiring a political solution," Prof Miah said, echoing the position taken by this paper through not one, but a series of editorials in the recent past.

The closure has earned the university a respite from a situation that looked set to spin completely out of orbit. But that respite is now exacting a price of a different kind. The price is being paid not by hoodlums and activists, but by ordinary students who have come to Dhaka from farflung places of the country to get higher education; they have come here hoping to get back to their districts with degrees that would make their families proud. That is exactly the reason why the vast majority of the 28,000 students of Dhaka University are here. Poor families have spent hard-earned money to fulfil a dream they have clung on to through drought, floods and storms. That dream is now the victim of a "political situation" which politicians seem incapable of, or even unwilling to, resolve.

With the closure of the halls of residence, hundreds of students now find themselves without a roof under which to sleep, or a table at which to study. Their plight multiplies with every passing day, without an end in sight. Already nearly 100 students have made known their intention to stay at halls, defying the closure. Many of them apparently do not even have enough money to go back to their towns and villages.

The university authorities should now be extremely careful in dealing with the emerging situation. We recognise the Vice-Chancellor is in a rather delicate position. He cannot reopen the halls without running the risk of armed gangs returning (police sentries and vettings tried out after the last Eid vacations were a total and absolute failure, judging by the amount of arms put on display Tuesday last). Yet he cannot order the police to physically evict boys staying at halls illegally — so long as they are staying peacefully. It is with a strong sense of reservation that we would view any news about ordinary, innocent students being roughed-up by police in the course of clearing any hall.

In the meantime, the fate of Honours and Masters final examinations continue to hang in balance, compounding the prevailing sense of uncertainty. Somewhere along the line, we seem to have forgotten that education, through imparting knowledge and awarding degrees, is the raison d'etre of this and any other university.

The university authorities should now set themselves two clear-cut priorities - return of students to the halls and holding of exams. Everything else, including elections to DUCSU, can wait, but these two cannot. The Vice-Chancellor should make it plain to the politicians that it is they who bear the responsibility for the prevailing situation, and they must now come forward to solve this problem. We certainly hope that informal, behind-the-scene parleys among the various political parties are going on.

A Case of Unappreciated Innovation

Friday's issue of an English language national daily featured an eye-catching double-column headline in reverse-print. It read 1650 shallow engines abused in Netrokona. A chuckle would hardly be repressed at the poor state of the language, but that is quite beside the point. The contention as coming out in the story underneath is that these machines, sold for irrigation purposes, are being used in ways far removed from irrigation. Quite understandably irrigation is suffering there in Netrokona.

Now, what are uses the shallow pump engines are being put to? The answer is all there in the news. To quote: "Shallow tubewell engines are being used mostly in the mechanised country boats, saw mills, rice and paddy husking and sugarcane crushing mills."

None of the above are quite useless jobs. On the contrary, they are not any less important than irrigation work. A very important point that is being missed is that a veritable revolution has taken place in our riverine transport by the mechanisation of the country boat. Speed and efficiency and frequency of journey, total volume of passenger and freight have all been multiplied many times over - all due to the mechanisation of the country boat. Who are the makers of this wonderful revolution in a land where nothing moves? Who hit the idea that a shallow tubewell engine can propel a country boat quite well without needing to buy a costly marine engine? Who fitted that cheap thing that consumes diesel and that too in a very low and economical manner to the country boat? The illiterate country mechanics and fitters. The crime lay there. Crores should have been spent on engineering projects to justify such a switchover.

When the small machines are being used in such a wide variety of jobs we can do better than wailing over the 'abuse' of these. Make available as much as our society has a demand for these, and as the demand seems to far exceed that required to man irrigation — arrange to fabricate these in our country, if need be by joint collaboration — as they did in Pakistan and India — rather than importing them wholesale from abroad.

Appropriate technology is a much talked about pet subject of seminars participated by 'experts' and administrators who would rather not move a straw from hither to thither. Some people in the villages — far below even the intermediate level of technical hands - have through an uncanny and wonderful grasp of the thing have hit an appropriate technology for using shallow tubewell machines. This has been a case of innovation that does not come easy to the classes presiding over our technical situations. Pray, do not call innovation an abuse.

Compromise and Consensus, but Not Quite Perfect

broth called democracy, which always means balancing conflicting views in a pluralistic society. However, the nature of this particular issue is a fundamental one, and compromise today only means postponing final resolution till tomorrow. Because of the contradiction inherent in a policy of giving state power to unelected people within the framework of a representative system, the issue will no doubt have to be tackled again.

HE government's 12th

Amendment Bill, which

is set to receive an

further

affirmative vote in the House

any day now, finally arrived on

the floor without most of its undestrable spots. Perhaps it

was the manner in which it

shed those spots -

negotiations, followed by more

negotiations until a unanimous

decision was reached - that

was most noteworthy. Consen-

sus polítics - on any issue -

has never been one of our

cratic provisions ironed out of

the bill, the path has been

cleared for a safe passage

through a parliament which is

taking its task far more seri-

ously than any of its four pre-

nagging doubt or two remains.

The bill, while rather good in

its watered-down version, is

far from perfect. Before any-

body starts hurling accusations

of nit-picking or trying to spoil

the party, it has to be stated

quite clearly that, while an im-

perfection or two may be ex-

cused in most things in life.

the system under which our

political life will be governed

for decades to come is not one

to the Treasury bill's provision

to retain the present system of

allowing 20 per cent of cabinet

posts to be filled by un-elected

nominees, was certainly quite

heartening to note: unfortu-

nately, disheartening in equal

measure was its failure to re-

duce the percentage to any

great deal of deliberations.

with neither side wishing to

give in completely, while at

the same time not wanting to

put any obstacles on the path

of the emergence of a consen-

sus. The result was the 10 per

essential ingredient of that

Now, compromise is an

That perhaps involved a

The opposition's challenge

But, amid the euphoria, a

With most of the undemo-

negotiations.

strong points.

decessors.

of them.

lower than 10.

cent compromise.

Contrary to standard prac-

whenever the opportunity

grouping is retained, ostensibly as a safeguard against instability, but in reality to prevent

Existence of permanent

curity and mistrust of party MPs on the part of the leader who insisted on this provision in the first place.

The point is, if a party leader can maintain his position by the strength of his personality, leadership capability, and credibility with the population at large, then sub-groupings will be nothing more than a minor irritant for him. (One universal truth is this: sitting MPs like nothing better than a leader who can win elections, while they always regard it as a

done what he did, or had he not been allowed to do so, india would have had to face a general election at a time when riots related to the Mandal Commission and Babri Masjid-Ram Mandir were at their bloodiest peak.

But despite these hitches, it is a near miracle that there is indeed a consensus in parliament over as fundamental an issue as the form of government. Constitutional debate in this country has never been as lively or as productive as during the past seven months or Not since 1972, at any

gressive role. If the bills being considered at present, give or take minor hitches, are any indication of what is to come in the future, then we are likely to witness a continuous effort to reverse the trend established in the past 19 years. During those years, 10 amendments to the constitution were passed by parliaments dominated by three authoritarian figures of one shade or another (two of them, Maj. Gen. Ziaur

the House). The trend those amendments established - particularly the Second in 1973, the Fourth in '75, the Fifth in '79, the Seventh in '86 and the Eighth in '88 - was a negative one, systematically robbing the constitution of its liberaldemocratic character and consolidating the legal base for

authoritarian rule.

Rahman in 1979 and Lt. Gen.

Hussain Muhammad Ershad in

'86 and '88, did not even sit in

These amendments and others are coming up now because never before in our history, save perhaps for 1972-73, have we had a political environment as conductve to free thought and debate as during the past seven months or so. The fall of Ershad, and the political vacuum that emerged, proved a fertile ground for the re-birth of true political pluralism - as distinct from cosmetic multipartyism - in this country.

But the crucial question will remain how the majority and opposition parties cooperate, without which none of the amendment bills will see the light of day.

by Sabir Mustafa

any credible challenge to the leader from taking shape within a party.

> caucuses within various parties the arbiter of such disputes, even less to make dissenters lose their parliamentary seats. The idea that a failed internal challenge to the leadership should be punished by the dissenters losing their seats is is a feature of many parlia-

Compromise is an essential ingredient of that broth called democracy, which always means balancing conflicting views in a pluralistic society. However, the nature of this particular issue is a fundamental one, and compromise today only means postponing final resolution till tomorrow.

tice in many other parliamentary dispensations, our 10 per centers will not even be required to get themselves elected within any given period of time. For decency's sake, there could have been a clause disqualifying people rejected at the ballot box from enjoying the benefit of the 10 per cent provision. In other words, no backdoor entry for people rebuffed at the front

Even the softened-up version of the 12th Amendment has failed to shed its mortal fear of that monster called floor-crossing, even though safeguards against floor-crossing have existed in Bangladesh since 1972. A member has always faced the prospect of losing his seat if he "crossed the floor" - meaning if he left his party and joined the rival bench, or if he voted against his party against the whip. The provision against sub-

ments, which have greatly contributed to fostering pluralism of thought within rigid party structures without threatening the stability of the system.

Of, course, the kind of grouping that sets itself up as an alternative to existing party leadership is a different thing. But that too cannot be claimed to have a destabilising effect on its own merit. Such challenges only take place when the leadership itself loses confidence of the party and tries to hang on to power regardless. In these situations, subgroupings are internal party matters, which could be solved through operation of a democratic system of leadership change. Absence of internal democracy most frequently causes people to rebel.

But there is absolutely no reason to make the Speaker undemocratic at best, and at worst, betrays a sense of inse-

duty to ditch the leader who has lost his way and become a liability to the party. But without internal democracy, subgroupings remain one of the few ways effective challenges can be made.)

The example of Chandrashekhar's revolt in the Janata Dal is often cited as proof of the instability subgroupings can cause. But in fact, the reverse is true. V. P. Singh's government fell because it was a minority government to begin with, and therefore always tottering on the edge. But more crucially. because it relied on the support of a party with whose ideological and tactical bearings it had absolutely nothing in common.

anything. Chandrashekhar's grouping ensured governance of India for a crucial period of time, when nobody was prepared for an election. Had Chandrashekhar not

rating a high degree of liberal values within a year of independence (it took India three and Pakistan nine years to achieve the same feat). At present no less than nine bills to amend the constitution

rate, when Bangladesh pro-

duced a constitution incorpo-

are either before the Jatiya Sangsad or at the parliamentary secretariat. An extraordinary figure, especially when one takes into account the fact that seven of those nine originated from opposition benches. The opposition has never

managed to move an amendment bill on the floor of the House during the tenure of the four previous parliaments, etther because the governments' massive majorities made the opposition quite ineffective (as in 1973, '79 and '88) or because parliament itself was not allowed to function in any meaningful manner (1986).

Iraqi Opposition Want Saddam Monitored by Gillian Forrester

II CEE, it's like a pencil," a nurse says, touchiong the leg of fragile baby. There is no mus-cle, only skin and bone. The baby's eyes are wide and dark brown, too large for the tiny skull.

The scene is from a video presented in London by Vanessa Redgrave, the British actress and political activist. She went to Iraq for nine days in June to witness the despair, sickness and poverty of the Iraqi people following the Gulf

She, UNICEF and the Iraqi government are among those calling for an end to sanctions imposed on Iraq by the United Nations. She says food, medical supplies and materials needed to rebuild Iraq's water and power systems are not being allowed into the country. "Can't we put people first?" is

Redgrave's message. Groups in opposition to Saddam Hussein are more united and active than ever before, and they too are calling for an end to sanctions. But they would also like to see a UN body set up to ensure that goods are distributed fairly throughout Iraq. They believe that people who are not supporters of Saddam are being deprived of vital food and

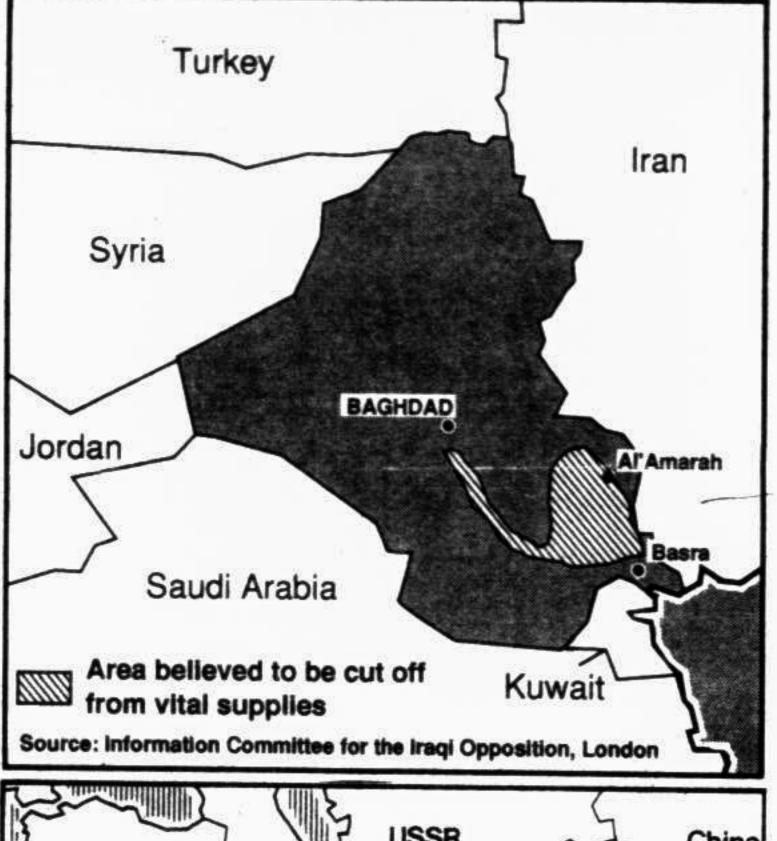
medical supplies. Opposition to Saddam Hussein has always consisted of many parties and groupings with widely differing political and religious views. Two years ago, however, they formed a united committee which is based in Damascus.

Despite large differences of opinion among them, this group, the Joint Action Committee for Iraqi Opposition, established some common goals at a conference in March. They are calling for a democratic government which respects the rights of all peoples within Iraq.

This is because they believe Saddam is responsible for the monumental disaster that has

The Iraqi government, opposition groups and international aid agencies all agree that current sanctions against Iraq should be lifted to spare the people further horror. But Iraqi opposition groups have banded together in their belief that Saddam is preventing supplies from reaching certain areas and therefore want the UN to monitor the distribution of goods. They want Saddam to be held responsible for the plight of the Iraqi people.

Iraqi suffering continues





befallen the lraqi people in the last year, and that he has himself done more damage to the country than the Allies did

during the war. A member of the Information Committee for the Iraqi Opposition living in London says the atrocities now occurring in Iraq are worse than in the last 20 years combined. If anything good has come from it, he says, it is that people are now speaking up against Saddam.

The 46-year-old Iraqi Shia left his home in 1968 to study, and did not return once Saddam's Ba'ath party came to

"The killing in the last few months is a million times worse than everything that's gone on in the last 20 years," he says. "We 've never had this kind of thing before. We heard about it in places like Ethiopia, but never at home. We are well educated people, we lived a comfortable life. When I see those children, they could be my niece or nephew," he said, after seeing UNICEF's video.

Now he and his wife devote their spare time to the political fight to remove Saddam Hussein. They belong to a network of several groups which has formed in London includthe International Committee for Incrimination of Saddam Hussein, the Information Committee for the Iraqi Opposition, and the International Committee for Free Iraq, which was launched

in the British parliament at the end of June.

Although UNICEF and the Gulf Peace Team said they had been allowed to go anywhere they requested within Iraq. Iraqi opposition groups believe there are people and places cut off from international aid and from any supplies that come into the country.

A report in the New Statesman and Society, focusing on a tour of the Gulf Peace Team through Iraq, said: "For every doctor in Iraq whose first loyalty is to the Ba'athist regime in Baghdad, for every administrator who creams off essential supplies for his won profit, there are dozens struggling in the face of overwhelming odds to bring basic health care to the people who need

Apart from the danger the Kurdish people face, a report in early July also stated that Iraqi forces had surrounded and were shelling between 30,000 and 100,000 Shia rebels and their families hiding in the marshes between Nasiriya and Basra. The Shias

have been called "Saddam's deadliest foes". In order to help Iraq achieve

democracy, members of the opposition groups believe the world must call Hussein to answer for his crimes against humanity, including his use of chemical weapons, and his attacks on neighbouring countries and groups inside Iraq, especially in the south.

Because the water and sewage systems of Iraq are still in disrepair, millions of Iraqis are drinking contaminated water and sewage still floods many city streets and some

Large numbers of babies were born prematurely because of the emotional stress of the fighting, and incubators had no power on which to run. Aid agencies were sending in kerosene refrigerators to keep antibiotics, insulin and drugs cool, but the destroyed power grid still restricts surgery to only emergencies.

Some newspapers claim a whole generation of children is being wiped out. It is esti-

mated that 500,000 refugees will return to the crippled country by this month. UNICEF was looking for another US\$16 million to help with the crisis. - GEMINI NEWS

GILLIAN FORRESTER, from the University of Regina's School of Journalism and Communications in Canada, is working for Gemini on a fellowship.

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.

Solar energy

Sir, Recent letters in this column of your issues of 13th June & 14th July, are of interest to us.

We are the leading manufacturer of Storage Batteries in Bangladesh and storage battery is the second major component for setting up solar system for availing electricity in remote regions of the country where grid electric supply is not available.

Solar panel consisting of photovoltaic cell is the major item of this solar system and this is yet required to be imported. We have been contacting various concerned government bodies and the National Board of Revenue for abolishing import tariff - as done in Pakistan and other

countries - so that solar systems are made available to our rural brethren at affordable cost. In villages solar systems can light up community centre, keep running power refrigeration facility to preserve life saving medicine and drugs, light up isolated panel mounted street light, homes etc. These facilities will help students and commercial activities in rural areas after dusk, thereby contributing to economic welfare. Delaying/reducing sleeping hours in our rural areas will also help in reducing population explosion!

We hope our decision makers discard penny-wise fiscal measures for greater social benefits. Engr. Kazi Shaheen Anwar

Rahimafrooz (Bangladesh) Ltd.

Guidance for both worlds Sir. On the occasion of

passing out parade of the young Army Officers on 20th June at the BMA, the Chief of Army Staff Lt. Gen. Nooruddin Khan delivered lecture. His address was unlike his predecessors in Bangladesh or contemporaries in Pakistan, as far as our memory goes. In his speech, besides touching the professional aspects, he called upon the young officers for offering five times prayer, and following the other teachings of the Holy Quran and the Prophet Hazrat Mohammad (SA). Indeed, prayer is for achieving mental peace, the prerequisite for building a

These officers are now like well ploughed fertile piece of land. Whatever seeds are now sown in this field will soon bloom into plants, and then well grown trees, providing sheds and fruits. Through them, may this spirit be imbibed and continued for generations to come. In return Gen. Nooruddin too, we believe, will

successful and meaningful life.

be showered with blessings in this world and hereafter. S A Hussain

Bara Mogh Bazar, Dhaka.

Foolscap, no fullscape

Sir. The lead story "Amendment Bills cleared ..." in the Daily Star of July 28 had, no, not a printing-mistake, a lexical error. The jump of the story on page 10 gave information about the volume of the Parliamentary Select Committee Report on the Constitution Amendment Bills in JS saying it contained seven pages of typed 'full-scape' paper. This would be 'foolscap,' a term used for a sheet of paper of a certain measurement, 13X16 inches approximately according to the Webster's II New Riverside Dictionary. though our local paper industries ordinarily did not keep up with this universal mea-

Bashtr Al Helal Bangla Academy Dhaka 1000.

surement.

OPINION

Subdue Anarchists It is a matter of deep con-

cern that not a single sign of democratic perception has yet nourished in any sphere of our society. It seems that we are not any how interested in taking lessons from our past. Tolerance which is known to be the essence of democracy has wholly departed from our political arena. Especially in the educational institutions, the grave scarcity of tolerance and patience puts up the question - what destiny are we heading to?

Right at this very moment, can any body point out a single degree-college which is free from the consequences of indiscreet acts of student politics? I wonder how many schools are yet left untouched! To be precise, these are the effects of the incapacious altercations among the political parties in the greater society which are displaying the nihilism.

Shall we forget the innumerable upheavals, pathos and pains that had to be passed through during the long nine years of autocratic regime? Shall we forget how our country was dragged, bullied and thrown into a long spell of political and socio-economic uncertainty, intrigue and foulplay by the devilish dictatorship? Weren't those nine years quite good enough for us to realise that fraud, anarchy and friction can do no ultimate good to a country, especially to a country like ours? Then why

shall all those dam practices of turmoil carry on without let or hindrance? Shall we be tempted to betray with the imperishable souls of Noor

Hossains? The Government very recently held a grand conference with all the political parties in quest of an appropriate solution to the constrained situation in the educational arena and withstand violence by all means. It is not at all surprising that no such solution will be available. How can a physician expect to cure others before healing his ownself? I fail to understand what hinders the political leaders to subdue the anarchists in their own parties?

However, I would like to draw everybody's notice to the well-established fact that social cohesion and socio-economic development of a country are strictly linked with its political stability. I, as a conscious citizen, urge to the politicians belonging to all camps and shades of opinion to shelve their petty party, lines whenever the situation dictates and decide on a joint course which is the best for the present and the posterity. Let the hoisted flag of democracy uphold the spirit of unanimity and spread the message of peace and tranquillity, or else we shall not survive. May Allah bless us

> Faheem H. Shahed Tikatooly, Dhaka.