

From Aid Dependency to Self-Reliance

Bangladesh-Burma Relations

The problem of the ethnic Rohingyas is beginning to put severe strain on Bangladesh-Burma relations. There is absolutely no doubt that these Burmese Muslims — legal inhabitants of that country under every international law and by every norm that entitles one to the citizenship of a country — are being severely oppressed. They are being discriminated against, subjected to special tax, and reduced to being aliens under the law of the land. It is only Bangladesh's desire not to sour the bilateral relations with its only other neighbour — save India — that has prevented the ties from worsening. The forthcoming visit of our Foreign Minister to Burma is expected to centre round the Rohingya refugees issue. It is a clear signal — as signals can be — that Bangladesh would like to solve this problem as discreetly as possible without creating any embarrassment for the Burmese government. But in order to protect our own population and to uphold humanitarian principles Bangladesh will have to seek the assistance of the international community if the refugee problem remains unresolved.

As reported recently in this journal there are about 30,000 new refugees who have come into Bangladesh. These innocent victims of a cruel and inhuman policy have harrowing tales of violence to tell the world. First and foremost the problem of Rohingya refugees must be seen as a human rights issue. Can any country follow a deliberate policy of eviction, oppression and harassment on the grounds of ethnic and religious difference? The whole Arakan region is being dotted with new cantonments, military camps and army outposts. In the Muslim populated areas Buddhist settlements are being encouraged.

The hardline attitude against the Rohingyas appears to have increased following the crushing of the democracy movement there a few years ago. These Arakanese Muslims supported the movement, as did the majority of the Burmese people. The most condemnable of the move of the Burmese military junta has been the 1982 Burma Citizenship Law which has effectively disenfranchised the ethnic Rohingyas. They have been reduced to being "stateless within a state."

The Burmese government must face up to the fact that Rohingyas and other ethnic minorities are as much Burmese as the members of the junta themselves. That they cannot oppress and discriminate against their own citizens just because they are ethnically different and follow a religion other than their own.

During his forthcoming visit to Burma Bangladesh's Foreign Minister must make it clear that we will be forced to seek the intervention of the international community if this problem is not solved amicably. Bangladesh wants friendly bilateral relations with Burma — preferably a democratic one — and that we really would like to avoid internationalising the issue if we can help it. But the Burmese authorities should be told in clear terms that we definitely will take that course of action if we have to. On that score let there be no doubt in the junta's mind. But then, do they care?

Rotting Vegetables

Markets selling fresh meat, fish and vegetables known as kutchas bazzars, are essential as our dietary habits make us entirely dependent on fresh food, rather than canned, dried or even frozen stuff. But whenever one goes into any of the city's 200-odd kutchas bazzars, one wishes one had not. More often than not, the place is filthy and odious. One can say that it would be next to impossible to keep these places clean round-the-clock or even make them free of bad smell, since fresh food stuff has a habit of rotting fast in hot and humid conditions. The only thing the City Corporation can really do is to clean up afterwards to make sure it does not become a health hazard.

But that still leaves the question of cleanliness and public convenience unresolved. There is no reason why these markets should be in such a highly unclean state virtually throughout the day and the evening. We accept that the traders themselves are largely to blame for turning the markets into veritable rubbish dumps. Practically every market can be found to be strewn with waste, by the sides of the shops and even on the pathways. This does not only make shopping at these markets a singularly unhealthy experience, they also create conditions for further deterioration of the city's hygiene level by blocking drains and sewers. If the shop owners are incapable of displaying even the minimum level of civic responsibility by storing and disposing of their rubbish in a hygienic and acceptable manner, then it falls on the DCC to take appropriate measures.

The measures we have in mind go beyond simply cleaning the places at night and in the afternoon as a matter of rule. Some sort of punitive measures are now urgently required against those responsible for turning large parts of the city into dumps, since mere reasoning and appeals to sense of civic responsibility have obviously failed to improve matters. However, the DCC should also look into ways of making it easier for the shop owners to manage their wastes before they are collected by the Corporation's trucks. The timing of the collections will also have to be revised, as a report in this paper yesterday revealed that, although DCC officials claimed such collections were being two or even three times a day, some market people complained of there being only one collection. If the DCC does not have enough staff, then it has no choice but to recruit more, because looking after its markets and keeping the city clean are two of its most crucial functions.

At the same time, the DCC has to look into the matter of unplanned and unauthorised growth of vegetable markets by the road side. Often pavements meant for pedestrians are simply taken over by such illegal hawkers, which force pedestrians to use the actual road, greatly increasing risks of serious accidents. While we may sympathise with the plight of hawkers who may not have any other way to earn a living and cannot afford the rental on proper market spaces, a line has to be drawn in the case of easily perishable goods because they pollute the environment and can become a health hazard only too easily.

OVERWHELMING aid dependency is the characteristic of a least developed country. Self-reliance is the hallmark of a newly industrialising economy. Foreign aid is a necessary but not a sufficient condition to achieve economic growth sustained over a decade or more. The sufficiency condition is achieved when the role of foreign aid starts declining, replaced by ever increasing volume of domestic resources and direct foreign investment. Against this general condition, we find in Bangladesh that an ever increasing proportion of the development budget is being funded by official development assistance (ODA) due to falling domestic resource mobilization. The inevitable result is counter-development manifested through deindustrialisation and clear trends against diversification of agriculture. Under these conditions, we are bound to stagnate as a least developed country.

The share of industry in the Gross Domestic Product or GDP has remained stagnant at less than 10 per cent for the last ten years — this is deindustrialisation, to say the least. Instead of less and less, more and more acreage are devoted to basic cereal production. This instead of agricultural diversification, it is increasingly subsistence agriculture that we are practicing today. Not that foreign aid is responsible for this; but what is conspicuously lacking is the comprehensive national endeavour to reverse the counter-development.

ODA provided under very soft terms, in fact practically

all grant, seems to have made us oblivious of the stagnation all around. We tend to regard foreign aid as easy money — easy come, easy go. Its steady availability every year, for the last 20 years, has perhaps led us to believe that the donor countries would at least keep us alive at the existing level of subsistence.

Increasing self-reliance and therefore falling aid dependency is strongly linked to generation of rapid economic growth and sustainable development. This is because, it must be accompanied by mobilisation of ever greater volume of domestic resources through taxes, private savings and reduced public consumption.

Domestic Resources

Initially, such domestic resources cannot be large, but its prudent investment in most directly productive sectors would imply a higher incremental rate of growth of GDP. Combined with greater efficiency of the taxation system, a high rate of growth of public revenue should be feasible for yet higher levels of investment in productive sectors. Simultaneously, private savings receive maximum incentives to be invested in growth inducing productive enterprises.

What has been stated above is all too well known but the problem boils down to the operationalisation of the strategy. How to do it? Presently, we seem to be at a loss to identify the specific modalities for the purpose because the overwhelming concern of the decision-makers at the highest

level have been to work out projects or proposals and secure ever higher volume of aid money. We seem to do what ever is favoured by the donors. It is reduced to a beautification exercise to heighten our attraction to the donor, beginning with the Paris consortium meeting each year. Under the circumstances, it is not surprising that the External Resources Division is the key entity of the entire bureaucracy — the most coveted out-fit of the government whose location in either ministry is determined by which Minister is more influential — Planning or Finance.

Self-reliance, however, cannot be instantaneous. It is a

often painful. It may as well cause spurts of sporadic growth in the shortrun. But lasting progress — the steady uphill march from LDC to NTC — must be indigenous. The domestic forces ought to be the prime movers for impressive rates of growth which remain firm and steady for at least a decade, if not more. Thus we have to determine the time frame and key domestic forces that set in motion the integrated pattern of increasing self-reliance combined with high rate of growth of the economy.

Underutilised Resource

First is the question of time frame. The present popularly

From LDC to NIC by Shahed Latif

time consuming task. In fact, economic growth can be compared to a long uphill march — on may have to climb down a bit to find the right approach to the steep uphill path. It is the design of the path of progress which must be worked out through careful, deliberate as well as determined approach. This basically, is the strategy of planning. An important consideration of the strategy is the time-frame since neither self-reliance nor economic growth are comparable with the switching on a lamp. But sustainable economic growth cannot be achieved without self-reliance. Foreign aid can provide the invaluable props, the critical wherewithals to smoothen the process which is

elected government with excellent democratic tradition has life span of five years — up until 1996. So what are the key initiatives that must be taken now in order to bring about the indigenous growth momentum which snowballs into gigantic proportions for the electorate to see and admire by the time people are called upon to vote for a new government? Land is still the key resource which provides the sustenance for the majority. Yet it is the most underutilised resource of the country. The lack of capacity utilisation is primarily due to agrarian constraints. Unless the sharp dichotomy between those who own and those who farm the lands is removed, the vast potential which could

easily double the size of total agricultural output can never be realised. At the same time, as I have argued earlier in my proposal on agrarian reform, a new class of businessmen traders and manufacturing entrepreneurs can be created out of the present landed class which should promote the growth of the secondary and tertiary sectors of the economy.

It has been often been argued that despite of the small size of the manufacturing sector, plant capacity are not fully utilized, primarily because of the lack in demand. The only way to increase the market size is to rapidly increase agricultural output. Price of non-grain foods, compared to other South Asian or South-East Asian countries with considerably higher per capita income are more in BGD. Enhanced production of fish, vegetable, poultry, egg etc. can be sustained easily. This would generate the extra income, at the farm level, to create the demand for urban based manufactured products and services. Expanding rural demand for urban goods created out of additional production of rural goods to meet extra demand is the key for the existing plant capacities to be fully utilized. Further, the increased domestic markets enables the industries to compete better in the world market. All leading brand names of the world today — be it garment, lipstick or automobile — first strengthened themselves in the domestic market so that they are strong enough to face the

fierce competition elsewhere. This in essence is the strategy of self-reliant growth.

Consolidated Farm

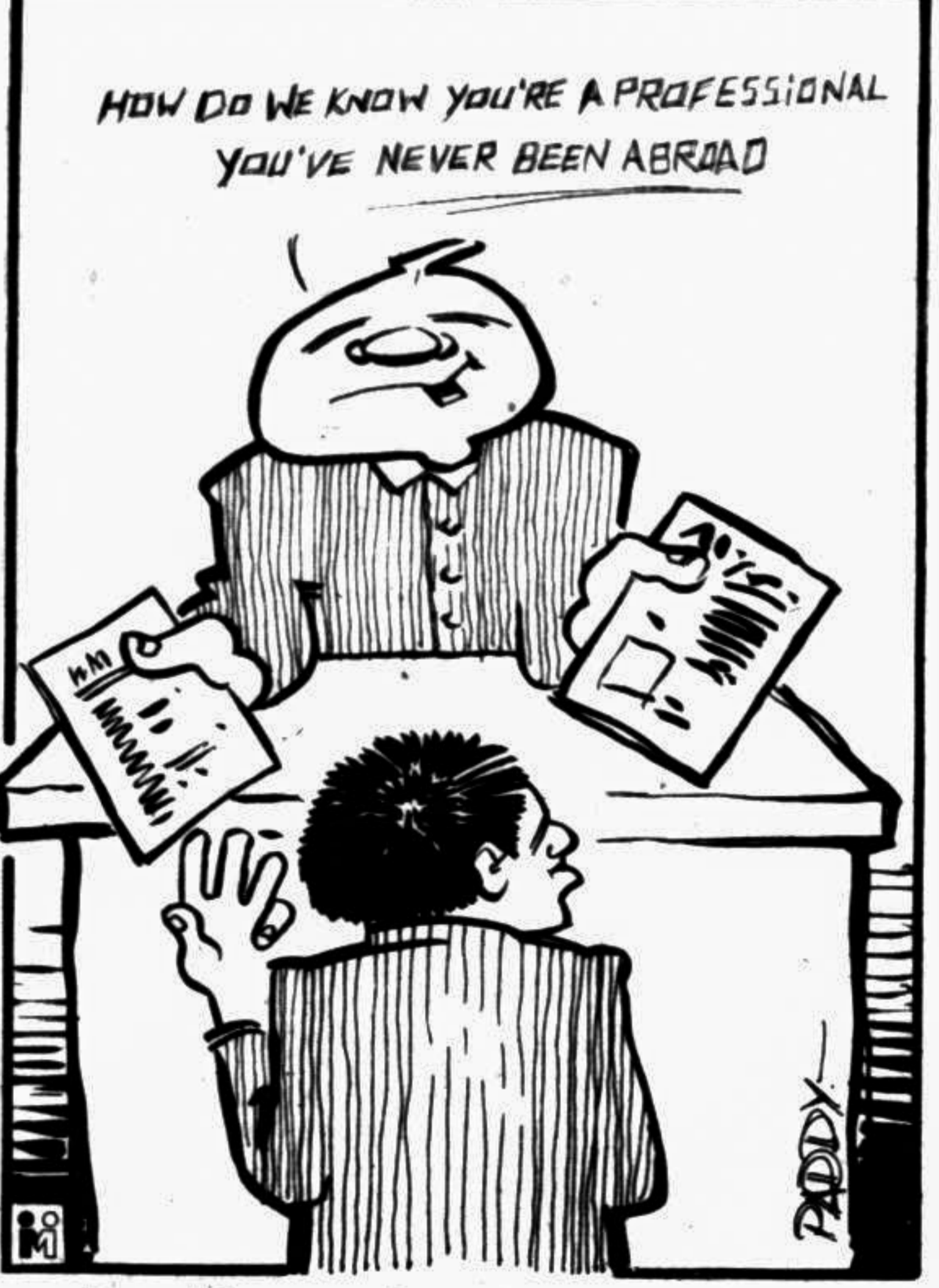
The agrarian reform plan, as detailed earlier would create 1 to 2 hectare consolidated farms engaged in intensive agriculture with cropping round the year. The land owner's investment compensation would be the year. The land owner's investment compensation would create the new breed of businessmen, traders and manufacturers. In such an economic structure, investment would largely originate from the retained earnings of farms, factories and enterprises. A small part collected as taxes would boost public revenue. In such an economic reorganisation, even land tax should bring in substantial earnings for the Government. Land, the most and underutilised resource, when intensively cultivated for productive gains would automatically create the demand for varieties of goods and services from the industries sector. We would thereby establish substantial domestic markets based on which the competitive advantages in the export markets could be secured on solid foundations.

Thus the fundamental condition to be fulfilled is agrarian reform, business development and total economic growth. It is surprising but true that neither BNP nor Awami League have yet come up with a plan for agrarian reform. But such a reform is a must, without which poverty would never vanish from this fertile land.

Plan to Lure Back Professionals May Backfire

Lugalambi George William writes from Kampala

Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni once vowed to pass a law to stop professionals from fleeing his country — a desperate plan to check the brain drain which had hobbled Uganda since Idi Amin seized power in 1971. Museveni has since changed his tune but his government's latest plan to lure back Ugandan professionals faces harsh criticism from locally educated citizens who feel it favours expatriates at the expense of those who never left.



country for places where they can get jobs — and high-paying ones. Most flock to North America, Western Europe or southern Africa.

In one of his radical pronouncements upon taking power, President Museveni said his government would legislate to prevent professionals who had been trained at public expense from leaving the country. But Museveni seems to have abandoned the idea. He now attributes the brain drain crisis to economic malaise, political repression and insecurity.

His government has begun tackling the brain-drain problem with the launch of a national programme called TOKTEN, Transfer Of Knowledge Through Expatriate Nationals. The programme, administered by the Ministry of Planning and Economic Development, is supported by the United Nations Development Programme, the International Organisation of Migration, the World Bank and a German development-assistance programme.

TOKTEN tries to mobilise highly qualified nationals and attract talented professionals and managers abroad to return to Uganda for permanent or temporary work contracts. Jobs are offered in fields which urgently need expertise that is not locally available.

According to Kweronda Ruhamba, the president's special assistant on return of professionals, 64 professionals have been persuaded to return home over the past two years, and they have been gainfully

employed in public offices. Many others are said to be preparing to resettle in Uganda.

Returnees, however, often encounter frustration caused by government red tape. Moreover, prospective applicants are often unaware of job openings since advertisements in the local mass media do not reach a large international audience.

Returnees have also met with hostility from government and para-statal company officials who are wary of being displaced by them and fear their own mediocrity and corruption could be exposed. Within the rank-and-file, too, employees often worry that returnees could curtail their chances of promotion.

The unsettling irony, though, is that government policy tends to encourage the exodus of the educated.

Generally, Ugandans abroad are accorded preference over those who never left in the first place. In an editorial, Kampala's Weekly Topic observed: "Somehow, even if they have the same qualifications or even less, the mere fact of one having lived and worked abroad is bestowed with a magical quality."

Not only will the returning Ugandan get the job, he will also get a monthly salary of a staggering \$10,000 (or 8 million Ugandan shillings) while the Ugandan who never left must settle for a miserable 100,000 Ugandan shillings.

The idea of appealing to professionals to return to

Uganda is not everyone's cup of tea. Those who oppose it argue that it would be more logical to beef up the remuneration and working conditions of professionals who chose not to leave the country. Those in favour of the idea argue there is little choice but to lure expatriate Ugandans home, since those who stayed have failed to deliver the goods.

Currently, government business is plagued by idleness, inefficiency and moonlighting in Uganda's bloated civil service. The government announced at the end of April that 60,000 of its employees would be laid off. Beginning next July 1, they will no longer appear on the government payroll. In fact, the government wants to keep only 110,000 of Uganda's 180,000 civil servants on the job.

Ghost employees, too, have severely drained the national coffers. The Public Service Review and Re-organisation Commission discovered that over the last four years, the government was "paying" thousands of non-existent workers. In the Ministry of Education alone, 35,000 "teachers" were "working" in non-existent schools.

Much as the government is banking on returnee professionals to revamp the ailing civil service, it is an open secret that some Ugandan specialists who returned and were placed in top positions muddled things up, while others got frustrated and deserted.

So unless the economy fully picks up, the brain drain crisis will be hard to hem in. And the country will either spend more resources hiring foreigners to fill the manpower gap, or make do with an atrociously inefficient civil service.

— GEMINI NEWS

LUGALAMBI GEORGE WILLIAM is a mass communication student at Makerere University in Kampala. He edits the Makerere Students Guild newspaper, the Make-rean.

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.

Cause of women

Sir, If democracy is 'for the people, by the people, for the people', then what democracy is therefore the fifty per cent of Bangladesh population (i.e. women) appears to be a 'million dollar question'. When the nation chose two top leaders in the person of women, we the weaker fifty per cent of the population naturally held high hopes. We thought better time would be coming for us — at last we would be getting our deserved places in the society. Nine months have passed making us proud to have a woman Prime Minister and a woman Opposition leader — but we saw no other change in the field of politics and spheres of the society where women folk still remain depressed. We have our representative-members in the parliament (their number should have been raised proportionately to our population),

chosen by the elected Members of the Parliament who happen to be mostly male. Previously at least one woman Minister headed the Ministry of Women Affairs which now is being headed by a male Minister, assisted by a woman State Minister, although we could see no reason why a woman MP could not be given the charge as the full Minister. We also not see any effective role being played by any woman MP regarding women's problems. The problems of the female victims of the cyclone and then again of flood affected areas could not get prominence by our representatives in the Parliament. Interests of the fifty per cent are not being looked after resulting in increased poverty, illiteracy, population growth and overall economic imbalance.

We expect a better position of women under the democratic Government led by a woman Prime Minister. We expect an

active role from our women MPs, in the Parliament, in extracting our share in the government and the society as well. But when something like "Tanbazar" happenings take place and we see no woman MP taking interest in that problem of the helpless quarter (whoever they are) of our female world which is the creation of our society and circumstances, we feel disappointed. Somehow their problems are to be solved like many other problems of the women or for that matter, of the society. These are all inter-related, the victims are the creation of injustice, dowry system, poverty and many other consequences for which they are not responsible. If they are to shun their 'immoral' profession, who takes the responsibility of feeding them? Who is arranging for their rehabilitation? Who is going to mould the opinion of the society and give them work and shelter? Or should they annihilate themselves for keeping so called 'religious values' up in Bangladesh? The leaders should decide that.

In my opinion the woman MPs should look after and fight for the rights of the unfortunate, underprivileged, uneducated helpless fifty per cent of the society. They should plan and materialise that for the betterment of the condition of women folk who are giving their energy, labour and time for the family, for the society, for the nation and not getting 'paid', nor being looked after properly by anybody.

In the meantime, I don't think it would be unjustified or unreasonable, if I suggest humbly that our Prime Minister insist that fifty per cent of the people she would be meeting in her weekly 'Meet the people programme' should be women.

Munira Khan
Green road, Dhaka

Campus violence

Sir, In the recent days, violence has been growing cancerously in our university and colleges leading to loss of promising lives, sessions jam, increasing financial burden on the guardians and so on. The students organizations are tied to the national political parties and therefore, the former are naturally patronized and defended by the latter. Sadly, the students fronts of the two major political parties of the country, who are said to be committed to improve the fate of the people, have mainly

been resorting to violence. The general students community have lost their faith in those organizations. It has been apparently proved that none of them has any sincere will to shun terrorism and let the students study. Many discussions have been held at various levels but all those ended yielding nothing.

There may be different trends in a party's leadership hierarchy. However, the people of this country understand that currently, perhaps the trend patronizing terrorism overpowers others in both the major parties' decision-making structures. I believe that there must be at least some people who truly love the country. The state of the polity has been in utter shambles. My honours final examination's date has been deferred from February 1991 to November 1991 through repeated shifting. Still it is not certain whether the examinations would be held at last! I have realized that it is unwise to look at those major political parties and their student fronts for systematization of the current chaotic situation. I myself would like to make efforts, to the best of my capacity, to bring an end to the

current state of affairs. As a small number of the terrorists are believably patronized by their parent organizations, would another small number of the people with sincerity, good will and love for the country patronize me or any one such to undo terrorism, specially on the Dhaka University campus?

Md. Abdur Rouf
Zahurul Haque Hall
Dhaka University

Power failure in N'ganj

Sir, We are the inhabitants of Masdair, a densely populated area of Narayanganj, where power failure has become a regular phenomenon. Almost every day electricity goes off at least 2/3 times. This causes untold suffering to the inhabitants of the area where also a considerable number of business establishments are situated. On the other hand, students are also the worst sufferers.

I, on behalf of the inhabitants, request the concerned authorities to kindly look into the matter.

Fayezur Rahman (Iqbal)
South Masdair, Narayanganj