

# May 1992, Test for Filipino Democracy

by Feroz M Hassan

## Wages Must Reflect Economic Reality

Both sides, the government and the representatives of the workers, are holding talks to avert the 48-hour countrywide work stoppage, scheduled to start from 22 December, planned by the Sramik Karmachari Oikhya Parishad (SKOP) and the workers of the jute and textile sector. We would like to express our appreciation to all the parties concerned for making sincere efforts to avert a situation which, in addition to affecting national output, will no doubt cause tremendous inconvenience to the public and may create social unrest.

While we support the move to provide a minimum standard of living for our workers, we cannot be indifferent to the wider questions that the SKOP and jute and textile workers' demands have given rise to. The five-point charter of demands of the SKOP talks of a new national minimum wage and of repealing the so-called anti-worker labour laws. These demands should be looked into. However, the SKOP also talks about halting the move towards denationalisation which is one of the key economic policies of Begum Zia's government. Are our labour leaders fully cognizant of the implications of their demands?

About a minimum wage for all, the government is correctly hesitant about imposing the wage commission's report on the private sector. Fixing of wages must be directly linked to productivity. To ensure that workers are not cheated out of their legitimate rights the labour law provides for elected CBA's. It is for them to negotiate a fair wage for their workers, which may, in profitable enterprises, be much higher than in others. To burden all production units with a wage structure which they may be unable to cope with, will lead to closures and bankruptcies as we have now. As for the government sectors, they will have more and more debts burdening the taxpayers with the type of losses that have become the hall mark of the nationalised sector at the moment.

The fundamental issue here is not of fair wages nor of high profitability but of relating wages to productivity. Our workers in general and trade unions in particular will have to learn to relate their own interest with that of the national economy. If the industry is making a loss for whatever reason — and often the reasons are external — then the workers will have to share in that loss. If they think that they are outside the scope of the overall economic situation then we are only likely to repeat what is going on now. A word needs to be addressed to the management also. They will have to behave in a way so as to gain the trust of the workers. At the moment the relation between the workers and the management is one of mistrust and suspicion; and it is this suspicion that leads workers to think that management is hiding the truth when the latter claims to be incurring a loss.

We have said it several times before and feel the need to repeat. However just the demand and fair the cause, nobody has the right to hold the nation to ransom. Nobody has the right to deprive the people of their basic public services. The very programme of SKOP and of the jute and textile workers smacks of disregard for public welfare and disrespect for the rule of law.

The government has so far gone more than half way to meet the demands of the workers. We call upon the other party to show similar flexibility and resolve this issue, keeping in mind the wider national interest. Under no circumstances should the type of barricade that we saw a few weeks ago, be allowed to be repeated.

## A Cool Ten-hour Raid

It was Friday night. Some thirty rickshaw-van load of persons came from somewhere in the direction of Kaliganj and over loudspeakers directed all the residents of village Joradaha, Jessore, to stay indoors on pain of death. All of the hundred-and-fifty raiders were armed and had little problem in fastening all the male adults of the village to posts and reduce them to utter helplessness. Whoever resisted got a dose of thrashing that discouraged others from raising an alarm. For ten hours the rampage continued. The main mission was looting and by the way molesting the women. They took away everything from 63 houses in the village including blankets, kankhas and clothes of personal use. The loot was loaded on the vans and the horde melted into the breaking dawn very coolly.

It didn't happen in dreams. The villagers were so terrorised that it was most difficult to persuade anyone of them to lodge a case with the police. To crown it all, when parading they raised slogans glorifying some revolutionary communist party, adding an element of weirdness to what was already a mindlessly cruel act of dacoity.

This story came out in the national press on Monday. We have now to draw our own conclusions and learn our morals from the reports of this incredible episode. Almost all of our 70 thousand and odd villages are unsecured against attacks by such looting hordes. Any sizeable group can raid almost any village — unchallenged. Only one thing prevents from all of our villages being subjected to the fate of Joradaha. The social factor — not law and order or the penal code. It is the erosion of that factor that is making all of our rural life vulnerable to such violations.

How strikingly did the gang illustrate the ironic fact that such social depredations can be justified by politicising the label. Worst crimes, crimes such as cannot be atoned for by punishing a whole generation of a people have passed with perfect impunity in this very land of Islam's peace and Chaitanya's love and Buddha's universal amity.

THE Filipinos on May 11, 1992, will again exercise their constitutional right of suffrage to choose the next President of the Republic. Members of the Congress and officials of the local government bodies. The elections of 1992 will thereby give the Philippine political system a multi-party system as provided in the country's new constitution which was adopted on February 2, 1987 following its approval by 21,764,777 votes out of 25,029,829 registered voters in the national plebiscite.

Strategically located along the southeast rim of Asia, the Philippine archipelago embraces over 7,000 islands, stretching in a north-south direction for over 1000 miles. The inhabitants predominantly of Malay stock are largely (85 per cent) Roman Catholic, although a politically significant Muslim minority (10 per cent) is concentrated in the south.

Claimed for Spain by Ferdinand Magellan in 1521 and ruled by that country until occupied by the United States during the Spanish-American War of 1898, the Philippines became a self-governing commonwealth under US tutelage in 1935 and was accorded full independence on July 4, 1946.

In the Philippines today, almost 19 years after the collapse of Philippine democracy and barely six months before the end of Mrs Corason Aquino's administration, the political players, traditional and emerging, are starting to mobilize, establishing their own political machineries to capture the much coveted public office and highest position — the presidency. Simultaneously the electorate is confronted with a big and highly controversial question —

who is the best qualified president?

The Philippine political area is divided into two main political camps: the ruling coalition and the opposition. The former consists of those who are presently occupying the positions in the country and are active participants in governance. On the other hand the opposition is composed of those who act as fiscalizers of the existing administration for varied reasons, whether for their own or for the public interest.

In Philippines there are different political parties with varied leanings. Of these the major visible political parties vying to become the ruling party beyond 1992 are as follows:

### Aspirant Parties

Nacionalista Party (NP) is the oldest political party from which the Liberals withdrew in 1946. It responds and defends as its creed the nationalist ideology of the center, an ideology that is committed to peaceful rather than violent change, evolutionary rather than the present revolutionary. Vice President Salvador Laurel and Minority Floor Leader Senator Juan Ponce-Enrique are fighting for presidential nomination from this party. There is a close fight between the two presidential aspirants considering their equal popularity within the party.

Liberal Party (LP) was organized in 1946 by a group of centrist Nacionalista dissidents. The party is led by Senator Jorito Salonga who is also an aspirant for the post of President. LP's political philosophy is based on belief in progress, the essential goodness of man, his desire for freedom, and his capability of exercising rational choice.

Partido Ng Musang Filipino (PMP). Senator Estroza formed this party after resigning from Liberal Party on the issue of disagreement in party policies and the manner by which the LP selected their standard bearers in the national convention. Senator Joseph Estroza who is extremely popular among the working class was a well known movie star before he joined politics. His spotless record as a Mayor of the San Juan municipality proved that he has the making of a good public servant. He is vying for the nomination of the party for being a Presidential candidate also.

People's Reform Party (PRP) is akin to the People's Action Party (PAP) of Singapore. This party was launched by movers which was founded by Miriam Defensor Santiago. The movers started as a nationwide citizen's movement for good government founded on the basic principle that "for evil to triumph, it is sufficient that good men shall do nothing." The PRP standard bearer Dr Miriam Defensor Santiago who promises to eliminate graft and corruption is also a candidate for the Presidential race.

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Filipino Lakas Ng Bayan, is a people oriented, mass-based and ideologically-centered political party. Its leader Senator Aquilino Pimental is a presidential aspirant. Senator Pimental stood during the dark years of the dictatorship as a nationalist advances the cause of freedom and genuine empowerment of the people.

By the end of December all the parties will finalise their presidential nominees for the 1992 election generally by holding the national convention. After the ascendancy of President Corason Aquino into power through the "people's power revolution" (EDSA) one can find increase in the number of political parties accompanied by the increase in the number of "eligible" presidential candidates. Most of these candidates (presidential) have already created a name in the political scene.

### Issues

The coming election will be dominated by issues of poverty, land-reform, unemployment, corruption and graft. The various parties and their leaders are already focusing on such issues which can benefit the large majority of the population. President Aquino has already taken up many such steps to eradicate poverty and distribute land to land-less people.

Massive grinding poverty exist in the Filipino society. Graft and corruption is rampant in the government and the society. The hurdles to a free, fair and meaningful elections can be the problems of money power, terrorism and possibilities of fraud. With Imelda back to Philippines, the money power influencing the electoral results is visible. All knows that vice-president

Laurel went to the air port to receive Imelda. As one journalist told me coming back of Imelda has added spice to the both.

Today, the Philippines is facing many serious and grave economic predicaments. Statistics show that out of 60 million Filipinos, 40 million are poor and out of that 20 million poor, 16 million are confirmed as being "very poor."

In 1986, the country's foreign debt was US\$ 26.3 billion and today the foreign debt is about US\$ 30 billion. Mrs Aquino's government had to borrow more and more in order to make payments on the previous loans, thus in turn has incurred higher and higher interest burdens. The foreign debt will have to be addressed by the incoming government more efficiently while arrange for employment, give food and shelter to millions of people.

### Namfrel

In the upcoming election the citizens organisation "NAMFREL" is going to do the parallel vote counting under the auspices of a newly formed Media Group, which will provide the funds. Namfrel with Makati Business Club has already launched a nationwide civic education programme to literate the voters about the senators / congressman's performance during 1986-1991 as public officials. The Catholic Parish through its parish councils has also started voters education programme to make the election meaningful. All these activities has been officially recognised by Commission of Election (COMELEC).

When we met the COMELEC officials it was gathered that they will require 510,000 election official for the 170,000 polling sites. They will have about 300,000

teachers available from Ministry of Education rest have to be recruited for the specific purpose. Our team also met the Chief of the Armed Forces General Abadina who categorically said that the armed forces will support all efforts of President Aquino in holding free and fair elections and ensure peaceful transition to a newly-elected government. He said "we want a credible election under any circumstances."

President Corason Aquino told me and the other members of the NDI delegation that 1992 polls would be the nation's freest election. She would like to see to it that the elections successfully completed and there by ensure a peaceful transition to a new government.

And in order that none can challenge the neutrality of the government in holding free/fair, honest election the President welcomed the international election monitoring teams to be present during the May 1992 elections.

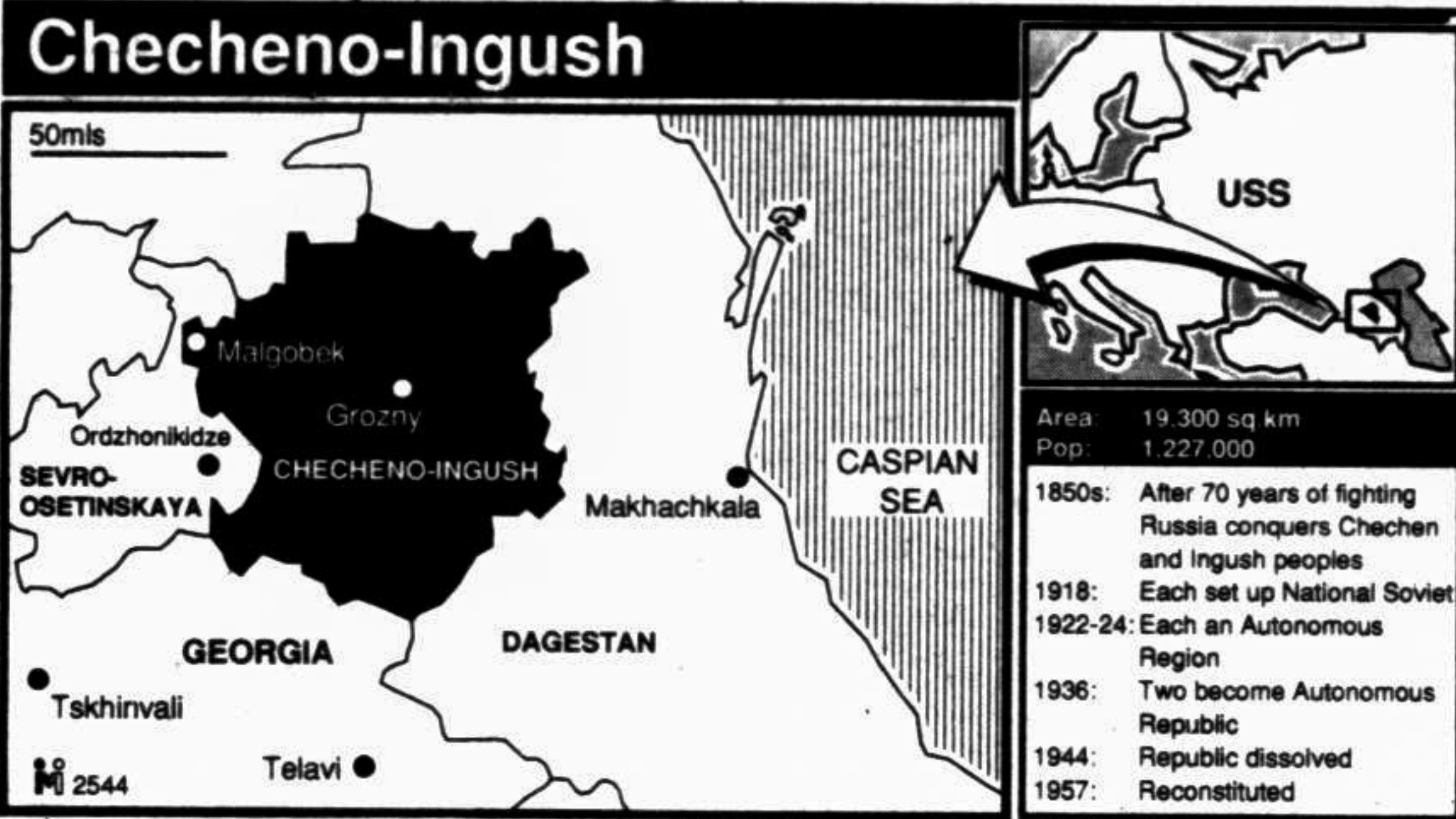
Since President Aquino took office in 1986, the Philippines has experienced a continuous, though at times shaky, transition to democracy. The true test will be now whether, after having clearly repudiated the country's repressive past, Filipinos can now conduct credible and peaceful national elections and emerge from that process with a strong, democratically elected government equipped to address the myriad problems facing the country.

Mr Feroz M Hassan recently visited Philippines as a member of National Democratic Institutes' delegation to assess the political situation in the Philippines and the government's preparation for holding the ensuing elections.

# The Tangle in the Caucasus that Confronts Yeltsin

Charles Quist Adade writes from St Petersburg

The huge vote for independence in the Ukraine puts another question mark against the final political shape of the vast area once known as the Soviet Union. The shape of Russia is also still in question. What has happened in one of its tiny republics, Checheno-Ingush, is just one example of many complicated ethnic situations now arising from the political ferment created by Gorbachev's glasnost.



higher council of Checheno-Ingush was chosen to prepare for elections. A few weeks later the executive council of a body known as the National Congress of the Chechen People almost usurped the provisional council by taking over these preparations.

armed soldiers. The Russian parliament, which had already refused to recognise the Chechen Congress executive, declared the elections null and void, and illegal.

Russians. In decreeing a state of emergency Yeltsin argued that destabilisation could disturb the radical economic reforms he had just announced for Russia. But it is believed he wanted to nip any Chechen revolution in the bud because he feared a snowball effect on Russia's 99 other autonomous republics and nationalities.

port of Islamic fundamentalism from neighbouring Muslim states. The reality of this threat was seen when support for Dadayev came from Muslim republics in the region and from fundamentalists in Turkey and Afghanistan.

King Hussein of Jordan sent an envoy to discuss aid needs with Dadayev, who was sworn into office on the Koranic oath. Another source of concern for the Russians is what has been called the unholy alliance between Zviad Gamsakhurdia, President of Georgia, and Dadayev. Russian democrats accused Gamsakhurdia of dictatorial rule and repression of the opposition.

They have attacked him for genocide in Southern Ossetia where ethnic minorities are fighting a liberation war against Georgia. Yeltsin says he is now ready for political dialogue with Checheno-Ingush. Dadayev says he will talk only after Yeltsin has recognised Chechen independence.

To the Chechen and Ingush people Russia has remained a constant threat to their very existence. Since an incident in 1971 when a leader named Sheikh Mansur was arrested and exiled by Russian soldiers the two peoples have believed

that no matter what is the regime in Moscow they are in danger of total assimilation, dispersal, deportation and genocide.

Their fears are justified. Thirty years of war in the Caucasus with the Russians led to destitution and decimation of the population. They cannot forget the war with the White Guards in the wake of the October Socialist Revolution and Stalin's genocide and deportations.

Land seized from the Ingush in Ossetia has still not been returned to them. Nor have areas captured from the Chechens in Dagestan.

Rising Russian nationalism after the August abortive coup in Moscow has also raised fear among the mountain peoples of the Northern Caucasus that a new Russian empire is in the making.

This has led to the formation of a Caucasus Confederation to provide a "defensive umbrella" for the ethnic minorities in Checheno-Ingush, Dagestan, Ossetia, Karachayevo-Balcaria, Kabarda, Abkhazia and Aldyga.

The new confederation, headed by Yuri Shanbov, is seen not only as a shield against Russian hegemony in the Northern Caucasus but also as a defence against Georgian expansionism in the area.

A Lebanon seems to be taking shape in the Northern Caucasus. And this should worry Gorbachev as well as Yeltsin. — GEMINI NEWS

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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.

### Inhuman

Sir, Further to my letter, "Democratic violence", which you printed in your issue of 8th December and which reflected my anger, I am writing today in an even more angry state.

I had mentioned my earlier letter of my organization's work with and support to organizations working with disabled persons. I have on 11th December heard of an appalling incident of violence which took place against a physically disabled person on 8th December.

van and sat on his tricycle on top of the van. When the van passed through Gulistan it was stopped by 6 or 7 young men who asked Deen Islam why he was breaking the hartal. He explained why he needed the help of the van as he was unable to walk and that he worked for the only self-help organization of the disabled persons in Bangladesh. The young men armed with hockey sticks did not listen to his request to allow him to proceed and set about his wheelchair with their sticks. The wheels were damaged and the air was let out of the tyres. It is luck that Deen Islam escaped injury to his person, but then, damaging the wheels of Deen Islam's tricycle was just the same as cutting off both his legs. The attackers, by the way, did not damage the van or attack the van driver.

It seems that parents, teachers, community leaders, and all other figures of authority need to get involved in a

very serious education programme, so that incidents such as this never happen again.

There is great deal of ignorance regarding persons with disabilities and in many countries, not only in Bangladesh, disabled persons are laughed at and ridiculed and regarded as sub-normal. It is high time that people realise that persons with disabilities are just the same as you and I, but some of their physical or mental abilities may have been damaged in some way during their life. All they need from the young people with their hockey sticks is understanding not savage violence.

Julian Francis  
CUSO Director South Asia,  
Dhaka.

### A slum

Sir, The sun was beating down on the slum — a dirty slum in the vast Dhaka city. A dirty little hut came into view as I walked on. The little hut was covered with filthy looking sags. I went inside. The entrance was so low that I had to bend both my head and back. As I entered, my nose caught a whiff of sweat and mud. It was quite dark, but for the faint

glimmer of a hurricane. Two young children were sleeping on the ground. They were sweating profusely. There was no provision for ventilation. The air was hot. I looked at the poor kids lying in the unhygienic and unhealthy atmosphere, unconcerned and just uncared. Their mother was out somewhere, working.

My heart cried for the poor, unfortunate children crushed by the miseries of poverty and the cold reality of life. Why should they not enjoy their childhood? Why should they suffer so much? I could not think. My mind was swarming. I had no answer. But I think the society must have one.

Mahruba Sameen  
Dhaka

### Lalmatia streets

Sir, Most of the streets of Lalmatia have developed cracks and pot holes and become dangerous for both the pedestrians and vehicles.

Although I don't live in Lalmatia, I go there at least twice a week to take my classes. Specially at the lanes around "Arong" the rickshaw pullers and the passengers as well, have to experience a lot

of difficulties not for any of their faults. When it rains the streets become submerged, people can't even see the broken parts and run a greater risk of avoidable accidents. The same is the condition at night when poor light limits vision.

Therefore on behalf of the people of Lalmatia I request the concerned authorities to kindly arrange for repair of the thoroughfares before someone is fatally hurt.

H. M. Aziz  
BUET, Dhaka

### Personnel management

Sir, Management is the art of managing, controlling, directing etc Personnel Management or presently called Human Resource Management deals with the entire system of personnel administration. In an organization, personnel or staff members, top to bottom, are the key elements for realizing the organizational goals. Hence, proper management of personnel is a must for smooth and productive operation of any organization.

In the advanced countries including Europe, America and

Japan, the discipline of personnel management has developed tremendously. But in Bangladesh, personnel management is yet to make its proper place in various organizations. The Institute of Personnel Management, Bangladesh situated at Mohammapur, Dhaka with its few regional branches has been rendering useful services toward the growth and development of personnel management system in our country. Many organizations have started receiving benefits after setting up personnel management division/department. The Institute of Personnel Management (IPM) is engaged in producing high calibre personnel managers and other management specialists and is affiliated with certain international institutes of personnel management including the American one.

In my opinion, various organizations including those of the government may, with the help of IPM, arrange training in personnel management for their officers and employees. This would benefit the public they serve.

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