The Baily Star

Dhaka, Saturday, October 30, 1993

Eventful Non-event

The official announcement declaring the Taka convertible on current account, has passed off without causing any stir on the economic scene, almost like a non-event. On considerations of a smooth transition to full convertibility eventually. this is indeed a desirable outcome. However, the question is, has the Taka really been made free for transactions on current account?

The official announcement is rather terse, leaving many a question unanswered. Although marking a departure from the usual sense convertibility is understood, continuation of restrictions on outward remittances for living expenses of family members staying abroad or for school level education, can be rationalised to some extent. However, should the central bank continue to define the courses of higher studies that can freely be pursued abroad? For instance, studying literature abroad is said to be an unapproved course. As a participant at The Daily Star Round Table on Taka convertibility put it succinctly, why should the government deny access to foreign exchange to someone, if he or she, wishes to study fashion design in an institution abroad?

The official announcement on current account convertibility is silent about certain other restrictions on free access to foreign exchange such as travel quota and limitations on medical expenses abroad. Presumably, such restrictions would stay in place. It could be that the present quotas are quite liberal. However, the currency is not really convertible as long as such limitations persist.

In point of fact, the extent to which the new convertibility has freed foreign currency transactions even in trade account, remains ambiguous. Subject to the limitations imposed by the import policy, for all practical purposes, the Taka had been convertible for outward remittance on goods account anyway. Exporters, on the other hand, could retain only up to ten per cent of their foreign currency receipts in their accounts. They were obliged to convert the balance of foreign exchange receipts into Taka forthwith. In other words, exporters were not free to convert foreign currency earnings into Taka at a time of their choosing, as and when they needed to. The official announcement is silent on this aspect of convertibility also. Rather, available indications suggest that, by and large, status quo ante has been retained. Convertibility did not confer any new freedom on the exporter.

The requirement of obtaining prior permission of the central bank for remittance of profits of foreign banks, insurance companies and other financial institutions has been waived. This is a new measure of exchange control relaxation that convertibility on current account brought in. However, it is only a limited few who would stand to enjoy this

new freedom.

Whatever strictly legalistic interpretations might suggest, it is impractical to detach the issue of conversion rate from currency convertibility. A currency is not really convertible unless the exchange rate is determined by the market freely. In this area, the prevailing situation is the same as it was before the Taka was declared convertible on current account. Convertibility did not bring any change in the scenario. The central bank continues to announce its buying and selling rates. Under its guiding hand, banks offer their quotations within the spread between the central bank's buying and selling rates. The parallel market for foreign currency continues to operate, very much the same way it did when exchange controls were fully functional.

All in all, the newly introduced foreign exchange regime does not seem to meet the tests of currency convertibility on current account. It did not even bring significant new measures of exchange control relaxation. Even so, it is a crucial move towards opening up the economy. Each country has to tailor its programme to suit its own circumstances. Let us hope that this first, albeit hesitant, step will take on a surer foothold in the coming months so that the Taka may attain full convertibility by the middle of next year as scheduled.

What's Wrong with Molasses?

Can you do this in a 'market' economy? Can you dictate the farmer what to cultivate and where to sell the produce? Doesn't such conduct remind one of the infamous 'neelkar' sahibs' so detested by the farmers?

A report from Natore published by The Daily Star on Tuesday and headlined 'Production of molasses hamper sugar output' says that 'government has banned production of molasses in mill areas but a section of people are producing it despite repeated warning by the concerned authorities.' The report adds that the number of 'illegal' crushers had already risen to over 100 against only 55 last year.

It is understandable that a sugar mill — to be viable — must get its supply of canes from the fields adjacent to it. This necessitates ensuring that the farmers working the fields around the mill keep to cane farming and offer their produce to the mill. How to ensure that the farmer would do the bidding? Centrally planned economies, enforceable only through an authoritarian political dispensation, could demand of the farmers such abidance But in an economy where market forces are being held to be the key to prosperity and are given the best supports to come into full operation, the farmer will have a choice in deciding what to produce and where to sell. Market economy posits that he will go for the commodity having the best demand and sell that to who offers the highest price. There can be nothing limiting his choice on this account.

If there is a question of the millwallahs helping the cane farmers with advances against the crop or other farming inputs as inducement for being helpful in return, that cannot be used as an instrument of exploiting the tillers by offering prices lower than available from elsewhere. When producing molasses almost guarantees a better return than selling to the mill, the farmer has all the rights to go for that. The mill's job is to offer an economically competitive price and not get government to force the farmers into compliance. If the mill has to be subsidised in the face of cheaper sugar from across the border, it is the government - according to worldwide practice - that would do

that and not the farmer. Molasses is no contraband commodity. Rather refined sugar is close to being one. Only a handful of years back ours was a sugar exporting country. Often we produced it in surplus quantities and offered it abroad at internationally competitive prices. Certainly we cannot force the farmers to make amends for our sugar sector's unhappy performance.

Bangladesh Agriculture: Crisis in Development

N the year 1990, the total agricultural population of 79 million in Bangladesh were primarily dependent on the fixed supply of nine million hectares of cultivated land; less than a bigha of land on a per capita basis. The situation is indicative of utter scarcity of land, which has no parallel in the recorded history of mankind so far. Even in China, per capita availability was at least a bigha of land for the rural population and it is increasing because the population dependent on agriculture is decreasing every year due to rapid industrialisation. During the last decade, (1980-1990) agricultural population in China increased by 3.9 per cent only against 20 per cent increase of Bangladesh.

Also, it is not only growth in manufacturing and urban job creation which caused the decline in population dependent on agriculture. During the same period, our total population increased by as much as 31 per cent against only 15 per cent in China. Severe birth control and massive industrialisation are the twin factors responsible for the demographic transition of China. The interactive, mutually reinforcing nature of the two factors should be noted, since growth in manufacturing leading to generation of employment for child bearing women population, together with congested living conditions at the expanding industrial areas automatically lowered the birth rates.

Population

According to the Human Development Report, 1993, the estimated population of Bangladesh in the year 2000 will be 144.3 million, implying a 25 per cent increase from 1990,

to Japan whereas it is a

liability to Bangladesh;

it is a liability to Bangladesh

because it is still posing as one

of the main hindrances to socio-

economic development of the

continuous attempts have been

made by the successive gov-

ernments to arrest the galloping

growth of population and to

convert the vast untapped

manpower into a productive

force. Experience testifies that a

uni-sectoral or uni-dimensional

approach has not yielded any

significant result in the reduc-

tion of the unbridled population

growth. It is therefore now being

conceived by the planners, re-

searchers and practitioners that

population-related issues and

problems have to be addressed

or handled by an inter-sectoral

and multi-dimensional ap-

proach. As population and de-

mography constitute a special-

ized field, training is considered

essential to preparing the devel-

opment actors so that they can

operate efficaciously in the

tration Training Centre (BPATC)

is alive to the increasing gravity

of the population problem and

to the urgency of devising

effective mechanisms to solve

the problem. It also envisions of

transforming the vast reservoir

of unskilled manpower into a

productive workforce by

incorporating in its training

agenda HRD components and

population-related subjects.

Keeping this in view, BPATC or-

ganized a one-day seminar very

recently. The specific objectives

of the seminar were — i) to re-

view the present status and effi-

cacy of population training now

in operation in this country, ii)

to assess the training needs of

the persons who are working or

will work in future in the popu-

lation field, and iii) to formulate

recommendations about the

measures and strategies for

coping with the increasing trend

that population of Bangladesh

is too big for a country having

small geographical area and

limited resources. It is also a

proven fact that population has

links with development and en-

vironment. Population becomes

a problem only when it goes be-

yond the economic capacity of a

It is traditionally conceived

of population growth.

Bangladesh Public Adminis-

problem solution process.

For the last few decades,

against 30 per cent increase during the previous ten year period (1980-90). There is a decline no doubt, but too little to bring about any substantial demographic transition like in China, unless there are other compelling factors which should force a reduction of the birth

In the meantime, our population programme has been rated as a success because the decline has already set in. If, for example, if the year 2000 population could be drawn down to 140 million, then the total percentage growth will be reduced to 22 per cent against the estimated one quarter increase. This can be realised, provided we are able to create the compelling situation through manufacturing growth and rapid urbanisation, which will induce postponement of marriage or adoption of practices to prevent pregnancy after marriage.

Industrialisation and urban growth are very much inter-related. Population growth can be curtailed if industrialisation is rapid and successful. In demographic terms, increase in agricultural population was 20 per cent during 1980-90 period, when total population increased by as much as 30 per cent. If during the 1990s, the declining trends could be further reinforced through manufacturing and urban growth, so that the total population might increase by only 22 per cent while agricultural population by only 5 per cent, then the desired demographic transition, same as in China, will be realised in all

What are the implications of this projection? First and foremost, total population in the year 2000 will be 144.3 million, out of which 83 million will be agricultural population. The to-

a threat to the environment and

to the development efforts.

Therefore, population control,

economic growth, social equity,

environmental upgradation

comprise the major items of the

development agenda today. Our

tasks to address these issues

cannot be accomplished unless

we can develop an efficient

management system and build

a reservoir of trained personnel

who will work with patriotic zeal

towards the solution of the

In the last regime, develop-

ment process turned static. The

economy was totally dependent

on foreign aid. The present gov-

ernment is, however, committed

to ensuring growth and in the

present fiscal year efforts are

being made so that 25% of the

development cost is financed

from the internal resources and

this share may be raised to

barriers to socio-economic de-

velopment of Bangladesh. China

which is considered to be one of

the conservative countries in

the world (for its practising a

closed system), has also opted

gramme as is practised by the

Link with Development

the first time formulated in

1976. It envisaged an integrated

health programme. Of late,

population issues are being

looked at from a broad perspec-

tive and are being integrated

with other socio-economic poli-

cies and programmes like ex-

tended role of women in devel-

opment, sustainable educa-

tional programmes etc. All these

indicate that population control

should be positively linked to

development. This did not hap-

pen in Bangladesh although the

World Bank has considered

Bangladesh a case of success in

family planning. Of course other

development indicators like per

capita income, women's status,

literacy rate are still low. The

case of Bangladesh has evoked

new thoughts in the minds of

the population or demographic

experts. Zimbabwe and Peru

A population policy was for

for "one-family one child" pro-

Western countries.

Population is one of the chief

staggering problem.

Solving Population Problem: How

Training can Help

by Syed Naquib Muslim

utilized.

tal population dependent on the industry and the service sector must increase from 36.4 million in 1990 to 61.3 in the year 2000 - a net increase of near around 25 million persons within a decade. The massive transformation can be made feasible only through creation of new jobs and income earning opportunities for at least 5 million bread-winners in areas outside agriculture.

Textiles

The ambitious scheme to manufacture and export textiles

at 9 million hectares. In fact, chances are that a part of that arable land might be taken away by thousands of garment and other factories proposed to be constructed.

Already, majority of the rural population own no land. After ten years, inspite of only 5 per cent increase in the rural population, the number of landless rural households will increase and poverty deepen further. The mushrooming garmentwallahs would, however, find it to be a very wholesome situation, since

WINDOW ON ASIA

Shahed Latif

including garments worth Taka 30,000 crores by the turn of the century is the type of endeavour geared to the generation of the extremely large scale employment required for the purpose. Yet, it is not enough. Our leaders and decision-makers must realise that the massive problem of unemployment, particularly under-employment, cannot be resolved by becoming "the master tailor of the world".

Bangladesh agriculture: crisis in development is the direct offshoot of the partial view of development that has emerged in the recent past — restricting economic growth to a function of rapid expansion of labour-intensive manufacturing for export. Of particular importance, is the fate of the estimated 83 million people dependent on agriculture in the year 2000. Let us not forget that the total population of the country was less than 83 million at the time of liberation and the land for cultivation will remain constant

A basic question often

haunts us - to what extent

have we been able to utilize the

training already imparted by the

training institutes like NIPORT?

NIPORT trains thousands of

grassroots level workers every

year. Keeping in view the socio-

economic realities in

Bangladesh, innovative ideas

should be generated so that

training imparted is optimally

Training as an input is es

sential to achieving targets of

population-related programmes.

Training makes people familiar

with the basic concepts like en-

vironmental preservation.

health, sanitation, family plan-

ning etc. Thus an exclusive

population training policy pro-

viding guidance of need as-

sessment and curriculum de-

sign is the need of the hour

Instead of a segmented ap-

proach, a holistic approach to

training can contribute signifi-

cantly to the formulation of a

It is contended by the ex-

perts that trained field workers

cannot reach the clientele prop-

erly or as desired. Therefore,

both population trainers and

their clientele should be in-

volved in the design stage of a

training programme. This will

make training courses prag-

matic and need-based. It will

also be possible to identify the

barriers to the communication

between the trainers and the

that training in our country

does not give any pay-off be-

cause the follow-up process has

not been institutionalised. In

this context, modern techniques

like PERT can be employed to

assess training impact on the

beneficiaries. It is a matter of

satisfaction that BPATC has

undertaken some research pro-

jects to assess the needs of

population training for entry,

mid-level and senior level offi-

cials and also for the clientele of

the regional centres which are

operating at the divisional level

Institutes to Join Hands

lation cannot be tackled single-

Training function on popu-

Many people hold the view

beneficiaries/target groups.

rational policy on population.

further deepening of poverty and landlessness would imply that the wage rates, both rural and urban, should remain at the deplorably low subsistence levels.

Clear Conclusion

Given the above expectations, conclusions are loud and clear: inspite of all the garment exports, which indeed is likely to be enormous in size by the year 2000, and I have no quarrel with it, the nation would still remain poor as well as least developed. The conclusions can be reversed if and only if the agriculture sector as a whole is also enabled to experience a sustainable rate of growth of 5 to 7 per cent per annum for the same ten year period. This, in essence, is the leading problem of development inspite of the garments.

Like missing the forest be cause of the trees, we are failing to appreciate agriculture inspite of its overwhelming presence all

handedly by one agency, how-

ever specialised it may be.

NIPORT alone cannot tackle the

heavy responsibility to bring the

rising population under control;

other training institutes should

also come forward to joining

hands with it in terms of design

and delivery of training courses.

The relevant training institutes

need to consider administration

of training at various levels to

cover all. For example - 1)

population training for the offi-

cers at the policy level; 2) popu-

lation training for the field level

officials; 3) population training

for officials beyond health and

population training agenda are:

Policy Making: 2) Sustainability

of Population-related Ins-

titutions; 3) Skills for

Demographic Research/Ana-

lysis; 4) Intra/Inter-agency

Coordination for Population

Programme Efficacy; 5) Female

Employment Generation:

Opportunities: 6) Improvement

of National Nutritional Status;

7) Strategies for the Reduction

complaints against the public

sector training is that training

administered to the clientele of-

ten gets encapsulated and there

is little applicability of training

to real job situations. The same

allegation is also made against

the persons for agencies

who/which are poised for ad-

ministering population training.

The funding agencies as well as

the conscious citizenry of this

country hold the view that de-

spite crores of Taka have been

spent or are still being spent in

the field of population training.

little progress is perceptible in

the standard of living of general

people. The population trainers

or population researchers

should try to look at the clien-

tele empathetically, search out

their constraint, and bring out

the gaps for which they remain

far away from the desirable level

of social advancement. What is

first needed is to assess popu-

lation training needs of the rele-

vant clientele and then design

training curriculum. Trainers

and researchers have to deploy

their merit, skills and experi-

ences to identify appropriate

training needs of their clientele

keeping, of course, in mind the

constraints of time and re-

literary works, memorable

One of the most common

of Child Mortality Rate.

The items of the possible

1) Politics of Population

around us. By agriculture, we only mean growth in paddy output. As a result, production of all other crops are either on the decline or growing at a marginal rate of less than one per cent per annum. During 1981-1991 period, total paddy output experienced a rate of growth of 3.2 per cent per annum, but production of wheat, pulses, potato, otiseeds, fruits, sugarcane and jute either declined or remained static. Consequently, per capita availability from domestic production of all food items except rice

declined. The inevitable consequence is smuggling of eggs and fish even rawshogollas at the corner store. Bangladesh is a land of rivers - it is a delta made out of water; yet fish is smuggled from the drylands of West Bengal. The poultry industry has made an insignificant beginning, while it is a full grown

industry across the border. Clearly, agriculture is in crists. Paddy alone, can never deliver agricultural development

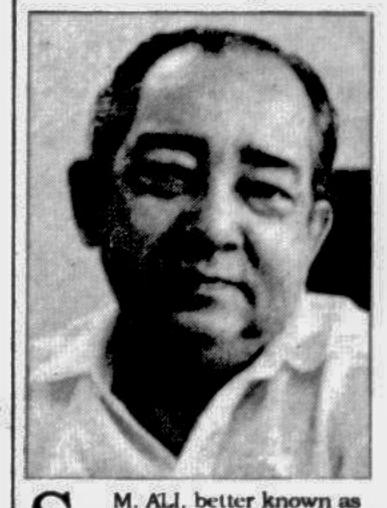
On the other hand, the focus on labour intensive manufacturing growth for export is a development in the right direction but alone it can never alleviate poverty. We require agricultural diversification, including rapid growth of fisheries and livestock sectors, along with the growth in manufacturing industries for export as well as domestic markets. The conspicuous absence of agricultural diversification is restricting the expansion of domestic markets since incomes are not growing to generate the expanding demand for manufactured goods and services.

Instead of the crisis, agriculture must be the basis of development; while, garment factorics are necessary but not sufficient for development.

IN MEMORIAM

'Khasru Mama'

— Syed Manzoorul Islam



Mama · Khasru Chacha) to the vast army of his nephews and nicces, was a legend in his own lisetime: not just in the professional sense in which he is being eulogized in the newspapers across the continent these days, but in a more real and tangible way, as he inspired and awed us - a generation removed from him. When I was a student of Sylhet Govt School in the early sixties, Khasru Mama, for us, was a more immediate role model than others among the illustrious clan of S. M. Alis. His Choto Chacha, Syed Mujtaba Ali was perhaps the most pre-eminent, but he commanded a height which was beyond our ability to scale — he was a phenomenon. we were told, which simply happens once in a lifetime. But Khasru Mama showed us what one could do by one's own efforts. A 'genius' he was, no doubt, but he supplemented that with hard work, for he received the most enlightened education possible on a purely self-motivational basis. He was a man of dedication and commitment — rare virtues always, but rarer so even today - and of humanity. Add to that his unflinching courage, his unfail-

ing wit and humour and his sagacity. It was not until he finally settled down in Dhaka, from 1989 to be precise, that I came in close contact with him. By then I had got rid of my schoolboyish awe of him, which was quickly replaced by a genuine respect - for I discovered a kind and affectionate person in him, one who cared deeply about others and took interest in little details one would not think much of sharing with elders. He liked to play the role of an impeccable Mama/Chacha - in his own way though, which, for one just wandering into his orbit, would look a bit distant and reserved at first sight. I remember the party he threw for his nephews one afternoon, with food coming from Aunt Nancy's kitchen. He was warm and friendly; he talked about his plans, which included an English language newspaper. He looked like 'a man seized by a vision as W. B. Yeats described his friend J. M. Synge. Aunt Nancy sat beside him, nodding an assent, or supplying a missing link, and I knew how beautiful their rela-

tionship was, and how much the quiet and unassuming aunt contributed in his life and in his vision. Khasru Mama wanted me to write. He liked the literary column | write in Sangbad, but I suspect more for reasons of indulgence a maternal uncle has for his nephew in this part of the world, than for its intrinsic merit, if any. But he was the Editor par excellence, a class by himself. If he asked me to write, how could I say no? So why didn't I write for him,

except for an occasional piece? For an answer, let me go back a little in the past and begin from the beginning. He was, as said, among the illustrious sons the small town always boasted of. We heard of Altaf Hossain, the Editor of Dawn, who began learning English from scratch when he was quite grown up. Fact or fiction - I never knew, for in popular imagination things are hopelessly mixed up, and it simply takes away the romanticism if one starts to sift them. Khasru Mama was the other person who knew English' - that for anyone from Sylhet, which always had a connection with England, was some praise. When I decided to take up Honours study in English, Khasru Mama's father, Syed Mostafa Ali was very pleased. 'It was Khasru's subject, too,' he said. Yes, I knew. When my results were good and Aniet him orice again, he said, 'Khasru would be pleased.' And pleased he was, as I was soon conveyed his congratulations. Then in 1976 when I was going to Canada for PhD. I meet Khasru Mama one July evening and he said, in his warm and resonant voice, "Choto Chacha wanted me to study abroad and maybe do a PhD. But I was cut out to be a journalist. I'm glad you are doing it."

I know for sure that Khasru Mama would've been an excellent Professor of English if he weren't 'cut out to be a journalist.' He borrowed all D. H Lawrence's novels from my father's bookshelf and read them even before he had entered the University. That man knows English,' father would say Coming from him, that was Truth itself.

When Khasry Mama wanted me to write, and I got down to write, I had more than a writer's block. My schoolboyish awe returned, and I visualized him going through my write-up, his editorial pen busy finding faults, striking off bits and pieces, even whole passages until his patience gave up. 1 even visualized him crumpling the paper into a little ball and throwing it into the waste paper

That would mean I had not come up to the mark. For a student from Sylhet Govt School, for someone who grew up in a small town when the town had role models who 'knew English,' that would be an ultimate nightmare.

I didn't write for him because was afraid to subject myself to a role model's scrutiny.

Now is that something you can forgive, Khasru Mama?

country. Such a problem poses have made breakthrough in this

'Traffic

mismanagement..'

Sir, Mr A S M Nurunnabi in his feature 'Down to Earth' covers the subjects quite comprehensively and if the relevant authorities take any note their own workload would be eased. Traffic mismanagement' on 2nd October is a particular example.

However, one is tempted to point out an overriding factor which Mr Nurunnabi might have kept out deliberately. It is the performance of the traffic constables. To an onlooker it appears that the poor creatures are neither trained for the job they are supposed to do nor are they given the requisite authority. Once I requested one of them to act against a truck which overtook me, dangerously, to jump the traffic signal (while I was waiting it to change). I learned that they had

no such power.

A long time ago someone suggested to replace the traffic police by the scare-crows to save tax-payers' money!

M A Haq Green Road, Dhaka.

Information about Syed Nawab Ali

Chowdhury Sir, Under the supervision of Dr K M Mohsin, Professor of History, University of Dhaka, a research work has been undertaken by me on the role of Nawab Bahadur Syed Nawab Ali Chowdhury (1863-1929), the Zamindar of village Dhanbari under Madhupur police station of Tangail district. He was a patron of learning and education, a leader in the field of establishing rights in social. political, economic and educational affairs of the then back-

ward Muslim community of Bengal under the British rule, during the later 19th and early 20th centuries.

The Nawab's personal and family-held papers — academic certificates. diaries. Kursinama, Kabinnama, genealogy of the relatives, history of Dhanbari Estate, Sanad of zamindari, deeds of property, decrees of property-suits, documents of will, gift and wakfnama of property, papers of his appointment to government and non-government posts, papers concerning government titles conferred upon him, letters of appreciation, address of welcome and farewell given to him, political and private letters to and from the leaders and the British administrators, election manilestos, portraits and paintings, photographs, manuscripts, speeches and statements, auto-biography, reminiscences,

events, interviews, contemporary government gazettes, reports, proceedings of the Eastern Bengal and Assam Provincial Legislative Council (1906-1912),Bengal Legislative Council (1912-1929) and Central Legislative Assembly of India (1916-1920), proceedings of the meetings of different socio-political organizations associated by him, obituaries and messages of condolence on his death, comments of the then leaders and distinguished persons about him, commemorative papers on him, relevant books, newspapers, periodicals, journals, magazines, 'University Studies', 'University Patrika', calendars of the Calcutta and Dhaka

Universities, compilation of

writings containing any infor-

mation about the Nawab, pub-

lished and unpublished theses

will be made, as far as possible, in taking interviews of those teachers, researchers, Ulema, poets, litterateurs, artists, journalists, physicians, politicians, lawyers, intellectuals, school and college-mates, colleagues, friends, assistants, kith and kins and descendants who came in close contact with the Nawab.

giving light on his career, his-

tory and gazette of the greater

Mymensingh district under

British period, an English

booklet written by him enti-

tled Views on the present

Political Situation in India', a

Bengali book written by poet

Shaikh Fazlul Karim (1882-

1936) entitled 'Syed Nawab Ali

Chowdhury', review papers on

the books written about him and any other relevant documentary evidences, if available, will be used as source materi-Deputy Director (Research) als in the research work. Besides these, an attempt

Persons, living at home and abroad, belonging to any of the source materials mentioned above and aware of any other relevant information, not stated here, are requested kindly to inform the researcher. The researcher with his own initiative would collect the information from them and the names of the contributors of any source material would be acknowledged in the thesis paper. Muhammad Abdus Salam

University Grants Commission of Bangladesh Sher-e-Bangla Nagar, Dhaka

S M Ali Road

Sir, It may be appropriate to rename 'Topkhana Road' as 'S M Ali Road', as the National Press Club is located on this road.

A 'Star' reader, Dhaka