

NAFTA's Implications for Us

With the endorsement of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) by the American House of Representatives, the long-drawn controversy and bickering has virtually come to rest. The agreement enjoys a strong support from the US Senate and is likely to be approved by it without much of a hitch. So much was at stake on the passage of NAFTA for President Bill Clinton that he and his supporters had to work overtime to convince the American people and the congressmen on both sides of the Democratic and the Republican parties and to pull their support.

Although the margin of votes for and against (234-200) is bigger than expected, Clinton's triumph owes more to the Republican votes than to his own party's. Quite interesting and a good lesson for the new practitioners of democracy in the rest of the world. The bi-partisan co-operation, as demonstrated through the voting in the house of representatives, is an unmistakable proof of the president's maturity in dealing with the congressmen across the fence. However, at the same time, his strong point has been undermined in that he has failed to hold sway over the house of representatives of his own party.

Nevertheless, the victory is crucial not only for President Clinton but also for the richest country in the world. Then any development in America — whether positive or negative — is bound to affect the rest of the world, beyond the region for which the agreement will be a binding and is expected to bring benefits. Viewed as a victory of trade liberalism and free market concept over protectionism and isolationism, the passage of NAFTA in the US Congress is certainly welcome news. Its positive impacts on the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) and the Uruguay Round may indeed help resolve the deadlock in the world trade. In this respect, the wall of protection and double standard adopted by the rich countries stand hardly any chance of enjoying support.

Yet this picture may not look so rosy, if instead of creating more volumes of trade NAFTA just concentrates on diverting America's trade with the rest of the world, particularly the Third World countries, to the newly created favoured region. This is a concern we share with others and cannot help expressing because of the potent threat that comes from its partner Mexico with its cheap labour. Since the US is our single largest market and the advantage the treaty will provide for Mexico poses to wrest the competitive edge from us, we have reasons to be nervous. For example, in the area of garments export, our market in the US can very well be taken by Mexico if it tries to do so. This is despite our commerce minister's assurance to the Bangladesh Garments Manufacturing and Exporting Association (BGMEA) that nothing of the sort will happen.

Happily, assurances so far are positive. US foreign Secretary Warren Christopher almost at the same time of the passage of NAFTA has unequivocally declared that no other region will get as much preference as the Asia-Pacific region in its trade and economic relationship. Even President Clinton has in his post-NAFTA victory speech made the commitment to expand such co-operation to all the states in Latin America and other regions of the globe. But after all, economic and trade blocs are no more than a kind of organised and collective effort devoted to protect particular interests.

The key word is competition and any kind of protectionism goes counter to trade liberalism and free market. The fear of developing nations can truly be dispelled if the principle of investment and technology transfer following the one envisioned for Mexico is applied widely and without discrimination. The bottomline is more production, creation of more jobs which in turn propels new safety and environmental standards and wage increase. The beauty of such thriving economic activities is that the benefits of a nation spill over to other regions beyond the boundary. But first the principle of trade liberalism must be ensured.

The People's Moulana

On Wednesday quietly passed the seventeenth death anniversary of Moulana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhashani. The print media made splashes here and there and politicians were handy with their annual chant so helpful to get space on the journals. What was very woefully lacking is a sincere heart-searching to determine if in our present ways about politics and society and religion we retain any inkling of that great man's preachings and practices. We are moving contrary to the Moulana's ideas of all these and far far away from the life of sacrifice and integrity that he lived to materialise those.

If he was kind of a *non-pareil* among the political celebrities who influenced the course of this nation, he was the size of man Gandhi or Vivekananda was. He was by the side of the persecuted Bengalee farm workers in Assam fighting the infamous 'Line System', a forerunner of Nazi ethnic cleansing. His experience there helped mould the character and leadership he were subsequently to bless the socio-political unfolding of this nation with. A key to charisma is the common man's unfamiliarity with the subject of his fables. The Moulana was charisma personified and still he never was a centimetre away from the coarsest of lifestyles to which the greatest number has historically been doomed.

Like Gandhi he brought politics to the ordinary man. Till 1948 the Bengalee people was literally dazed with the communal ideological blitz of Pakistan. It was the '48 state language protest that first shook some of them. It took Bhashani's total commitment to man and resulting assiduous building of a pro-people and anti-oligarchic politics before the students could dare the state power of Pakistan with the '52 Language Movement. Not long afterwards he was more explicit at the Kagmar cultural conference in 1957.

Moulana Bhashani is among the best of men of religion becoming servers of man. He was a populist — a believer in the supremacy of people. A democrat and a socialist to the marrow. Political savants like him are not a frequent phenomena. The problem with our present realities is that there are not how many around who follow the same ideals as the Moulana and who build a life that matches those ideals. Our remembrance of that good Muslim who chose to be the secular server of a secular polity cannot as such avoid an element of lamentation. The ever-diminishing presence of the Moulana in our politics is decidedly a great loss for this nation which is in so much need of a leader who would live among them and talk their language and would not beguile them with the talk of doradoes — religious or otherwise.

Behind the Curfew Lines in Kashmir Siege City

by Michael Urlocker

The military standoff at the Hazratbal mosque, one of India's holiest sites, has focused world attention on the Kashmiri separatists. But the guerilla war has been simmering since 1988 with wide popular support due to Indian army atrocities. Gemini News Service reports from behind the army curfew lines in Srinagar, where militants seized the mosque more than a month ago and gave themselves up early Tuesday morning.

FOR K V Krishna Rao, the retired army general appointed governor of India's troubled state of Jammu and Kashmir, there is only one explanation for the bloodshed that has prevailed here for more than four years: Pakistan's "illegal" occupation of one-third of Kashmir.

"We want it back," Rao told a group of military men in a speech.

The government of P V Narasimha Rao and Pakistani Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto, who broached the subject of preliminary talks on Kashmir at the Commonwealth summit in Cyprus, would seem to agree to the singularity of the problem.

While India and Pakistan — enemies since the two countries were created in the bloody partition of British India in 1947 — could sit down to talk about their long-simmering dispute, one question remains for Kashmiris.

"Who is going to talk to Kashmir?" asks Suraiya Farooq, spokeswoman for the Jammu and Kashmir Students Association, a group supporting the creation of an independent Kashmir. "All these things are being done over our heads."

Her husband, Farooq Siddiqi, was spokesman for the Jammu Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF) until he was jailed nine months ago. Some JKLF members were among the militants under army siege holed up inside the Hazratbal mosque in Srinagar since October 15.

It is difficult to establish exactly how the siege started. The government, whose views are parroted by most of the national press and state-owned broadcasters, said Pakistan-trained militants seized the mosque, grabbed hostages and threatened to blow it up, to destroy a sacred relic believed to be a hair from the beard of Prophet Mohammed (SM).

Farooq and most Kashmiris tell a different story, asserting that the militants, or the boys,

as they are called, have visited the mosque every Friday for the past three years. According to this version, the army surrounded the mosque when it knew militants were inside, in order to be seen as defending a Muslim shrine "held" by fanatics.

Farooq says the civilians in the mosque stayed inside because they were afraid of being shot by the army. The government's goal, she says, was for the ruling Congress Party to curry favour with the Muslim minority in upcoming state elections.

She compared the standoff to the disastrous 1984 army storming of the Sikh Golden Temple in Amritsar, in which, however, thousands were killed,

ultimately provoking the assassination of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. "They have never thought of the repercussions, only the political gains," said Farooq.

Technically, only 50 armed separatists and about 150 civilians were under siege inside the mosque. But life in Kashmir valley came to a halt, with thousands of security forces in place upholding curfews and checkpoints at major intersections and bridges in the state.

The military's rationale for its massive presence is simple, as explained by V K Handi, an artillery officer stationed in a deserted park, far from the mosque: "Militants are everywhere. Children and even

women are militants in every village."

His analysis of the power of the militants may be exaggerated, but in a sense he is right because most people when interviewed, support the militants. In some regions of the state it is not the army that controls the roads but the militants, who operate their own checkpoints.

In Talbal Shalimar village, on the outskirts of Srinagar, 40 men are gathered outside a shuttered row of shops. Village leader Haji Abdul Samad Bhat, is holding court in a folding chair, heckling passing soldiers and urging small boys to return to their homes. Every man in the group is adamant that

Kashmir should become an independent nation. Says Bhat: "Everybody in Kashmir supports the mujahadeen 100 per cent."

Every five minutes, the group becomes silent and the visiting reporter is asked to hide his notebook. Another team of armed soldiers passes through town, poking drainpipes and long metal rods and dragging nooks across the puddles in search of bombs. The villagers say they do not want to be seen talking to a reporter for fear of repercussions.

"We don't have the right to talk, to move, or to do anything at all," says Mushtak Mir. "They are ruling us at gunpoint."

Kashmiris tell stories of friends, family members or nearby villages which have suffered at the hands of the Indian troops. In its 1990 report, the US-based human rights group Asia Watch said military forces used "lethal force against peaceful demonstrators, shooting scores of unarmed civilians." It also described the army's summary executions of suspected militants, killings of civilians, beatings, rapes and burning of villages.

New Delhi dismisses such reports, although it occasionally launches inquiries whose findings are rarely released publicly. Says Mir: "Only the Kashmiri people, the military and God know what has happened."

The army actions also touch the press. Local journalists show burn marks and scars which they say are the result of not following the government line. Reporters were prevented

from entering the town of Bijbehara, south of Srinagar, where 50 people were killed in political violence, so that funerals would not be filmed. Some who managed to get through the security net later had their cameras and tapes confiscated by the army.

Farooq says she is satisfied that the siege at the mosque, however ending quickly, has attracted world attention to the Kashmir conflict. But she knows that while the West may sympathise with the independence movement, that sympathy turns to paranoia if independence is used to create an Islamic fundamentalist state.

The militants have banned alcohol, cosmetics, hashish and cinemas under Islam, effectively destroying many such businesses owned by Kashmir's dwindling minority of Hindus. A few years ago, some Israeli tourists were kidnapped by militants and accused of being anti-Islamic spies.

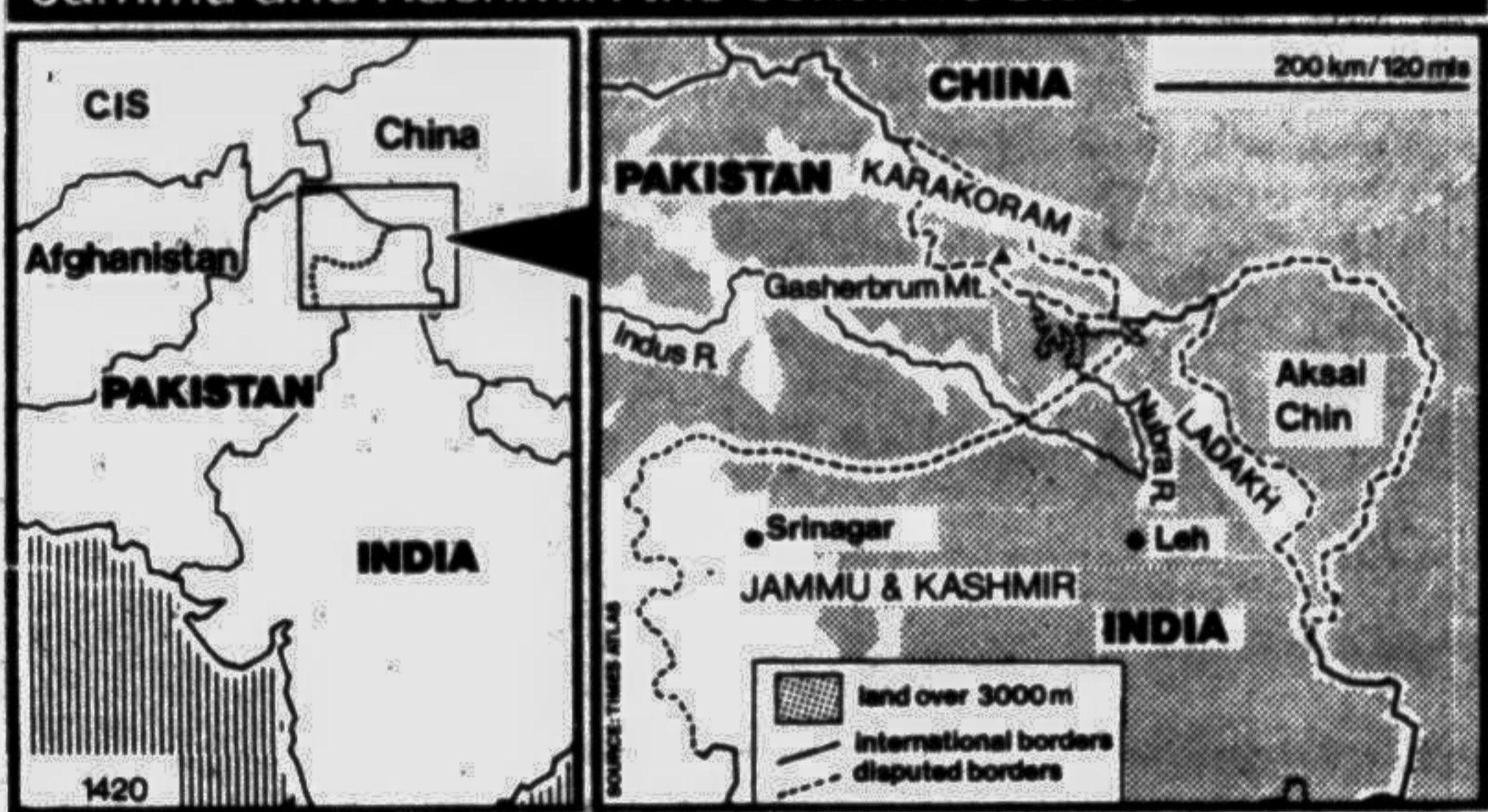
Reports of militants levying fines and beatings against people for breaking the alcohol ban, as well as their penchant for seizing cars, food, fuel and houses has helped fuel the mould of fanaticism and miscreants, as they are described in Indian newspapers.

"India has been beating the drum all around the world: fundamentalism, fundamentalism," says Farooq. "Yes, some unfortunate people have misused religion, but this is not a fundamentalist group. We do not impose Islam on people."

Others, not directly involved in the movement, agree. Says Prof Hamida Bano, of Kashmir University: "When youngsters take up guns, of course they will make mistakes, but that does not diminish the cause."

MICHAEL URLOCKER is a Canadian freelance journalist reporting from India sponsored by the Canadian International Development Agency.

Jammu and Kashmir: the sensitive state



Seventeen-Point Charter of PROKRACHI-BCS Invitation to a Debate

by Mohammed Abu Hena

In this fourth and final instalment of the 17-point Charter of PROKRACHI-BCS, the author, who is the secretary-general of the body explains how reforms will benefit us all in getting a more accountable administration as an exception. The Daily Star published this four-part series to contribute towards a greater understanding of the intricate issues involved. It was something we felt the public should be known about and the issues debated upon. Once again we invite all to participate in a debate on the ideas expressed in this series.

includes in its ranks members of a wide range of professional and highly specialized occupations, including scientists drawn from nearly forty distinct disciplines. Civil Service in that country is broadly divided in two categories — Industrial and Non-Industrial. All craftsmen working in ordnance factory, dockyard and workshop are also industrial civil servants.

In Bangladesh, unfortunately, the Civil Service pattern which was set by the East India Company for the purpose of collection of land revenue and magistracy remains to be still the same. In Britain, the lower court magistrates who work in the countries are civil servants in a remote sense. But in this country they put the entire claim on Civil Service and administration to the exclusion of others. The proposal to include all class-I civil servants in their respective professional/functional cadres is not only justified but imperative as well. Where there is no functional cadre for the group, new cadre may be created.

Point-13: Changes in perception about the personnel in Civil Service were compiled recently by a senior team leader in quality circle as follows:

"People, and their brains, are the most precious resources we have. We want to improve our productivity not at the expense

of our people, but at the expense of wasted time, lost motion, unnecessary work, and products of poor quality. Our most valuable partner in cutting waste is people on the production floor who know their jobs better than anyone else. We want the involvement of their minds as well as their hands. When we can achieve this effectively we will have the greatest team in the world.

This brings us to the all important aspect relating to human resource development. This involves the improvement of quality of human resources in terms of professionalism of personnel.

With high professionalism, the personnel in an organization have high motivation and the capability to improve productivity while, at the same time, increasing the efficiency of resource used by applying technology.

The major functions of a central personnel agency like the Establishment Ministry in Bangladesh should be to develop over-all policies and standards and to assist the operating agencies to apply them without affecting speed, economy and efficiency of the operating agency in getting programme results.

The aim is to select and equip men for career growth

which may be illustrated in the following chart:

Table with 4 columns: 'Date of employment', 'Of the subordinate staff in which he serves', 'Of the nature and scope of the work of the post', 'Of the functions of his work within the organization and the nature of his responsibilities'. The table is partially filled with text.

Source: John J. Caron, "Equipping Men for Career Growth in the Public Service," Public Administration Review (March 1962). Reprinted by permission of the American Society for Public Administration.

The flow chart shows that there is no single factor or single functionary in administration. All functional groups start at the same entry point and end up at the top to devise ways and means of projecting the policies and programmes throughout an enterprise and seeing to it that they are carried out. The Bureau Chiefs and heads of departments and corporations, all grow within and are not imposed from outside. The fulfillment of the needs of these top positions require the lifetime of study and reflection of the functional civil servant who reaches his full potential at that stage. A Chief

Engineer, a Director General, Health and all other chiefs of

departments, corporations and bureaus fall in this category. The responsibilities for recruitment, selection, training and career development can be better integrated under the direction of one Ministry, if it concerns itself with such jobs as the Civil Service Department in England does it. Since there is already a unified civil service with unified grading system in Bangladesh there should be positive advances in these areas in a comprehensive manner.

The proposals to redesignate the Establishment Ministry as the Civil Service Ministry,

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.

Fair play and USA

Sir, Sports, to me and to the multitude of people, is a thing for enjoyment and should be kept well out of politics. These days, almost in all games, posters and flags written 'Fair Play are displayed. Football, as a game, is one of hustle and tussle and some very hard tacklings amongst the players. For fairness of the game the defaulters are penalised and quite rightly so. But, if the officials of the match are unfair and prejudiced then, I believe, it is worse than just unfairness and those concerned should be severely dealt with. This unfairness not only mars the game, but creates distrust amongst the participants and sports lovers alike. I happened to watch the Asian World Cup qualifying match between Iraq and Japan.

To my utter surprise, FIFA, which is supposed to be an independent body, did not keep its pledge and promise of being 'fair'. In that particular match, almost all the spectators were disgusted by the decision of the FIFA officials (the referee and a linesman). Any footballer and football lover will perhaps agree with me that of the six teams, Iraq was the superior team and yet that team was unfairly stopped from taking part in the USA-94 World Cup in America. It has also, become apparent that FIFA has considerably bowed down to the big brotherly attitude of the USA. I ask, would it be wrong to say that it is about time for the United States to practice democracy and offer equal human rights instead of preaching about it in other countries.

Although, in a press release Ed Best, the vice-president of the USA-94 World Cup committee, said that all qualifying finalist teams including Iraq would be allowed in the United States, would it not mean that earlier decision was not to allow Iraq in the USA?

M I Rasul
2/3 Nawab Street, Dhaka

Government servants

Sir, It appears that some government officials of high echelon of BCS-Admn and non-administrative cadre engaged in a long time tug of war for their respective powers and functions, status, promotion, facilities and privileges at the cost of the public exchequer. From time to time they are resorting to abstention from work, pen-strike, holding rallies and demonstration paralysing the government offices, hospitals and establishments to the utter suffering of the people and detriment of the interest of the country. It appears that some highly paid officers who are well established socially and financially are more concerned and

interested in their own welfare rather than rendering service to the people. We wonder, work or no work, government servants are regularly getting their pay and allowances, house rent, medical allowance, conveyance, TA/DA, overtime, Eid bonus, new pay scale, promotion continuously for 30-35 years and after retirement, pension and gratuity, but yet some or many of them are not satisfied and want more and more and in the process indulge in negligence of duties, irregularities and even corruption. I strongly feel that the government servants should not create any obstacle or interference in the policy matters of the government, and carry out their routine works sincerely and honestly. If a government servant has a problem or grievance he may submit his representation to the authorities concerned through proper channel and wait for the decision of the government, or he may simply resign and go at his free will and make room for himself in this big world of open competition, democracy and market economy. I would request our MPs and

the law makers in the Jatiya Sangsad to kindly look into the matter and make stringent disciplinary and conduct rules for all government servants consistent with the requirement of time, accountable and transparent government, smooth and efficient administration and success of democracy in Bangladesh.

O I I Kabir
Dhaka-1203.

Housing

Sir, There is acute crisis of housing for the inhabitants of Dhaka city. The middle class is almost torn apart trying to maintain a balance between their standard of living and income. With the price hike of essentials the house rent has also multiplied. After paying for the house rent, essential commodities, education of children what is left is only imaginable. The major part of the income is spent for the house rent purposes. It is, therefore, appealed to the Honorable Minister for Finance, that long term loans for purchase of flats may be introduced for the working class, not only through HBFC, but also from private and commer-

cial banks, under soft terms and simple interest rates. The loan may be repayable every month or on quarterly basis. If such system is introduced the banks' activities will be expanded, the government will earn a revenue and the homeless will have a home.

Under such a system the bank will be custodian of the legal documents of the flat, so that the defaulters can be evacuated if problems arise. At present the cost of a reasonable flat ranges from Tk. 15 to Tk. 20 lac. This amount is certainly beyond the capacity of the common working class. If the flats are given in soft term loans, there will be competition as per demand among the real estate businessmen and the prices of flats are likely to come down within a reasonable range. Apparently, the proposed idea may sound radical, but the neighbouring countries have similar facilities for the welfare of their citizens. I hope that my humble opinion would be seriously considered for which many would be benefited. K Sayeed Dhanmond, Dhaka