Founder-Editor: Late S. M. Ali

Dhaka, Wednesday, August 24, 1994

Companies Only in Name

The past few years saw a tremendous spurt in the initiative to bring a qualitative change in the country's rural economy, specially by different private organisations. Such private initiatives have received encouragement from the government, aid agencies and donor countries alike. With varying degrees of success the Non-Government Organisations are carrying on their programmes. But not everything is going on well on the front, Of late take companies and or NGOs have announced their presence in this lucrative business. In a number of cases people have been cheated and the companies simply melted into the thin air with huge sums of money collected from unsuspecting people with inflated and false promises.

In most such cases fraudulent means were resorted to by people with so-called higher education. But a report comes from Manikganj - with a high concentration of different NGOs — about a rare incident of fraudulent gains by none other than one of the poor class. Wife of a day labourer Razia Khatun, known as Lili, set up 'Lili company' and began to collect money from people of the area, promising an interest of Tk 200 on a deposit of Tk 2000 per month. Its catchy slogan that money brings in money attracted people and they began to deposit money with the company. The company actually paid interests at the announced rate until it folded its business.

Nobody really questioned the bonafides of the company because it was apparently true to its words. But it also did not occur to anyone's mind if the money they deposited was being invested in any gainful venture. As for Lili, paying the customers the promised interest was no difficulty, She paid from their capitals and was simply buying time for accumulating an unearned fortune of a huge sum before fleeing the locality. Her customers found nothing to suspect and words spread about the high rate of interest. Many sold their domestic animals and immovable property, others accepted credits from reputed organisations to avail of the opportunity to make quick bucks. But Lili had a different idea. She has gone into hiding with about Tk 80,000,000 (eight crore) she collected from about 2,000 people of 15 villages there.

It sounds unconvincing that a day labourer's wife alone could play such a trick on so many people of the locality. Maybe, there is a sinister design behind it all and it is a work of some superior but evil brains. We do not know much about the woman's education and other antecedents except that she was associated with a number of NGOs as a local representative. Those who have become victims of the deception cannot be blamed for smelling rat in the whole business. But Lili was not carrying on her semi-banking business with lucrative offer of interests in secret. The local administration was reportedly aware of the deal.

Now the question is: if taking an unusually high interest is illegal, cannot an offer of the same be also held equally blamable? We are also not told if the company had registered with the proper authority. If it has got its registration, it surely had to submit its constitution and a description of the way of its handling of accounts. Common people cannot smell foul play, but the local administration are there to bring such out-of-the-way practices to the notice of the relevant authority for immediate action.

Illegal manpower business is carried on in a clandestine manner. But that is punishable by law. The operation of a fake company is no less dangerous. It conducted its operation openly and if challenged, things could not have come to such a bad patch. To avoid more such deceitful practices, the local administrations should be instructed to keep an extra vigil on organisations promising fabulous rewards. It is also necessary to track down the woman and her accomplices, if any, for trial in court.

Matter of a Missing Link

Mayor of Dhaka Mohammad Hanif has done some crystal ball gazing at what could be the shape and substance of urban life in Bangladesh at the turn of the century. This he did at a mayors' colloquium on social development organised recently at the UN headquarters in New York. He told his counterparts that a galloping urban population in Bangladesh is rapidly outstripping whatever little we have had as civic amenities. The swelling population of the cities is not to be mistaken for urbanisation which implies a corresponding expansion in the infrastructural facilities. It has practically meant a growth of slums or squatter settlements.

This basically negative kind of urban transformation has been portrayed at a greater length by Mohammad Hanif who faces the unenviable task of doing something about this in the metropolis during these closing years of the century. The urban population, at the current rate of growth, will constitute a quarter of the country's population by 2000 AD. Half of that city populace will be poverty-stricken and a quarter is perhaps destined to live in the slums. As a result, a still larger proportion of the urban population will be devoid of any accessibility to municipal services like health, nutrition, water supply, sanitation, literacy, and education and transport and communications. Add to this the grievous wounds on life and living being inflicted by an ever increasing pollution of the environ in the cities — their water, air and the surface.

In stemming the rot which is threatening to choke the wind-pipe of life, we have to go by the old rule: earn your bread in a city if you must but physically do live away from the brick and mortar of the cities. Make the countryside your home. This is something which the highly sophisticated urbanites in the most advanced countries have fallen for. Their trek back to the village, so to speak, was made easy because of the inter-linking of long distance communication facilities. So let's have shuttle trains connect Dhaka with its peripheries both in a linear and spherical fashion. For instance, with the Jamuna Bridge coming up. the forward link from Tongi could branch out girdling places right up to Aricha. A circular railway was once conceived to be laid around the radius of the flood embankment project. Why is it on the back-burner now? It is the dispersal of the growing urban population to the countryside that holds the key to our survival. More than that, city life will improve, inclusive of a fall in rentals, mufassil areas will grow providing nice living conditions to the new dwellers and what a stimulating effect it will have on the economy as a whole. We

should start building the right infrastructure for

such a re-location of our population, now.

OME have compared it to a paper factory, others say it is a debating society, and the hot air given off in its conference halls is

contributing to global warming. Even in the best of times. the United Nations has had an image problem. It cannot seem to do anything right, and the world body is now coming under fire to making promises it cannot keep and straying from

its mandate. "Throwing around pieces of paper never solved any real problems," says Richard Butler. Australia's ambassador to the United Nations and president of the UN's Economic and Social Council (SCOSOC). "By making deci sions it had no means to im plement, the United Nations risked falling into disrepute."

The criticism is echoed by the Danish Minister for Development cooperation, Helle Degn, who says the United Nations is being sidetracked by peacekeeping and is only paying lip service to its real mandate: economic devel-

"There is so much of talk that we are suffering from a clash between expectations and reality. It is high time for the United Nations to move from being a talking shop to a leader in the field of development. People can't eat words they need action."

Mauri Eggert, Finland's Under-Secretary of state for Development Cooperation, said the 184-member General Assembly has been turned into 'Resolution Factory'. As a result, the real work of

A news item recently pub-

lished in different newspapers on venues for public meetings is encouraging. However, the item said that the Dhaka City Corporation has requested all political parties to hold meeting at five places e.g. (1+2) north and south gates of Baitul Mukarram. (3) Bangabandhu Avenue. (4) Gulistan Square and northern side of Press Club, until venues for public meetings are selected. The City Corporation is stated to have taken initiative to select the venues with active co-operation of the Government and on the basis of discussions with different political parties.

The news is of course interesting. The five spots so earmarked by DCC have been selected for "easing traffic jam" and sufferings of the people in their movement. It is known to all that public meetings of different political parties are already regularly and mostly being held in the areas now earmarked by the DCC. Meetings of importance at other places are seldom held. So what's new in the new decision of the

Of course, some meetings are held in different areas which no doubt create traffic jam. But these sites are situated in places which are commercially less important in comparison to Topkhana Road. Naya Paltan, Baitul Mukarram, Bangabandhu Avenue, Gulistan, Motifheel areas. These places are interlinked. Traffic jam in any of these places seriously affects the whole area. But, frequent meetings here have become a regular feature. We should not forget that the commercial nucleus of the city is located within these particular areas. The Secretariate of the Government is also here. So it is easy to imagine, what traffic jam and inconveniences to the people and their business is caused by the meetings. It has been observed that meetings are generally called to start at around 3-4 o'clock in the afternoon. But preparation for holding the meetings, such as erection of the rostrum and setting the loud

Reinventing the United Nations

The United Nations is coming under fire from delegates of member countries for talking too much, and doing little. Thalif Deen of Inter Press service evaluates efforts to reform the world body.

to the authors.

The United Nations spends

But report notes that "few

roughly 42 per cent of its

US\$8.5 billion annual budget

UN reforms have been com-

in Third World development.

consensus-building had been replaced by "summit-hopping". The Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, the Human Rights Summit in Vienna last year and the Social Development Summit in Copenhagen next year have largely taken over the role of the UN General Assembly.

But Third World members of the United Nations say the real fault lies with the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) which have usurped the UN's role.

A report released this month by two ex-UN veterans says half-hearted and piecemeal attempts to reform the United Nations are failing to strengthen the clout of the world body.

Renewing the United Nations System' is written by former senior staff members Erskine Childers and Brian Urquhart. They argue that reforming parts of the UN system which deal with economic and social issues has been incomplete or superficial.

Many independent analysts and UN staff members have complained that under Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali, the United Nations has been steadily losing its power to effect social and economic

Childers and Urguhart partly blame budget-conscious western nations which generally favour the economic advice doled out by the Washington based Bretton Woods institutions - the World Bank and the IMF. They say any reform

of the United Nations should



also include reforms of the World Bank and the IMF.

"No area of UN system reform and reorganisation is as critically important in the 1990s as the economic and social programmes which still sources and outlay," according the last 40 years.

They say that the United Nations is suffering from "avoidance reform" — a syndrome characterised by the will to create new bodies and departments rather than improve and use existing ones the UN system while strengthdesigned for the same pur-

Falling into this category is ' the much-touted recommendation by mostly rich countries and the UN Development Programme (UNDP) to establish an Economic Security Council — comparable in size

and authority to the Security Council - to oversee global macro-economic policies. Childers and Urquhart reject this proposal, noting that the planned purposes and functions of the new body are precisely those that were

originally supposed to be car-

ried out" by ECOSOC. They disagree with much of the prescribed medicine for the ailing world body, including calls for greater "coordination" between and among offices, and more "decentralisation".

They argue that consolidating offices is often a better remedy than repeated calls for coordination, and that too much decentralisation has itself created a lack of coordina-

The report attributes much of the loss of stature of the United Nations in social and economic fields to deliberate recommendations by rich countries seeking to weaken ening the World Bank/IMF.

But rather than try to seize control of economic and social policy in the 1990s, the authors say that Boutros-Ghali

where the industrialised na-

tions have a much stronger

has instead rejected a proposed post for a Director-General for Development and International Economic Cooperation. The Director-General would have been the second most se-

nior UN official after the Secretary-General, in charge of all economic and social capacities of the United Nations. Vociferous opposition to the

post by industrialised countries also led to its elimination. the authors say, citing this as the beginning of the UN decline in the economic field.

They argue the United Nations is not the bloated and profligate organisation frequently depicted in the western press. They note that the world body's regular budget is roughly equal to what US citizens spend each year on cut flowers and potted plants.

Gus Speth, the administrator of UNDP, says the United Nations is investing too much on peacekeeping and too little on development.

"If the United Nations was going to be more than a debating forum, it must keep a balance between peacekeeping and activities aimed at promoting human betterment," Speth

Speth doubts whether the United Nations could be a strong force for peace unless it is a strong force for develop-

OPINION

Suggesting Venue for Public Meetings

Shafiqul Islam

the street starts around 10 o'clock in the morning. And with it, starts the traffic jam which continues till the audience is dispersed around 7-8 o'clock in the evening. Now, if the meetings which

were used to be held in areas which are commercially less important are now to be held at the nominated places, the frequency of meetings there is likely to be increased considerably. If so, this will create more frequent jams and disturbances.

Yes, the disturbances. It's no denying the fact that disturbance is now-a-days associated with most of the meetings. Shops and establishments are to keep their shutters halfshut on all meeting days in apprehension that disturbances may erupt any moment when the shutters will have to be fully shut. And cases of complete closure of shutters are not less in number. Damages to properties and cars are not unknown. Unless and until our behaviour and manners are improved, incidences of damages are not expected to be

As a matter of fact, the sooner the venues for meetings are shifted to appropriate places, the better for public safety and convenience.

Everybody wonders, what might be such venues in or around the city. If the venues are proposed at places away from the city, perhaps no political party would agree to such a proposal. And it is really very difficult to get a place for public meetings in or around the city.

But this was not the case earlier. The vast expanse where a million strong audience could easily be accommodated was available. And such huge gathering at a place is a matter of record in the country's history. Yes, I am mentioning the place once

known as the Race Course and now as Suhrawardy Uddyan. The then authority was perhaps justified to convert it into a beautiful park with systematically lined up trees. Perhaps there was a two-fold idea: recreational facilities and afforestation (?).

The question is : did we achieve the purpose. Leaving the benefits of the trees, what recreational benefits have we actually been enjoying is a point to ponder.

When we think of Suhrawardy Uddyan, there comes three points: (1) value of the trees, (2) environmental benefit derived from the trees, and (3) recreation with free air under the shade of trees. The trees do have the

money-value and we can expect to get it in course of time. Environmental benefit we will continue to derive so long the trees are there.

Here also the question of money-value of the 'trees' can be further questioned. The trees that have been planted in the Suhrawardy Uddyan are such that they would not grow higher after a certain height. As a result, by spreading the branches around, the trees, taken together make bushes. These trees have little timber-

Recreational benefits? We may ask: do we get it? At the time of planning for the Uddyan, it was greatly expected that in a congested place like Dhaka city where the population is growing fast. the number of motor vehicles is increasing rapidly polluting the air, and where there are a very few places to breath fresh air, the ever increasing city dwellers would get some relief when they would be able to spend some time in the open place with the members of the family. But in reality, we find

versions of economic heavy-

weights that aid dependency

and utilisation is a disguised

form of slavery planned and

designed by the rich north,

unforgetful of their past

colonial power. Regularly one

or another of our economic

gurus pump in articles.

arrange seminars, write

voluminous books, to influence

and convince us that our hard-

earned sovereignty is at stake

because the World Bank and

the IMF dictates our fiscal,

monetary and development

polices. We have constantly

heard that aid must be stopped

or, that aid must be sufficiently

increased to derive or reach

the desired objectives. Now,

for the first time, we have had

a peep into the real workings

correctly saying (1) that the

problem lies not in itself but,

in aid polices, management

and utilisation," (2) that trickle

down development strategy

Thanks to Dr Haque for

of the aid business.

quite a different picture now If you suggest one to go to Suhrawardy Uddyan, promptly comes the reply: is it a place for gentlemen to go? If you ask, why? With similar harshness the reply comes: it is infested with criminals and antisocial elements. And such comments are common, because such is the experience one obtains from there.

Since morning till after noon, the place is thronged mostly with couples, seemingly lowers, scatteredly reposing under the shade and at the trunks of many of the trees. And since late afternoon till late in the evening and beyond it is infested with call girls, pimps, intimidators etc. Many incidents have occurred in the Suhrawardy Uddyan, particularly during the second period when gentlemen with wife and children were harassed and embarrassed. Cases of hijacking are many more.

So, the purpose is not fulfilled, rather gone. Suhrawardy Uddyan is no more a place for recreation for the ordinary city dwellers. And here, I like to offer a proposal: the Suhrawardy Uddyan may be converted into a public park-cum-meeting place for political parties. It's area is so big that four normal public meetings can be accommodated simultaneously.

Let me outline the idea: An area of 200 feet width all along the border (boundary line) of the Uddyan should remain as it is with the trees. Carefully, the trees which give "bush effect" should gradually be replaced by trees which grow tall and do not block the view when fully grown and which have timbervalue, in a planned manner The 200 feet belt as such will constitute an area of about two kms or more. The remaining whole area inside will remain almost open. Trees from this

area should be partially removed making enough room for the meetings to be held.

One may oppose the idea by saying that the trees have been planted, nursed and cared for costing a lot of money. How then these be thrown away causing huge monetary loss? Secondly, a park (with trees) should be considered a must for the city dwellers. Thirdly, these trees in the middle of the city should also be considered necessary ecologically.

The points deserve considerations. But, for bigger interest, some sacrifices are also considered necessary. The monetary loss in this case will only be nominal because these trees have little timber value. Secondly, the area of Suhrawardy Uddyan is enormous and a 200-feet belt of trees around the Uddyan may not be as big as the whole Uddyan is but should still be considerable enough for the citizens to breath open air and roam about with spouses and kids. Vigilance for maintaining law and order will also be easier in the localised area for recreation (in the existing vast area it is really difficult for a handful of

personnel, if any, at present). Third comes the ecological consideration. If the inner area of the Uddyan is half-cleared, certain ecological loss will be there but it is not as big as cannot be compensated. If there is the will, there is the way too. With careful planning and earnest execution, many spots in the city can be utilized for planting saplings. This will not only meet the ecological need, but also ultimately beautify the spots and surroundings. The ecological "loss" at the Suhrawardy Uddyan can thus be well compensated.

If we think in the line of the idea as has been outlined above, we can derive the following benefits: 1) A big area will be available for holding public meetings in a centre place of the city, where more than one gatherings can be accommodated simultaneously. It will be convenient both for the organisers and the audience. 2) The city dwellers will get, perhaps a safer place to go for recreation. Control of crimes will be easier because of effective vigilance. 3) Ecological benefits will remain at least as it is, by balancing.

In consideration of the above, why should we not go for converting the Suhrawardy Uddyan into a park-cummaidan when both the purposes are simultaneously served? What is needed is just a bold step.

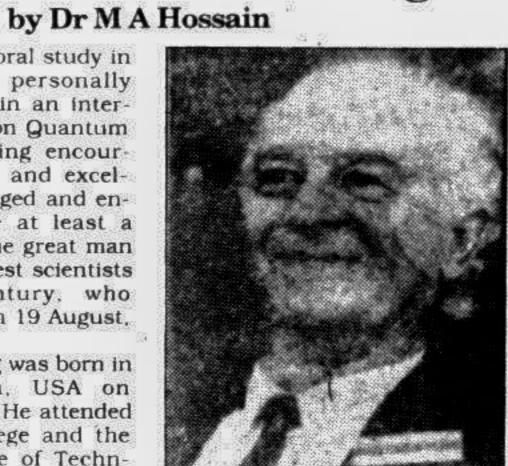
A Tribute to Professor Pauling

During my doctoral study in France I met personally Professor Pauling in an international congress on Quantum Chemistry. By being encouraged by his ideas and excellence. I feel so obliged and enlightened to write at least a few words about the great man one of the greatest scientists of twentieth century, who breathed his last on 19 August,

Linus C. Pauling was born in Portland, Oregon, USA on February 28,1901. He attended Oregon State College and the California Institute of Technology where he received a Ph.D. in 1925. After a year of post doctoral study in Europe. he returned to USA and joined the faculty of the California Institute of Technology. In 1964 he was raised to the position of Research Professor of Physical and Biological Sciences in the Centre for the Study of Democratic Institutions, Santa Barbara, California. He became Professor of Chemistry in Stanford University in 1969. Later on, he established the Linus Pauling Foundation of Physical Chemistry in California where he worked till the

end of his life. Professor Pauling's interests have centered on the nature of ehemical bond and the structure of crystals and molecules. but he has made substantial contributions to many other areas in chemistry, biochemistry and medicine. Among these milestones of contributions, his application of quantum machanics to chemistry is the greatest of all. His successful interpretation of the structure of atoms and molecules on the light of quantum mechanics is the basis of modern chemistry. It is the ideas of Professor Pauling which clarifles the understanding of the reactivity of chemical substances. Other than these, his study of the effective sizes of atoms in molecules and crystals, his work in establishing the existence of helical struc-

ture in proteins, his develop-



bonding, his study of molecular abnormality in relation to disease and his study of vitamin C are remarkable contributions. He has published more than

500 papers, most of which present the results of original investigations. He also published several books that are among the best in their fields. These include "Introduction to Quantum Mechanics" (with E B Wilson Jr), "The Nature of the Chemical Bond", "College Chemistry" and "General Chemistry". The value of his contributions is recognised by 17 medals and awards, 30 honorary degrees and honorary membership in 20 scientific societies in 12 countries. His application of quantum mechanics to chemistry brought him the 1954 Nobel Prize in chemistry. The recognition of his fight for an international agreement to stop the testing of nuclear weapons brought him the 1962 Nobel Prize for Peace.

Since the inception of Nobel Prize Professor Pauling had been the only person to have won two complete Nobel Prizes on his own.

Professor Pauling died on 19th August at the age of 93 at his residence in California, USA. But he will remain alive forever in the scientific community as the father of modern quantum chemistry.

The writer is Chief, Research and Development ment of a theory of metallac Cell, Ministry of Industries.

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.

Commuting in the metropolis

speakers at different places of

Sir, While the issue of traffic jam and commuting problems are discussed in all possible forums, we come across many thoughts some of which are worth trying as those cannot but ease the situation. One such idea I heard recently in an informal (and unreported). discussion is the introduction of commuter trains between Tongi and Narayanganj. .

Will the Railway authorities consider leasing their facilities, at mutually convenient hours, to private operators to introduce commuting trains in this sector on fixed fare basis? Half-hourly trains will reduce pressure on the roads allowing traffic authorities to concentrate elsewhere. M A Haq

Green Road, Dhaka-

Fish Fortnight '94 Sir. We congratulate our

Ministry of Fisheries for observing the 'Fish Fortnight '94' - a nationwide campaign to

boost pisciculture through expansion of modern technology. We however feel that the observance of the fortnight

would help create more awareness towards care and cultivation of fisheries among our people than boosting of pisciculture through expansion of modern technology.

The importance of increased fish production and not fishing of fires with 'current' nets in our country cannot be overemphasised. Further, we feel that our government may make all out efforts to cultivate 'Hilsa fish' in the Padma river which has been seriously affected due to unilateral withdrawal of the Ganges water by India. In this connection help and assistance from international organisations like FAO. Security Council and UN Economic and Social Council may be sought. O H Kabir

Development Aid ...

Dhaka

Sir, Possibly, since 1971, Dr Rezaul Haque's economic article (Development Aid: The Alternative within, The Daily Star 11. Aug 1994) seems the most enlightened, accurate and truthful regarding foreign aid utilisation and dependency. Throughout years we have

been submerged by pessimistic

must be replaced with the privatisation of the rural development sector where, the NGOs could be in the position to disburse and direct such aid in flows; (3) that today, those

who deal with aid are the biggest beneficiaries. Very often they are the politicians diverting projects, where they travelling and not selling wares are most benefitted, the bureaucrats coming into partnership with the businessmen eyeing profits and not the merit of the project in the absence of government's interested in transparency, and in-

Sir, we are clouded with wrong aid versions. I believe such intellectual weakness of our mainstream economic gurus is one of the causes of our declining economy and growing poverty. The Daily Star should focus more on consistent economic thinking, such as Dr Haque's strictly ignoring others which, in my view, have been responsible for our present economic disarray and the tragic downfall of atleast one government since the emergence of Bangladesh. Nizam Ahmad Executive Chairman

MORE, Dhaka'

Peddling or pedalling? Sir, The "Dhaka Day by Day"

article of 21-8-94 was titled "Peddling Miles Away". I wonder if it is "peddling" or 'pedalling", since the story is about a lady riding a bicycle as a mode of transport. In dictionary, Pedall as verb means "move or operate by means of pedals; ride bicycle;" while "peddle" as verb means "follow occupation of pedlar; sell as pedlar: and "pedlar" means travelling vendor of small wares; seller of illegal drugs." I believe the writer meant

door to door. Anyway I enjoyed the article. S A Mansoor Gulshan, Dhaka

'Pedalling' is correct. The error is regretted. — Editor dependent courts and press.