

Serious Educational Lapses

The Comilla Education Board has earned an unenviable record in conducting its affairs over the past years. This time it has succeeded in creating yet another mess — one that is almost insoluble and has the potential to shatter the future of thousands of examinees. Double registration of SSC candidates i.e. allotting same number to two or more candidates is a rare — if not unheard-of — incident. But when gross mistake occurs in case of registering thousands of students, it is indeed difficult to take in the shocking news. Yet the hard truth is that thousands of unsuspecting students will fall victims to this irresponsible and erroneous paperwork by the Comilla Board.

What is even more galling is the fact that this error was detected by the Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (BUET) centre before the distribution of the admit cards among the students. When the board was informed of the incident, the victims of double registration were given special admit cards on condition. As late as August 17 did the office of the controller of examinations issue a letter to the headmasters of schools, the students of which have been victimised, communicating the decision of withholding the double registered students' results and also instructing to contact, with requisite documents, the office by August 23.

Several months have passed since the SSC examinations of 1994 were held and the board authorities have moved to right a wrong which is completely its own creation. By issuing a letter on August 17 it wants the teachers to be present at the concerned office within a week. We wonder how many days the letters took to reach the schools and how much time the headmasters really got to communicate with the office of the controller of examinations. Is the board serious about correcting its mistake or just shirking the responsibility by shifting it on anyone else coming in handy for the purpose?

There is every reason to smell rat in the whole thing. When thousands of examinees are given double registration numbers, it couldn't happen by accident. There might have been some deliberate and calculated move either for graft or other narrow interests orchestrated by some vicious circles. The board should know better. Yesterday's newspaper also carried another news of serious import. It says that answer scripts of geography, the examination of which was held on March 30, was found to be used as a wrapper by a shopkeeper for vegetables although the results are yet to be published. These are alarming developments. This time the Dhaka Education Board has also joined the bandwagon and is getting its usual share of criticism.

Time has come to seriously look into the matter and address the problem in right earnest. The incident of irregularities should be considered a test case. If the salaried wrong-doers can avoid punitive action, things at the board will go further out of control. If the screw is tightened on them, it will be a first step towards saving our education from disintegration.

The Artist who Fought Evil with the Rifle

The 23rd death anniversary of Shaheed Altaf Mahmud came and went without the society's taking much of a notice. The martyred hero was not born a great man but worked his way to it and culminated the process with an unsurpassable act of sacrifice stamped for all eternity with the indomitability of spirit. As such it is his death that binds us all, the beneficiaries of the Liberation War and the national independence it brought forth, in inseparable bonds of gratitude. How could we have forgotten even to remember the day? This is perhaps one of the best measures of how the values of the Liberation War have eroded.

Altaf Mahmud is best known as the great composer who took an indifferently penned poem by Abdul Gaffar Choudhury to the position of the best known and highest revered of all Bengali songs, to the people of Bangladesh as well as West Bengal and Tripura. A song that in the pithy refrains of the shortened formed at once fills our soul with the intimations of all that constitute the best in the Bengali heritage. While the two familiar stanzas known to and rendered each year universally by all educated people in Bangladesh has for its claim to greatness the simplicity of both melody and a sombre dirge like rhythm, he excels as a composer in the less known stanzas laced with melodic arabesques in the best traditions of raga music enlivened by varying and heightened beats.

Except for a short spell of apprenticeship to Suren Babu of Barisal as an aspiring violinist, Altaf was a self-made musician and did not himself think much of his singing prowess. Strangely enough, this talent bordering very much on genius and given wholly over to music — and pure music at that — kept unsparingly at musicmaking solely for the benefit of political propaganda aimed at opening the minds of the multitude to the sounds of the footfall of an approaching new dawn. His songs, his music, his singing — everything was given over to hasten the coming of the new man, the new society.

Exigencies of a more prosaic and mundane survival pushed him into the arena of film music and he was lucky to have the legendary Timirbaron as his mentor in this. With Barisalan obduracy he always wanted to go the whole hog in whatever he chose to pursue and was full of innovative music throughout the sixties as testified in the two dance dramas by Dr Enamul Huq. He was doing wonderfully when the genocide struck. He did not take a moment to abandon the harmonium on which he composed as he took up the rifle.

He was betrayed and, caught, tortured to death in a fashion shaming even the Pakistani standards of cruelty of those days. Unlike many of our martyrs who were unwitting victims of the genocide, Altaf was a warrior fallen in battle. Who shall we compare this artist par excellence with, going down fighting evil in an armed encounter? To Neruda cut down by the goons of Pinochet? But Altaf had the higher honour of overcoming torture before death with an unflinching spirit and an unflinching no to renege even by as much as a moan or sob, lifting himself to the stature of St Joan.

Altaf's death anniversary passed quietly on August 31. Bangladesh, in order to survive, must travel past this present political doldrums. We are sure this nation will outlive its present state of oblivion to be able call herself worthy inheritors of Altaf Mahmud.

I am once again seeing the making of a movement in Assam. This is not for the recognition of Assamese as the sole official language, as was the demand in the sixties. Nor is it meant to oust 'foreigners', a phenomenon between the mid-seventies and the early eighties. This time the protest is building against the violation of human rights and the feeling of injustice with which the people live.

The Assamese are peace-loving citizens. They are somewhat indolent because the nature is extra bountiful to them. But they have a strong sense of fairness. They abhor violence and their agitations have been more peaceful than those of even Mahatma Gandhi. Kamrup, proverbial for beauty and peace, is part of their state.

The United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA), which indulges in indiscriminate violence, is not to their liking. And they feel relieved that its back has been broken. But for many of them it is an expression of desperation to which the unemployed youth have been driven. (I found engineers serving as receptionists).

The Assamese are essentially the *bhadralok*, the gentlemen, minding their own business. But they have been horrified to know that some of their youth are being killed through false encounters. A wave of revulsion swept through parts of Assam the other day when the people saw in a local newspaper a picture of policemen standing near a pyre of motor tyres, rotten wood and dead bodies of the youth.

Seldom have the intellectuals left their ivory tower. This time they have. They have constituted a body, *Ganatantrik Adhikar Sangram Samiti*

(Organisation of Struggle for Democracy). Their aim is to arouse consciousness for 'the basic democratic rights to life and freedom of expression.' Babes in the political jungle of India as they are, they do not seem to realise that many states — particularly Kashmir and Punjab — have seen the worst and have got inured to the brutalities of security forces.

Still it goes to the credit of intellectuals that they travelled all the way from Guwahati to Delhi to meet the President, the Prime Minister and the Home Minister to acquaint them with the killings and the people's estrangement. The prime minister and others admit that there is something drastically wrong in the state, say the intellectuals.

They have returned somewhat assured by the prime minister's word that he would 'do everything short of imposing president's rule' to set things right. But their disappointment against the national press has deepened. Before departing, they held a press conference in Delhi where they explained what ailed Assam. Newspapers nearly ignored the copy. They suspect it was deliberate since nobody cared about their state.

In contrast, they have respect for the Assam press, the bulk of which, they feel, is exposing corruption that is guiding the administration. Two editors, Ajit Kumar Bhuyan and Ramendra Narayan

Dutta Baruah, are in detention under TADA. Their crime is said to be the disclosure of dishonest deals. The government's charge is that they were intermediaries for the payment of Rs 12 crore by the Gas Authority of India Limited (GAIL) to the ULFA. The GAIL has, however, denied their involvement. Baruah's other exposure, which has embarrassed the government, is the forged letter of credit (LOC) worth Rs 200 crore.

considered necessary. Every SULFA boy has been given Rs 2 lakh and allowed to retain the gun he wielded before surrender. Saikia has, however, kept them at a short leash because the TADA cases against them have not been withdrawn.

On the other hand, the enmity between the tribals and Muslims is taking an ugly turn. Instances like Barpeta and Kokrajhar may increase because allegations are that the Bangladeshis from across the

border are squeezing out the tribal population from their lands and homes. In Assam, there is more or less unanimity on 1971 as the cut-off date and all migrants before that may be accepted. But this is not the case in other parts of the north-east. The successful bandh the Northeast Students' Organisation held on the independence day indicates the wide support for the demand of expulsion of infiltrators, who came even before 1971.

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BETWEEN THE LINES

Kuldip Nayar writes from New Delhi

The Assam press has demanded that if the two editors were linked with ULFA, they should be tried in an open court so that the 'proof of their guilt' was available. Newspapers in Guwahati talk openly about the pressure to muzzle their voice.

Not only the press, the government is trying to silence all those who are pointing their fingers at corruption as well as oppression. There is an atmosphere of uncertainty and disorder. The authorities' wrath is feared at every step. Chief Minister Hiteswar Saikia is blamed for letting out the SULFA, the surrendered ULFA boys, to indulge in goondaism so that his authoritarian rule is

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tion to the area. He has written many a time to the prime minister 'to do something about Assam' but without any result. Even the 10-year-old Rajiv Gandhi accord remains mostly on paper.

Indeed, the feeling that he does not get attention torments an average Assamese. He increasingly believes that New Delhi or, for that matter, the rest of India is too busy in its own way to think about his problems. Over the years, I have seen him growing despondent, miserable and lonely.

To some extent, the Assamese have to blame themselves because their anxiety to preserve the entity has at times got mixed with chauvinism. Had they not insisted on having only Assamese as the sole official language, the non-Assamese-speaking areas would not have opted out and the Assamese population might have enjoyed a pre-eminent position as it did before the state was reorganised.

The erstwhile state of Assam was pluralistic enough to absorb tribal and ethnic troubles. Now every tribe wants autonomy. The Bodos are the first to articulate their demand. Others are not far behind. The influx of outsiders, they say, now about 18 per cent of Assam's population, has swelled the number of non-Assamese in the state. The Assamese are already a minority; any further reorganisation of the state will

bring down their number still further.

This scenario is bad enough but worse is the scant attention paid to Assam since independence. New Delhi's neglect takes the cake. It has treated Assam as a step child of the Union. One proof is the low investment the Centre has made in different sectors, the railways, the roads or the public undertakings. The state has returned Finance Minister Manmohan Singh to the Rajya Sabha but he has hardly articulated the Guwahati case. In fact, the adjustment of central assistance against Assam's age-old loans has begun during his time.

Assam has India's 60 per cent of hydro-electric potential. No project has yet reached even the drawing board. The gas has been going waste for more than three decades — worth Rs 10 lakh a day. Tea, timber and oil are taken out of the state but not even a fraction of the earnings is ploughed back.

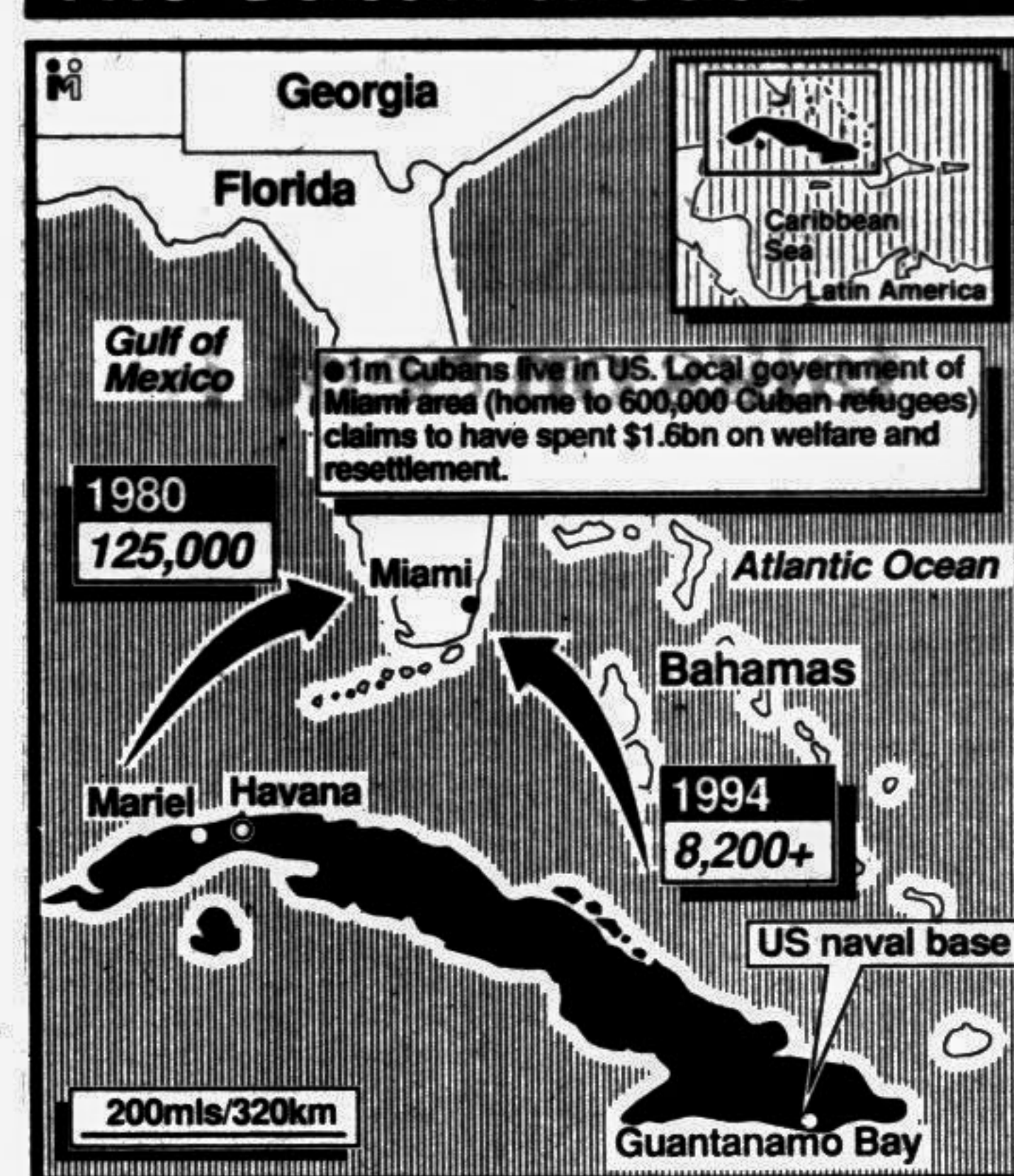
Assam is not a problem but a poser. How do the youth get jobs when there are not enough avenues? Some in desperation take to the gun and some accept any employment which comes their way. On the other hand, the state has no resources to create jobs or improve the quality of life. There is too much power — money — accumulated at the Centre. In fact, it is treating the states like municipalities. Decentralisation of power is considered risky because the states are not found capable of administering their own affairs. The presumption is wrong because of the mess New Delhi has made all over the country. Given more powers, the states may still stew in their own juice. But at least it will be their own.

Washington Counter-attacks with Captured Pawns

Mohamed Hamaludin writes from Miami

Just days after reversing its long-standing policy of granting asylum to Cuban refugees, Bill Clinton's administration started trying to farm them out to Caribbean countries. Gemini News Service reports on Washington's turnaround in its attempts to deal with the continued flood of people out of Fidel Castro's Cuba.

The Cuban exodus



been allowed in. As a result, there are now about one million living in the US. 600,000 of them in the Miami area.

Initially, automatic admission may have granted to assuage national guilt over the failure of John Kennedy's administration to send in the

Marines to support Cuban exile groups in the Bay of Pigs invasion, leading to its collapse.

More recently, it has been due to strong lobbying by the exile Cuban community led by the Cuban American National Foundation and its president, millionaire businessman Jorge

Mas Canosa.

The Cuban Adjustment Act was put to a severe test in 1980 when Castro, angry at the ease with which foreign embassies allowed entry to refugees seeking to flee, opened the Port of Mariel to all who wanted to leave.

That exodus, the Mariel Boatlift, brought some 125,000 Cubans to the Miami area. It put considerable strain on the social infrastructure, with the federal government not providing enough funds to help meet the cost of new schools, housing and medical treatment for the refugees.

Local residents were angered by reports that Castro also used Mariel to export thousands of criminals, mentally ill and other unwanted people to the US. Some 2,500 are still held in prisons here awaiting resumption of normal immigration procedures between the two countries.

There has been no other major influx of refugees from the island — until late July, when the number of refugees seeking to flee by boats and rafts began to rise. By the second week of August, more than 8,200 had fled this year compared with under 3,500 for all of last year.

The impetus this time, as in 1980, appears to be Castro's anger over US refugee policy. He has for many years accused Washington of actively encouraging Cubans to flee as a means of embarrassing his revolution. His anger grew when, ac-

cording to Cuban reports, a young Cuban soldier shot and killed a colleague as the former seized a military boat and used it to ferry friends and relatives across the 90-mile stretch of sea to Florida.

That incident came a week after an unusual violent anti-Castro demonstration by hundreds of Cubans in Havana, in which they demanded to be allowed to leave the country.

Castro threatened to unleash another exodus and while there is no evidence of any active encouragement of such a new flight, all reports here indicated that the Cuban authorities began to look the other way as several hundreds took to the sea on virtually anything that floated.

Faced with the prospect of Mariel II, the US slammed the door shut on Cuban refugees — the first time in 35 years of the Castro regime. Washington announced that those who arrive will be detained; those 'rescued' at sea are being taken to Guantanamo Bay for 'processing'.

Under the new policy, Americans who try to take boats to Cuba to bring back relatives, as happened in 1980, will have their boats seized and face prosecution.

Clinton acted under pressure from local and state officials in Florida who shudder at the thought of another Cuban influx.

Florida Governor Lawton Chiles declared an immigration emergency and called on

the federal government to take strong action to discourage refugees. Chiles is campaigning for re-election and wanted to capitalise on an immigration backlash that is sweeping Florida and the rest of the US.

Facing outrage from the powerful Cuban exile community, Clinton turned his attention to Castro, ordering a series of measures that he said would tighten the pressure on a regime that has been under a US economic embargo since it came to power.

Clinton banned charter flights and the transfer of dollars to Cuba and ordered an increase in propaganda broadcasts from the US.

This package of measures was welcomed by exiles, who see it as intended to hasten Castro's downfall. Some, including the two Cuban Americans in Congress, Ileana Roslehtinen and Lincoln Diaz-Balart, demand more, including a complete naval blockade of Cuba.

Cuba is facing its worst economic depression since the revolution. The collapse of its main ally, the Soviet Union, left it with a lopsided economy with no leg to stand on.

The Castro regime has been racing against time to develop a new economy based on tourism and biotechnology. But results have not been coming fast enough to meet even the basic needs of Cubans.

Both the exile community and the Clinton administration are hoping that by capitalising on the regime's growing domestic problems, dissatisfaction will turn into a popular uprising that will drive Castro out, as happened in Eastern Europe.

MOHAMED HAMALUDIN is Editor of the 'Miami Times'.

To the Editor...

Foreign magazines and books

Sir, The latest outcry against foreign goods relates to what is being called flooding of our market by foreign magazines and books. We believe from our experience that the fascination for foreign books and periodicals that our boys and girls evaluate stems from the urge for having better and glitzy quality, material, contents and get-up of these foreign publications.

Random statistics indicate that Bangladesh publishes more than two hundred weeklies and monthlies, but when so many compete for the limited market, their struggle for survival interferes with their aptitude and ability to pursue quality. The writers on whose contributions the publishers depend complain of the niggardliness of remuneration, with the result that they in their turn have to write for a number of periodicals in order to earn enough to survive, and thus can't always vie for quality.

This analysis will perhaps be considered too simplistic by some, but the fact remains that it is difficult to name a local magazine which qualitatively can be said to be able to hold its own against similar foreign publications. And unless our publishers and writers take steps to remedy this situation, it will be hardly possible to prevent the inflow of foreign magazines — and books — by any means.

The fantastic rise in the

number of periodicals in recent years is evidence of an improvement, when the situation is considered in the light of the fact that fifty years back, it was difficult to survive for even half a dozen. But we need to pool our resources better and concentrate on quality to counter the challenge from foreign publishers and writers.

N H Sufi
Mohammadpur, Dhaka

Exports of shrimp and hilsa

Sir, There are two important news items in The Daily Star of August 29, '94, which call for immediate attention of the authorities in the Ministry of Fisheries and Livestock and the Ministry of Commerce. One of the items relate to the 'fish processing units that are becoming sick' and the other to 'export of hilsa fish to India'.

The demand for shrimps point to a very attractive market in the USA, EEC countries, Japan etc. But due to lack of attention, our shrimp supply has been greatly reduced. Of the 107 shrimp processing factories in the country, only 8 to 10 factories are in production and the rest of them are sick and non-operational, due to the extreme shortage of shrimps. Some unscrupulous exporters resorted to misgrading the quality of shrimps, as a result of which the concerned importers have stopped placing orders. However, if the remedial measures are taken

now, it is possible to increase the exports four fold or more.

We have a huge trade deficit with India. Our export to India is only a fraction of what we import. Hilsa is a delicacy in West Bengal, and given the right support by the government it can fetch substantial foreign exchange for us. The news item tells of cases where the perishable hilsa often gets rotten at the Benapole border due to the stalling activities of the Customs and the BDR. This can be easily remedied.

If our exports are poor we ourselves are responsible. Promotional activities by the government has to be geared up and bottlenecks removed quickly. The demand for our Hilsa is there from abroad, and we should have the capacity to get it.

Shahabuddin Mahtab
Siddheswari Road,
Dhaka-1217

Revealing photograph!

Sir, I, in my life, never wrote to an editor — though I often felt tempted, but never dared to.

Today's matter is somewhat different. It's a captivating photograph published on 25th August in your daily. It is indeed so revealing that I find it irresistible not to write and congratulate your photographer.

It was highly amusing to find those two surreptitious hands sneaking from behind under the raised arm of the

chanting women in front. I am a non-political man, now in my mid-forties, but I have seen the great political events of our national history such as the '69 mass movement, and fought the liberation war. All these events took me to streets innumerable times. But our hands, palm and fists were above our heads — not clenching and poking like the ones referred to.

That's really revealing and magnificent photograph. Honestly, I really enjoyed it and of course found a chance to express my admonition against those there (in the streets) with lesser motives.

Md Juman Khan (Jumma)
Kochukhet, Dhaka Cantt, Dhaka

Deposit Pension Scheme

Sir, It is really good that The Daily Star wanted its readers to participate in its recent supplement on 'Banking'. However, it remains a matter of regret that any complaint published in our national dailies is not usually taken into account by the concerned authorities. Anyway, we look forward with great hope for the time when public matters will really be given a thought to with reasonable respect.

As regards Deposit Pension Scheme (DPS), a few dozens of letters were published over the last couple of years urging the authorities to continue to open fresh accounts under the

scheme, but till now we do not see any positive response from the banks.

We understand that the present interest rates do not allow the banking sector to continue the scheme. But I do believe that the similar types of schemes could have been introduced keeping well in consideration the present interest rates.

Motius Samad Chowdhury
Phulola Tea Estate, Sylhet

Congrats!

Sir, I want to convey my heartfelt congrats to the victorious teenage cricketers of our country who clinched the Seven Nation Youth Cricket Tournament title some days ago in Malaysia. It was a great pleasure for me when I heard the news on BTV that Bangladesh, which is considered by most to be a backward nation in international sports, had won a tournament abroad. And it was all the more amusing because the less known teenage cricketers of our country had boldly defeated the side of a Test playing country like Sri Lanka. Besides Bangladesh won the other matches also with very enviable average run rates and wickets. They showed their skills in all the disciplines of the game — bowling, fielding and batting. And, it was clearly noticed that the other participating teams (except for Sri Lanka) were far below our standard. And Sri Lanka,

though they defeated our side in the first match, could not hold their winning spree in the final game.

In the early months of this year, our national cricket side took part in the ICC Trophy in Kenya. Though they could not qualify for the World Cup Cricket '96 they showed no small efforts. And now country's youth cricket side have won a tournament. So, isn't it enough a victory for dreaming about the bright future of our cricket?

In this respect, I would like to suggest the government and specially Bangladesh Cricket Control Board (BCCB) to take up the following measures: 1. To take special care for nurturing both the national cricket side and the youth cricket team; 2. to select the players for the teams more carefully; 3. to organise more cricket training courses at home and send the promising cricketers abroad for higher training; 4. to give them more chance to play against a tougher side at home and abroad; 5. to appoint an experienced coach for the national side as soon as possible for the preparation of the coming ICC Trophy; and 6. above all, to make more cricket grounds and stadiums for the purpose cricket only.

At last, I again convey my congratulations to the teenage cricketers of our country and hope for the bright future of cricket in our country.

Shamin Talaimuri, Rujshahi