Founder-Editor: Late S. M. Ali

Dhaka, Monday, February 27, 1995

Jute Mills that Nobody Wants

In what can perhaps be termed as one of the understatements of the year, it was reported yesterday that bid for privatisation of jute mills drew poor response. The truth is, practically it got no response. Tentler for divesting four mills was issued in October last year. Because of poor response, the date was extended twice. Even after the expiry of the second date, only one mill out of four received five valid bids - not to be confused with justifiable bids. This tender was the first step of the Jute Ministry to privatise 10 mills. This forms a part of the World Bank funded US 250 million dollar Jute Sector Adjustment Credit Programme. According to reports, while the first tender was being rescheduled, the Privatisation Board floated a second tender for the six remaining mills. The dates of the second tender also expired in the middle of last month. Again the response was extremely poor. There is of course , a message in all this.

It is ironic that the "Golden Fibre" which created so much wealth for us in the fifties, sixties, and even in the seventies, should now become so unattractive that there are no bids for jute mills. Well, that is perhaps not a fair statement. The lack of interest in the state owned jute mills could be more a reflection of the state of those mills in particular, and that of government owned productive units in general. There could also be serious flaws in the bidding process itself, or on the process of valuation of these units. One could also raise question of labour-management relations in these mills that make prospective own-

ers shy away from them.

The point that we would like to underscore here is that the recent demand for pay-rise in private jute mills is likely to have a very negative impact on the whole jute sector reform process initiated by the World Bank. The whole reform package hinges on a very delicate balance between cost of production and market prices. The whole idea is to restore the competitiveness of Bangladesh's jute in the international market. The reform package itself is rather a complicated formula whose various component must fall into a cohesive whole for it to have the desired impact. We believe that any wage hike in the private sector mills will have a serious negative impact in making our jute sector viable. We therefore consider it to be highly irresponsible on the part of the government to have raised wages in the state owned mills. It is a case of populism getting the better of the government's economic sense. The poor response for tender bids is another evidence that questions the viability of the sector and points fingers at the dwindling importance of our once pride possession - jute.

The Mad Bad Rush

For the week starting on February 25 the question of the greatest public concern of Dhaka, and as such the whole of this country, is how would two million people get out of Dhaka in about 48 hours and through only four main exit points. Home-bound Eid passengers would spend possibly about 300 million Taka in those 48 hours to get a passage home, each paying 20 to 60 per cent above the fixed fare. The rush of passengers, the bottleneck at exit points and shortage of seats are combining to exact a bonanza for mastans and assorted extortionists. And this gang includes, untorumately, drivers and conductor-helpers and other manpower that the bus and launch operators employ to woo or intimidate travellers. At Kamalapur, the only railway outlet for an 8-million-plus populace, it is already a scene resembling the front of a cinema house before the release of a blockbuster: no ticket at the counter, all in the hands of the blackmarketeers. The goons are selling tickets at a premium of 20 to 100 per cent and complaining even after that: police are exacting too big a share from the loot.

The countless weird cameos of the mad rush for both money and passage add up to one whole picture: complete collapse of governance, of rules and of civilised norms. The absurdity of the situation hits an ultimate peak when some terminal managers and transport operators try to justify the carnage. The vehicles and vessels would be returning to Dhaka almost without passengers this must, be offset by the extra money charged. And they say the transport workers and the rest of the transport manpower have to be paid bonus - and this is how the dole is collected.

How come the railway people are playing the cinema blackmarketeer game? Perhaps there isn't anyone in real control of the whole mechanism — if that is still a mechanism at all. Near closure of counter sale before the Eid is symptomatic of the rot that is eating up the big thing.

Does the government want the citizens to resign themselves to such outburst of anarchy? Then what and who would build norms into colinteraction - economic and social norms? And without there being rules in the game, this game of playing at society and state and nationhood would all come to nought. If the government indeed cannot do anything about this black hole of governance, cannot it even restrain its police from fixing protection tolls and pacing

the extortion race?

Starving the University Pupil What are the universities for? For nurturing boys and girls into a full person by intellectually and emotionally developing them to carry forward man's accumulated wealth of knowledge and wisdom and creativity and the highest sense of responsibility and commitment towards society while consuming these and at once contributing to these. Our universities cannot be said to be realising such objective in any manner.

Dhaka University is serving food in its residential halls, that on the average offer 1000 calorie or 50 per cent less than the pupils' need for their bodily upkeep. The result? A survey conducted by the Nutrition and Food Sciences Institute of DU reports that hall residents, both men and women, are victims of various diseases originating in malnutrition. An astounding 80 per cent of all hall residents suffer from low blood pressure, 12 per cent from anaemia and 36 per

cent from iodine deficiency To arrange for all resident students a square meal, perhaps the university would need to charge more money. We do not think the students would grudge that provided they got their money's value.

If the halls offer a prescription for anaemia, the college hostels in Dhaka offer worse. Perhaps all this is done on the plea of keeping education within the reach of all. This is an useless eyewash doing more harm than offering no hostel accommodation at all.

Shedding Child Workers, Easing Labour Migration

The situation might have been different had the global movement of labour been freer than it is now. Poorer

countries could have gone ahead with their human resource development programmes with greater assurmonth, reportedly to find out ance then, knowing that their surplus labour would find employment abroad the progress made by the garment industry in shedding minimum age for admission to its child workers. The immeemployment in industry. There diacy of the concern of the also is the UN Convention on American Administration over the Rights of the Child Indithe issue seemingly arises vidual countries, including from a possibility of revival of Bangladesh, framed laws to deter use of child labour in inthe Child Labour Deterrent Act in the US Congress. More

two-member team from

the US Department of

Labour paid a visit this

widely known as the Harkin

Bill (by the name of the US

Senator who introduced it in

impose sanctions on countries

exporting to the United States.

goods using child labour. Held

in abevance, it is possible that

the Bill may be revived this

single largest export market

for readymade garments from

Bangladesh. Some 60 per cent

of garments exported from

this country go to the United

States. Enactment of the

Harkin Bill could directly im-

pact Bangladesh's exports and

by extension, its economy. For

now, it rather appears that the

US Administration is inter-

ested in helping Bangladesh

take corrective measures so

that its garment exports may

not come under the mischief

The outery raised by hu-

marr-rights activists, especially

by anti-child-exploitation gro-

ups, against consumption of

labour, holds even more far-

reaching consequences for the

marketing of such goods. The

campaign has created an

awareness among consumers,

particularly in the West, of a

need to avoid a product if child

labour has gone into its mak-

ing. The international commu-

nity has come alive to the ur-

gency of protecting children

against exploitation by indus-

tries. There is the Interna-

tional Labour Organisation

(ILO) Convention prescribing a

ffering from the denial of oil

income. Don't fall for it. If the

world lets heavy money flow to

Baghdad while Saddam rules,

at least one weapon of mass

even weapons of mass destruc-

tions were used. Now the

world is full of weapons of

mass destruction and some of

these are in the hands of

killers and would-be killers.

Then why worry so much about

only "Iraqi potential" ? William

Safire himself mentioned in

his commentary that "the UN

Commission thinks the Iragis

are not now producing germs

of delivery, but if is certain

that Saddam has the equip-

ment, material and expertise

in hand to begin production of

biological warfare agents as

soon as inspectors are thrown

out. The facility in Dura now

innocently producing hoof-

and-mouth vaccines is set up

for immediate change over to

bio-war production". One won-

ders, how such rash conclu-

sions could be made just on

cine producing facilities

around the world and if such

assumptions are correct, every

such facility could go for im-

mediate change over for pro-

duction of biological warfare

agents. Then why doubt only

Iraq? In case Iraqi facility has

anything special for which

such assumptions were made

that needs to be brought out.

Such assumptions only com-

plicate the judgement of those

who make decisions at the

level of UN on the life and

death of Iraqi people. More-

over, if Saddam had all these

biological weapons and had

such facilities in place why did

he not use them when he

faced humiliating defeat in the

There were some reports

that American soldiers suffer-

ing from Gulf War syndrome

were the victims of Saddam's

poison gas used during Gulf

War but later this was denied

which means Saddam did not

Gulf War?

There are many such vac-

the basis of assumptions?

▲ drumbeat of stories

/ Door tragts are su-

will follow about how

products using underage

of the proposed law.

The United States is the

year for enactment.

1992) the legislation seeks to #

It's not that child labour is employed by garment industry alone. Children can be found working in other industries too, for instance in small engineering workshops, bakeries and confectioneries. Child labour finds employment also in transport sector, hotels and restaurants. Why is it that underage workers in garment industry alone caught the attention of the outside world? A part of the answer is obvious. It is because the product of child labour - readymade garments in this case, is being exported abroad. Use of child labour in another product of South Asia. namely carpet, has also come to be assailed far and wide. mainly because that too is exported.

The main thrust of the ongoing programme for elimination of child labour from the garment industry is to arrange for education and training of the underage workers. Bangladesh has already signed up with the ILO, two-year IPEC -International Programme for Elimination of Child-labour. The programme will basically finance in-service education for underage workers in the garment sector. Initially there will be two schools for girls working in garment factories - falling between age group of 12 and 14. Each school will provide education to 300 girls for two hours during the time they work in the factory. More such schools will be opened. In fact, the government formed a 20-member steering commit-

tee earlier this month, with representation from concerned agencies, employers and labour leaders; to monitor the IPEC programme. ILO and UNICEF have been included in the committee as observers. UNICEF is also reported to have committed assistance in the education programme for child workers in the garment industry

Addressing a press briefing at the end of the its mission. the US Labour Department team indicated that the United States too would consider

Nepal and Pakistan. Carpets made in these countries are mostly exported. For years now, human-rights activists abroad, particularly in Germany, as well as some regional organisations such as the Delhi-based South Asian Coalition on Child Servitude, had been campaigning against the use of child labour in the carpet industry. Now some carpet manufacturers and traders in India and a number of importers in Germany have joined up to establish last month what has come to be

ALONG MY WAY

S B Chaudhuri

funding comprehensive programme for education of underage workers in the garment industry. Outlining an agenda for phased elimination of child labour in garment factories, the team spoke of signing of a memorandum of understanding (MOU) between the Bangladesh Garments Manufacturers and exporters' Association (BGMEA) and two local NGOs to set up and run schools for underage workers employed in garment factories. The US team reportedly said that the United States would consider providing funds for programmes under the MOU.

This emphasis on schooling of underage workers as the way to eliminate child labour in the manufacturing sector finds expression elsewhere too. According to UNICEF nearly a million children work in the carpet industry in India.

known as the Rugmark Foundation. Based in Delhi, its job is to administer a new scheme for exporting Indian carpets with "Rugmark" to the German market.. Treated as a trademark, the new label indicates that the hand-knotted carpet in questions has not been made by children under the age of 14. Carpet factories whoe opt for Rugmark licenses must allow surprise inspections to make sure that the product is indeed child-labour-free. Carpets with the Rugmark will cost only 2-3 per cent more. Carpet importers in Germany would support the Rugmark by paying one per cent of the price into a fund for educating

Educating the child workers with the aim of rehabilitating them is, of course, a noble venture. Question is, will schooling alone suffice to solve

the child workers.

the problem of child labour in industry? Manufacturers may well show a readiness to hire child workers since they take lower wages. Besides, child labour is also available freely for employment in the industry. Poverty is behind it all. Parents are too poor to afford schooling for the children. Rather, the prospect of supplementing family income with earnings of a child worker is too alluring. Despite awful conditions, the children still prefer to work because of the independence it brings them. Such considerations would perhaps weigh heavily particularly in the case of temale workers.

On the other hand, a modicum of education and training will raise expectations of displaced child workers to higher levels. Will this new work force find jobs to suit its expectawons? Will these ex-child workers find employment at all? It can't be gainsaid that the economy will grow to absorb these new entrants to the adult labour force despite their past experience of work, parttraining and some education. In the end, the present scheme of things for the rehabilitation of displaced child workers could only add to their frustrations.

The situation might have been different had the global movement of labour been freer than it is now. Poorer countries could have gone ahead with their human resource development programmes with greater assurance then, knowing that their surplus labour would find employment abroad. Advanced industrial economies need migran labour because of increase in their geriatric population and may be that their own people

tend to shun the so-called 3-D jobs - dirty, dangerous and difficult. With industries at full stretch, fast-growing developing countries classified as emerging economies, also need foreign workers. Yet." these countries continue to put up barriers designed to keep migrants out. So the illegal trade in migrant trafficking thrives in America, Europe and Asia. At a televised news conference last month. President Fidel Ramos of the Philippines called for a global summit on labour migration. May be it is high time that the international community makes such a move. Migrant-sending and receiving countries need to sit together to address the issue of global mobility of labour. The UN social development summit being held in Copenhagen · next month could bring just such an opening.

T the Dhaka press briefing mentioned earlier. 1 L the US team leader spoke of the possibility of taking the issue of child labour to the new World Trade Organisation (WTO) also. That raises the spectre of tradelabour linkage. Just last month, at the fifth Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) labour ministers' conference held in New Delhi. some .82 developing countries adopted a declaration terming the linkage proposed by indsutrialized countries in the WTO as totally unacceptable. Tying trade benefits to a country's willingness to enforce preset labour standards amounted to a new form of protectionism aimed at lowcost exports from developing nations, they said. Meanwhile, developing countries have raised the issue of migration of labour, calling for easing of immigration policies to permit freer movement of workers across borders. Well, WTO could turn into a battlefield OVER THESE ISSUES.

Spare Poor Iraqis — all are Not Saddams

It is absolutely the high time for the permanent members of the UN Security Council to review their political and strategic agenda and other compulsions in the region and look at the Iraqi people's situation somewhat differently ... They have really suffered for their 'beloved" leader Saddam and now they should be spared.

destruction will soon be in the hands of a proven killer" use poison gas during Gulf War. If he had the poison gas and writes William Safire, a did not use them for any valid renowned columnist under the reason why at this stage fear captain "The Iraqi Potential for Germ Warfare". Saddam did about an imaginary potential and in the process keep a nanot fight World War-I and World World-II where innotion under siege? cent millions were killed and

Saddam reportedly used poison gas against his own people - Kurds in particular. which was, however, not fully established. Some reports spoke against such assertions. Saddam did fight Iranians but who encouraged him and supplied with resources and equipment? May be the supporters had security and strategic reasons of their own but undoubtedly damage was done: war took place and the people of both sides suffered. The Kurds immensely suffered under Saddam but Kurds have been suffering for ages under many rulers and governments. Saddam's ill-adventure in Kuwait was apparently also not free of some external manipulations or he was at least not timely warned against it by the then friends. The attempt here, however, is not to say Saddam is innocent but why the entire population of 20 million Iraqi should suffer and that also for years because of one man - Saddam Hussein who has been enjoying his life anyway and is reportedly building new castles by selling oil through clandestine chan-

nels even under UN sanctions. There are reports about Saddam's misrule and mistreatment of his people but it is the irony of fate that the UN Security Council consisting of members which are champions of human rights joined Saddam Hussein in further punishing the Iraqi people. Indeed, the nation is under siege and unless the sanctions are lifted soon, Iraq's younger generation may ultimately face irrecoverable physical and mental damage. This is nothing but violation of human rights - denial of a nation's right to eat, drink and lead its normal life and the UN Security Council may not escape

and medicine under strict UN conditions was unworkable right from beginning as UN Security Council knew well that Saddam would never accept such conditions. Even if Saddam agreed, mere food and medicine are not good enough for a nation. Again, the purpose here is not to bring accusations against the world body indeed far from it. One, how-

reconstruction could have gone to the US Saddam could have agreed to open for international inspection all his doubtful facilities and equipment which are in any case mostly obsolete. This seems unrealistic now but could as well happen. Indeed, when the dictators feel obliged they give in that way. The dictators are like elephants; when mad they

SPOTLIGHT ON MIDDLE FAST

Muslehuddin Ahmad

ever, feels morally obliged to highlight these issues for UN Security Councils serious consideration. It is absolutely the high time for the permanent members of the UN Security Council to review their politi cal and strategic agenda and other compulsions in the region and look at the Iraqi people's situation somewhat differently - all Iraqi people are not Saddams. Enough is enough. They have really suffered for their 'beloved" leader Saddam Hussein and now they should be spared. If not for the Iraqi people,

go at least for business interest. Iraq seems to be a gold mine in terms of oil and reconstruction work of the devastations the allied powers inflicted. France, Russia and China have already taken serious note of these and started making positive moves for lifting the sanctions. Business deals worth \$15 billion for the next 10 years are being completed by these countries. The other two members with veto power are holding out. Britain has started making small moves, though late, through British business groups. Only the US is still adamant. The US indeed missed the first opportunity when President Saddam Hussein made an offer to President Clinton when he

entered the White House. The US could have gained enormously, in the event of an understanding with President Clinton the major contracts for are devastating but under a correct trainer-master they are as harmless as earthworms

One does not have to lecture on the US on such strategies. The US has enough knowledge and experience. It has been dealing with dictators for ages and these were generally to its advantage. This could have been another. Even now the US stands a good chance. It has only to stealthily follow other permanent members of the UN Security Council and make a good bargain with fraq. The moves made by France and followed by others seem destined to succeed — the US cannot stand alone and may have to give in at some stage; it is a question of time. Then why lose the big business and also some political advantage?

In any case, Saddam will not stay for ever. Even Ceaucescu had to go - incredible though it was. Therefore, leave these matters to the people. If the UN has faith in the strength of the people, then spare them and help them fight dictatorship and establish democracy. Also do not always go by what dissidents say. They have their own agenda and political interest The return of Iranian dissidents to power after Shah's fall should be enough of a lesson.

Gulf war objectives have largely been achieved the most important one was the recognition of Kuwait's border. If sanctions continue, at some

stage Saddam may relapse into his pre-Gulf war syndrome and revoke recognition of Iraq-Kuwait border and order mobilisation of forces to Kuwait's border thus reactivating US into war situation - US forces flying across Atlantic. Saddam may even go for repeat exercise just to embarrass the US. The US may not get any more support of its allies in view of the latest developments. Such a situation would be bad for the

The UN Security Council. has set up the monitoring cameras in Iraq or some form of surveillance; it is no use becoming obsessed with such ideas. In a world of today mon-

itoring cameras can easily be

be built underground, anything may happen underground and cameras cannot detect everything. Nuclear bomb? The monopoly was gone long ago. Over a period of time practically every country which can afford will go for nuclear bomb on the Western justification of "deterrent" against nuclear attacks. Materials and expertise are abundantly available especially after the collapse of Soviet Union. As it seems, Saddam or anyone in his place may have to go nuclear to counter the powerful neighbour which, the Western reports say may have nuclear bomb in a couple of years time. Some other countries in the region may also go for nuclear bomb to counter Israeli nuclear arsenal. Therefore, let the UN act as it should and not become a tool in the hands of some powers. As it is a world body, it must deliver justice and Ifaqi people deserve jus-

tice from the world body.

made ineffective. If cities can

CONTATTONT OPINION

Is DCC Blind?

Jamal Uddin Ahmad urbane and a perfect gentle-

I have read with considerable interest several letters under the above caption which appeared in your esteemed daily. I have also gone through the series of articles and comments which appeared in the print media including that of your's in the recent past about the terrible state of affairs now obtaining in DCC. The question is not that

DCC is blind. The fact of the matter is that it simply does not exist. Between DCC and the Traffic Department of DMP, the capital city of Bangladesh has been reduced to a grand slum. The roads and streets of the metropolitan city of Dhaka officially belong to DCC. But has any body seen any sign of its authority anywhere? The answer is plain no. Why. because DCC is simply not capable of exercising authorny of any kind. Truthfully speaking. roads of Dhaka belong to peddlers, hawkers, shopkeepers, slum dwellers and above all, rickshaws. Just take a walk along Motifheel, the commercial capital of Bangladesh. What do you see? Roads choked with hawkers, dirt, filth, open drains, thousands upon thousands of rickshaws. Motifheel has now become a big bazar for all kinds of vegetables, beef fish, fruits, spices, second hand clothing etc etc. The best spot to do one's daily shopping is in front of Bangladesh Bank You name anything, you get it here. From dry fish to Biryani, from Telapia to big Rohu fish, vegetables and spices of all varieties. This is the place where foreigners come to transact business. Just imagine what kind of an impression they take back with them about Bangladesh! A country which cannot decently manage a city. how can it claim to be an emerging economic tiger!

The election of Mr Md Hanif as the Mayor of DCC had generated a great deal of optimism among all shades of public opinion. Besides being the first directly elected Mayor by a population of about seven million people, he was and still is known to be a soft spoken.

man. Despite his political affiliation, he was generally accepted as a person without dispute. The people of Dhaka city looked forward to better days under his able leadership. Their support and sympathy for his development programme were never in short supply. But as days went by, instead of things getting better, people saw to their utter dismay and anguish that their hopes and aspirations were getting shattered, their environment was getting dirtier, roads and streets becoming more and more crowded and impassable, safety and security of road users decreasing to a hazardous level. The city of Dhaka is now in a total mess. Nothing is right.

The Gulshan, Banani and Baridhara Society invited the Mayor to a meeting of its members at Gulshan Club. The reception given to him was unprecedented. He was given four separate representations at this meeting on behalf of the residents of the locality. None of these needed involvement of any major financial outlay. He had promised that all these would receive his urgent attention. That was well over six months ago. Not only that nothing has happened for the better but, regrettably, things have further deteriorated in the meantime. A legal notice was served on DCC to which no reply was received.

There is no point in saying that the Central Government is not cooperating with the DCC. This is a matter which needs to be sorted out between DCC and the Government. People want service and redress of their problems. The Mayor and his administration are pledge bound to provide these. We want cleaner environment better and safe roads, removal of traffic congestion, elimination of all unhygienic road side eating places and slums. proper garbage cleaning etc DCC must ensure these mini mum facilities to its citizens. No more excuses, please.

Shocking indeed!

Sir, A news monitored by the Reuter and published by many newspapers including The Daily Star (February 20, '95) that a former minister and highly respectable Indian politician stood against an emergency exit and urinated during his flight from Calcutta to Bombay on Sunday, February 19, 1995 since the toilet was found occupied by a fellow passenger, really shocked me.

The old and respectable exminister was certainly forced by the uncontrolable natural call. Was Reuter's newsman present on that unfortunate occasion in the state-owned Indian Airlines plane? Or the news was flashed out by the airline crew? In any case, it is in utter bad taste to make the world know of such a nuisance. It is not a news at all, nor is there any sense in publishing

such stupid news. Even a robust healthy person may face such situation, not to mention the very aged Indian politician.

the blame. The import of food

Whenever I visit Dhaka, I try to avoid passing from the eastern side of Bangabandhu Avenue near Gulistan as half of the roadside is always found effluvial with the vapours rising from the urinating by numerous passersby.

I would request you to keep The Daily Star free from such unpleasant 'so-called' news in the future, which only leaves a bad taste in the readers. K R Zakhmi Khulna

Manners matter

Sir. Sudden accumulation of a lot of money and wealth has a common effect of changing one's attitude which is manifest through one's proudness,

snobbery and arrogance. Of course a lot also depends on who really inherits what! Anyway, in our surroundings, many of these people even lose their sense of manners and has a peculiar attitude to look down on others.

For example, on one of these mornings of Ramadan. along with my wife, child and with many others were anxlously waiting at a doctor's

After nearly an hour, we finally got into the doctor's chamber, but before the physician could start with us, just then a lady in a rather bright dress and wearing a rather strong perfume for that part of the day, wildly pushed, opened the door and walked straight up to the doctor. I did not say anything as the physician seemed too flattered himself. After she left, I was told

that the person was one of the big shots of the city. What was really dismaying was that she had nothing serious or important to consult over, but merely argued over her pathological reports, taking a considerable amount of time and was absolutely least bothered about our presence. She was also responsible for deliberately delaying others that included couple of patients in a serious condition. This was indeed an act of arrogance and height of bad manners. Well, this sort of situation is not unusual! And as it seems, we are increasingly becoming immune to such acts of bad manners and personal insults day by day. Should we not raise our voice against such behaviours?

K Vigar Motnuddin Dhaka