Dhaka, Wednesday May 3 1995

Dialogue with Private Sector

We are for as many consultation meetings between the government and the private sector as can possibly be held before the national budget is announced in June. Such a series of dialogues is warranted by three very cogent reasons. First, the opposition's absence in parliament rules out any possibility of a critical analysis of the budgetary proposals to be tabled by the Treasury Bench. Secondly, this is an election year with the ruling party and the opposition having a higher stake in the new budget than they had in the previous ones. Since a parliamentary duel between the ruling party and the opposition seems out of the question, the need for dialogues between the government and a broad-based private sector is all the more reinforced. Thirdly, a trend towards a much greater internal resource mobilisation places an increased burden of responsibility on the private sector.

It is in this light that the FBCCI-NBR consultative meeting of last Sunday has to be seen. Not only are we for more such consultations between the private sector leaders and the government during the coming crucial weeks of budget-drafting we would also like to see some of the business community's suggestions incorporated in the draft document. Since it is private sector-led growth the government stands committed to, it is obliged to provide an enabling environment to the private sector of which a responsive bureaucracy is the linch-pin.

The tax base looks rather inelastic having been pulled to be farthest. Anyway, higher indirect taxes would be unwelcome to the general consumers who have grown wary of the burden passed on to them. Some rationalisation seems due over the VAT.

The government's fiscal management must be able to cope with an inflationary pressure that election-related expenses are bound to exert on the market. Simultaneously, the law and order situation has to vastly improve for the private sector to perform better both in catering to the consumer needs at reasonable prices as well as to be cost-effective in their production and exports. We have lowered our tariffs structure faster than other countries rendering our industries uncompetitive with theirs. We are expecting a reorganisation in this area after SAPTA comes into effect in less than a year's time.

With all our limitations, we can give the private sector a break, if freight, power, gas and telecommunications services are efficient enough.

Malaria Menace

Malaria, once thought to be eliminated, has once again staged a comeback. Finding itself in one of the high malaria-prone regions, Bangladesh faces the problem anew largely through the lack of awareness of the people about the menacing disease. Another related problem is our helplessness to stop carriers of malarial parasites at the border. The director general of health and the director of primary health-care and disease control have claimed that the country has an adequate quantity of medicines to combat the disease. But they have admitted in the same breath that some lacunae exist in the distribution of medicines. On top of this, either people do not seek medication or they are not reached by health workers or doctors at the time of their need.

The lesson that gets lost in the hullabaloo is that eradication of malaria, which we recall with pride now, was made possible by a consistent and systematic campaign against it. Health workers used to make regular house-to-house visits to record any attack of the fever and offer remedies. That is no more done even when only 10 out of 64 districts have been found to be high-risk areas. If vigilance like in the previous campaign is revived in these districts, prevalence of the disease can be drastically reduced.

Some areas like Bandarban, Rangamati and Khagrachhari are somewhat disadvantaged to wage an effective fight against the disease. The people in these hilly areas need a greater access to medical facilities. So it is in the fitness of things that rather than the people seeking medicare there, the facilities should reach them. Here the government must be ready to share more than the normal part of its responsibility. Even on the preventive side, the government has a lot to do. If not by supplying the instruments and medicines free of cost, at least by ensuring that these are available at reasonable prices, the government can very well fulfil its obligations. However, the use of insecticides must not get the better of environmental concerns.

Drive for Software

In the age of computer or microchips, we find ourselves way behind the race. Sure enough, we are enjoying some of the benefits of this modern machine but this is very largely as a consumer of the sophisticated gadget. We have learnt some of its uses but the vast opportunities and advantages it offers are yet to be fully explored by us. At a workshop on development of software industry in the country on Sunday our pathetic lackings were vividly brought to the fore.

Our weakness for modern amenities is almost legendary but hardly do we take the trouble of seizing the opportunities that come our way as the blessings of a versatile modern invention. Our inability to invent is perhaps excusable but certainly not our lack of initiative to harness a new product to the fullest. As a result, the country's industrial production line has not shown any marked qualitative change over the past years. Not surprisingly our booming manufacturing industry remains nothing other than garments.

Thanks are due to those who are thinking of going for software manufacturing. Better late than never. The venture is not something beyond our capacity. It is good to know that the government has expressed its readiness to support the initiative. It is worth mentioning here that factories in Madras, India supply a major portion of software for one of the computer giants in the US. This is how developing countries can penetrate the markets of the developed world. We can no longer afford to be apathetic to wards developing a few bases for sophisticated software manufacture in the country. This should be high on the agenda, because it has some advantages over more capital-intensive industries.

Only the Wearer Knows

I wonder how Kuldip Nayar could be so sure that the current deplorable situation arose largely or solely due to the machinations of the bureaucrats. How could he rule out the possibility that the bureaucrats are simply executing a political decision?

attend summits, conferences, workshops and seminars all aimed at promoting greater cooperation and friendship among South Asian countries.

am a great admirer of

Kuldip Nayar. He has to be

counted among the great

journalists, past and present,

in this part of the world. He

has the talent to unearth the

truth, wisdom to judge it with

objectivity, courage to tell it

unvarnished, and stature to

command attention of the high

and the low in his country and

happy to see his trenchant at-

tack on the silly and petty

game the authorities of India.

Pakistan and Bangladesh have

been playing in respect of is-

suance of visas to each other's

citizens: (The Problems They

Face The Daily Star: February

comical that anyone from any-

where can roam all over the

country but when it comes to

Pakistanis (lately the

Bangladeshis also) the visa is

given for three cities." He

could have perhaps added that

even this is done most grudg-

have joined recently in this

comical, yet to the victims de-

basing and often painful, cha-

rade of tit-for-tat. (Who was re-

sponsible for the first 'tit' and

who retaliated with the 'tat'

will never be known'). And

ministers and foreign ministry

officials almost froth at the

mouth specifying on The

spirit of SAARC'. They fly

hither and thither untiringly to

respects Oklahoma and Yoko-

hama — one at the heart of the

United States and another a

port city of Japan - are vastly

different. Yet on April 19 these

two cities found themselves on

the same boat. Not exactly in

the sense of casualty and

destruction but from the point

of view of vulnerability. The

central American city was

ripped through by a powerful

bomb blast on the nine-storey

federal office building.

Yokohama was made to con-

vulse by a poison-gas attack,

the second such incident al-

most within a month after the

sarin nerve gas release on

Tokyo's underground railway --

the first incident-left 12 pas-

sengers dead and 5,000 more

injured. The Yokohama gassing

did not kill anybody but 400

Oklahoma was, however,

not that lucky. It turned out to

be the worst instance of ter-

rorism America has ever suf-

fered. At least 250 people per-

ished in the inferno and many

were missing in the debris

This, however, does in no way

undermine the power of gas

released in the railway tunnel

in Japan. In fact, the nerve gas

has the potential to kill more

people. Considering the

crowded Japanese subway, the

gas could account for thou-

sands of lives. That it did not is

more a stroke of luck than any-

thing else.

people were hospitalised.

similar. But in all other

Bangladesh also seem to

So rightly he says. "It is

Hence, I was particularly

abroad

17, 1995).

Plus c.a change, plus c'est la meme chose - it reminded me. The more that changes the more it is the same thing. The year was 1963.

Government of India was hosting the Asian Population Conference. I was serving as Director, Bureau of Statistics in the then East Pakistan and was included in the Pakistani delegation to attend the conference to be held in New Delhi. I wanted to take advantage of this opportunity to visit Calcutta and Ajmeer — the former for cultural (I had already visited the Louvre, the Smithsonian and the British Museum more than once but not the museums in Calcutta) and the latter for spiritual en-

I duly submitted application for visa to the then Indian Deputy High Commission with all official papers. First, there was a long wait presumably for clearance from Delhi. Then I

was told that since the conference is in Delhi, that is the only place for which I would get visa. On my way, I spent more than twelve hours, from nine in the morning to ten at night, waiting for the connect ing flight sitting on a bench in the dirty and dusty Calcutta airport lounge. I was not even

age. I wonder how he could be so sure that the current depiorable situation arose largely or solely due to the machinations of the bureaucrats. How could be rule out the possibility that the bureaucrats are simply executing a political decision?

Kuldip Nayar's own bitter

Another Voice Kazi Fazlur Rahman

allowed to step outside for ten minutes for a breath of fresh

And I am sure that there are many Indian citizens with similar tales to tell.

Reverting to the present. I find that Kuldip Nayar has solely and squarely blamed the bureaucrats, whether in the (Indian) home ministry or in the foreign ministry for causing this damage to 'India's im-

experience as a bureauterat of a sort has been vividly described in his India House memories of eight months as the Indian High Commissioner in the UK. One could have expected that this experience would have made him somewhat more understanding of the lots of bureaucrats who are often made the targets of uninformed criticisms without any right or

means to defend themselves.

He was charged with being negligent in attending to the then Chief Justice of India who died of a heart-attack in London There were angry criticisms in the newspapers and denunciations by the politicians.

Kuldip Nayar writes, However one lesson comes through clearly to me, It is all too easy to criticize the bureaucracy from outside whereas the reality inside can be very different.

He then goes on to quote from his letter to then Indian Foreign Minister. All too often a public servant has his name dragged through mud in parliament and in the press without being given a chance to explain his position. There should be some remedy for

Perhaps Kuldip Nayar has unearthed irrefutable evidence that the relevant Ministers are totally ignorant of this disgraceful activities by the bureaucrats poisoning the relationships among the peoples of the neighbouring South Asian countries. In that case there

should be some positive action to restore sanity now that Kuldip Nayar has exposed the bureaucrats' game. It political masters really want it, they can surely overrule the bureaucrats. By all accounts, India's relationship with neighbours were much more positive and cordial in days of Janata rule in New Delhi with the same bureaucrats in the foreign and home ministries. Frankly, I am not optimistic

of any action arising from Kuldip Nayar's exposure of the perfidy of the bureaucrats.

God knows the bureaucrats of the South Asian countries, ail supposedly carrying on the British colonial tradition, have been responsible for many misdeeds - some from motives of self-interest, some out of sheer malice, and yet some due to ignorance or stupidity. However, there must be as many other wrongs perpetrated by them at the dictate and desire of their political masters - some clad in Khadi. some in Khaki and others in suits and coats of assorted cuts and hues. Even for most of these malefactions arising from the decisions by the political authorities, bureaucrats

are the ones often held guilty. As a former bureaucrat. can only join Kuldip Nayar in his plaintive observation that the reality inside can be very different and add that only the wearer knows where the shoe pinches.

P RONOUNCED the two cities ring nearly STRING OF TERRORISM

From Oklahoma to Yokohama

by Nilratan Halder

A sustained campaign of vendetta on the line of religion and ethnicity, as in Bosnia Herzegovina, and also on tribalism is now sweeping the globe. The aberrations are not all their own making. Part of the problem might be a major one — has been created by default of government policies.

What is however of grave import of the two incidents is the victimisation of innocent people and the concerned governments' inability to ensure adequate security for them. Where the fanatic mostly dead set — terrorists want to strike, they are almost unstoppable. If the two superpowers— one on the strength of defence and allied ability and the other economic- are so helpless against such -terrorist attacks, what chance do nations like us stand in the face of similar frenzy? Already the terrorist groups possess sophisticated arms and ammunition. Some even believe that part of nuclear arsenals from the ex-Soviet union have fallen in some of those groups' hands. With a few of them in possession of a misanthrope or a diabolic cult guru can hold the whole world hostage. That will be the most tragic and worst scenario mankind has ever been exposed to.

It might simply be a coincidence that the two cities

across the Atlantic came under senseless attacks on the same day. Or, there may indeed have been some remote link between the two. Whatever may be the case, at least a pattern of terrorist tactics is discernible in the two incidents. That the perpetrators chose. this time, Oklahoma and Yokohama— two less important targets - rather than New York or Washington DC or even Los Angeles in America; or Tokyo in Japan makes the picture clearer. The car-bomb attack on the World Trade Centre in New York in 1993 and last month's gas attack in Tokyo's subway could be considered a prelude to what was to come. Such demonstrations of vengeance on civilian targets are made primarily to instill terror in people's minds. Both incidents have been successful in doing that.

However, even the most diabolic of deviationists and bizarre of cults know that such occasional attacks cannot bring governments to their knees or

help take over power from the long established system. Yet such attacks are carried out almost throughout the world. There is hardly any likelihood that the attackers do so only to derive sadistic pleasures. Far from that they are committed - albeit to a wrong and perverse cause - to get on with their ways. They risk their lives for a belief, religious or political or otherwise. Of course, sometimes they use their attacking prowess as a bargaining power to seek release of their corridors or for their purposes. A few of them may indeed have genuine causes to pursue and have reasons to feel betrayed. Even

At this point we need to remember two things: statesponsored terrorism and the deep frustration of a large number of people on which some highly clever, crooked and even charismatic leaders cash in. Whether such acts are

then, that does hardly sanction

them to harm civilian popula-

perpetrated by political extremists, religious fundamentalists or obscurant cult sects. it exposes a broad avenue of unaddressed economic, social and human needs. This is where the crafty, wily and devilishly devoted can make deep inroad. It was there in the past. Its transformation into a murderous obsession in recent years is what worries the sane people the world over. The white supremacists in Britain, neo-Nazis in Germany. Bhagwan Raineesh's or David Koresh's popularity in America or Aum Shinrikyo's appeal in Japan may go down in history as eruptions of an ailing civilization, but that is too vague a term to describe the disease More appropriate it would be if it is readily admitted that this is also a natural consequence of policy failures by govern-

The problem is confined not only to the developed countries - where there is risk of affluence causing disillusionment and the standard of

life is generally high - but also in other less fortunate nations like us. An unmistakable subtle link connects the excesses of religious fundamentalists in the Middle East - from Albania to Egypt to Iran - with the Bharatiya Janata Party's political rise in India and also Jamaat-e-Islami's new-found stronghold in Bangladesh. A sustained campaign of vendetta on the line of religion and ethnicity, as in Bosnia Herzegovina, and also on tribalism is now sweeping the globe. The aberrations are not all their own making. Part of the problem - might be a major one - has been created by default of government policies, compounded by new interpretations of human needs and development together with religious and political opportunism.

This is how the fanatic forces' campaign here in our own land has to be seen. A more caring society - not totally welfare-oriented though could perhaps get rid of the various political and religious aberrations. misinterpretations, deviations etc. A less consumer society deriving its strength from democratic-secular-cohesives enlightenment duly complemented by the humanities may take the steam out of the fanatic disruptionists forces. This can help restore sanity - and therefore parity too- to the world constantly in turmoil

UNDER THE OVERPASS

Why Blacks in US View OJ Trial as the Big Payback TT 71

Michael Datcher writes from Los Angles

For many African Americans the O J Simpson

ACE is front and centre in the O J Simpson trial ▲ \ — as it has been from the beginning. For months legal talking heads have insisted that "this case is not about race." Now former juror Jeanette Harris's revelations of discrimination against black jurors and racial tensions in the jury room have turned that mantra into an empty chant.

In our increasingly multicultural world, the Simpson case is a throwback to an older black and white era. This case is about a black man and a white woman, black jurors and white jurors, black defense attorneys and white prosecutors

Most white folks don't want to deal with this reality for fear it will spark a dialogue about the sorry history of black experiences in the legal system.

There is, after all, no room for this dialogue amidst the new "colour blind society" that has magically ushered itself into existence during the last 100 days. But black folk don't know anything about this colour blind society. Maybe you have to be blind to see it, white to experience it.

Most black folk are still living under the overpass: within sight of the fast track and the information super-highway and the Bill of Rights, but unable to gain full access. Down here, under the overpass, we are tired of reaching out, so now we have begun to strike out. We will use any weapon within our reach. Jury power is the weapon at hand — the one place where one-person, onevote still packs clout. Freeing a black man who may be guilty of killing a white woman be-

trial is not about a man, it's about race and power. Black attitudes about the trial reflect a resurgence of black anger against white Americans which runs across the socio-economic spectrum. comes The Big Payback. Across socio-economic

lines, there seems to be a resurgence of black antagonism toward white Americans. I hear the anger in line while shopping at the grocery store. The old brothers who spend their retirement days playing dominos in our neighbourhood park routinely begin references to whites with, "those mothafuckas ..." During a casual party conversation, my multidegreed friend suddenly

turned to me enraged. "I can't stand white people, you can't

trust them." A year after frustrated black New York Colin Ferguson killed six whites on a Long Island commuter train last December, a young brother in Washington, DC, smuggled a 9mm pistol inside police headquarters. He did not come to pledge his allegiance. He killed two white law enforcement officials.

What is causing all of this?

The country's conservative mood swing, a general white backlash against blacks, and the resurgence of white hate groups are significant factors. To many African Americans, these factors coupled with the two-pronged attack on affirmative action and civil rights era legislation is more than a slap in the face. It constitutes betrayal. Moreover, with some 60 per cent of African Americans employed in the public sector, dismantling the welfare programmes is a crippling blow not just to the lower class but to black middle

In this context the accommodating assimilationist spirit has lost its appeal. Even among the old guard, integration has become a bad word. Call someone an "integrationist" and he might scream, "Yo' mama!"

class civil servants.

With progressive Afrocentric thought beginning to permeate black communities, blacks are no longer obsessed with trying to seek affirmation from white people: Instead, we are trying to learn how to affirm ourselves. We are trying to overcome the divisions within our own community - between men and women, straights and gays. Muslims and Christians. We are working on our communal infrastructure, circling our cultural wagons, pledging allegiance to ourselves.

O J is just a pawn, a food soldier in this struggle. This trial is not about him. It's about race. It's about power. It's about The Big Payback, here under the overpass.

Commentator Michael Datcher writes a column for Image, a Los Angeles-based magazine for men of colour.

Turkey and Kurds

Sir, This refers the article written by Mr. Muslehuddin Ahmad under his column "Spotlight on Middle East" published on 12th April in The Daily Star.

I would like to give some of the facts. It is simply because some of the western countries, however, trying to put pressure on Turkey to withdraw the forces from Northern Iraq, had proclaimed the PKK as

ERRATA

In the issue of April 30. the fourth line of the first editorial was inadvertently printed as "... the death of one party MP ..." instead of "... the death of the son of one party MP ...'

In the "Bureaucratic Mystique in South Asia" column, published on the same day, the fourteenth line of second para was inadvertently printed as "... was cruelly killed ..." instead of ... allegedly killed ..."

The printer's errors, and the inconvenience caused to our esteemed readers, are regretted.

terrorist organisation and banned its activities in their countries, in opposition to Mr. Ahmad's assumption:

Mr. Ahmad expresses in the article that Turkish Kurds form about 20% of the Turkey's population and on their behalf Kurdistan Workers Party, PKK, has been fighting. The figure of 20% may be correct or not (actually it is about 10%), this has not much importance. The most important thing, that surprises and Kurdish Turkish individuals out of the terrorist organisation, is "the PKK, fighting on behalf of the Turkish Kurds." This not only an imaginary expression but also an insult to the Kurdish people living innocently in Turkey and some of whom are being murdered by terrorist attacks of the PKK, which Mr. Ahmad defines as "guerilla

war". There is, therefore, a need to take account of the guerilla war, that has been continuing for a decade costing the lives of 15000 innocent people, including mostly children.

women, elderly people, teachers and imams.

Lastly, I should express that I am very pleased to live in a brotherly country, Bangladesh. No one will ever be able to impair the everlasting friendship between the two countries. Turkey and Bangladesh.

A Celal Turanoguz Commander Military Attache Embassy of Turkey. Dhaka.

A M Zahiruddin Khan

Sir, I fully endorse the views expressed by Karishma Rahman published in the letter column of your esteemed daily of 28th April.

One must admit that Mr A M Zahiruddin Khan has made positive contributions in promoting industrial development in the country; particularly in making paper pulp and rayon fibres from green jute using locally manufactured machineries. His faresightedness. personal supervision, and ability to motivate the concerned people has made such a great

success possible. His contribu tions to industrial development during his short tenure as Industries Minister deserves a special place in the history of the country.

His resignation from the post of Industries Minister is a big loss for the country. We are looking forward to seeing him in the same portfolio again.

I Hussain Dhanmondi, Dhaka.

Harassment at Calcutta airport

Sir. On the 12th of April, 1994, my husband and I were at Dum Dum Airport, Calcutta. waiting for our names to be called as passengers by 'chance' on the Biman flight BG 094 bound for Dhaka, due to depart at 7:30 in the evening. Our names had been on the waiting list since 3:30 pm. At around 6:35 pm, we learnt that there were 17 'chance' passengers on the same list, and not enough seats. Two men of the ground staff were coordinating the matter - one Indian and one Bangladeshi. The Indian gentlewoman was approached by a relative of ours travelling on the same flight with a confirmed booking, who knew him and she requested him to reserve two empty seats for us, since it was imperative that we reach Dhaka before the 13th He took down our names and assured us he would do his

By 7:25, all the confirmed passengers had completed their formalities and the 'chance' passengers stood around the check-in counter The Bangladeshi member of the ground staff announced that there were just 5/6 seats left vacant and began calling out the name of the people on the 'chance' list. I asked the Indian staff member, if it was possible for us to be on the next flight if we could not be on this one. He told me not to worry and that there were enough seats. He even told my husband to pay our travel tax.

When my husband returned. the Bangladeshi staff member stated, rather than asked us. that if there was just one seat left neither of us would board the plane. He then proceeded to take the single boarding pass he said was left, and walked off towards another

room behind the counter on some mysterious errand. We immediately sought out the other staff member and asked him how many seats were left. When he said quite a few we told him what had occurred He rushed off towards the Bangladeshi and we saw the two in a heated discussion.

The Indian gentleman came back, took our tickets and handed us two boarding passes. We were the last passengers on the plane - being numbers 5 and 6 on the waiting list. When all the passen gers had settled down in the plane, we counted seven more empty seats.

office please take note of the harassments faced by potential passengers and take strict measures to put an end to such acts of exploitation. Not only does this cause discomfort to those who were unnecessarily rejected, the government looses a sum of foreign ex change due to this since the people abused had to use up more of the money is seas for a day or two longer in Cascutta.

Eskaton Dhaka

Will the Bangladesh Biman

S Rahman