

## ROK's Investment

We are delighted to hear our Foreign Secretary tell us that the Republic of Korea may invest up to US\$ 1 billion in the next five years. Immediately the current level of a million dollars is likely to go up to two with the setting up of a special industrial estate exclusively for them. All this is extremely good news. But the question is, can we build on this initial step? The reason we ask, is because our very positive reactions in the past had to be severely tempered by the subsequent failure to undertake follow-up measures which resulted in the initial breakthroughs not amounting to much. There appears to be lots of slips 'between the cup and the lip'. In fact we are a bit weary of every Prime Ministerial trip being followed by press offensive about how foreign investors are all convinced about zooming in on Bangladesh, and then nothing much happening. We heard similar comments after PM's visit to Japan and Malaysia, as we heard Monday about South Korea.

There is nothing wrong with these attempts. In fact these Prime Ministerial forays have helped to impress the foreign investors as to how serious our leadership is in attracting outside investment. It is the follow-up steps, or precisely the lack of it that lies at the root of problem.

In spite of our repeated promise of making a foreign investor's life easy, our bureaucratic maze remains as forbidding as ever. The so-called 'one stop' facility is popularly called the 'full stop' facility because nothing gets done there. A casual talk with any Bangladesh based foreign investor reveals a whole range of areas where urgent reforms are necessary to increase our attractiveness as a potential investment location. The investors who are already here feel that we spend far too much time in trying to attract new investors while ignoring their problems altogether. Their argument, which we think makes a lot of sense, is that they should be given more attention to, so that they can expand their investment. This will make others follow automatically. We strongly feel that more regular dialogue between our government and the existing foreign investors will greatly help both sides. Meanwhile we welcome the idea of a special investment estate for the Koreans and hope that its example will set in motion similar thing for Japan, and may be others at a later stage.

## Power Supply

The authority concerned calls it power rationing. But the consumers perceive it as a punishing experiment with their physical and mental patience. For hours area after area of this megacity has to make do without electricity — without which life in this concrete jungle becomes unbearable. And take an account of the losses to our economy: According to competent sources, the figure beats its counterpart caused by work stoppages through strikes and hartals.

Now the DESA (Dhaka Electric Supply Authority) sources regret that they cannot lessen the suffering of people in some areas before at least two or three weeks. The reason cited by them is the collapse of a 50 mw transformer in Mirpur grid. The commissioning yesterday of a new substation at Baridhara is expected to improve the supply of power in some other areas. Another sub-station to be installed on June 30 at Kalyanpur, according to the DESA, will solve the power crisis in Mirpur area.

Now the question is, if the authority knew that a few sub-stations alone can solve the power problem in the city, why did it not make arrangement for installation of those earlier? According to the DESA version then the disruption is at the point of distribution, not at the point of generation. That it is high summer and load shedding in this lean period of the year can be natural is not the excuse. A few sub-stations do not involve huge expenditure — not when the people's sufferings and economic losses are taken into account.

How convincing therefore is the assurances of the DESA? We do not know. But we certainly would like to know if the situation will be all right after the period the authority has mentioned. If the DESA can assure people that supply of electricity will be normal after two or three weeks, let it announce this through a public notice on television, radio and in newspapers, seeking public co-operation. But the nature of power disruption is so unpredictable that even the most sober person's patience is stressed. Please stop this and treat the consumers a bit respectfully. After all they pay for the service.

## BRTC Regains Health

After years of sickness Bangladesh Road Transport Corporation (BRTC) is showing signs of health. Since its coming into existence in 1961, its yearly loss between Tk 20 and 23 crore has accumulated to Tk 295 crore. But recently the situation has changed dramatically. The BRTC is now making profit. Reportedly, the operating profit of the corporation stood at Tk 13,500,000 in the year 1993-94 and Tk 27,100,000 till April of the current fiscal year. This is good news.

A series of reform measures, including sacking of corrupt employees and sizing down the staff under a 'golden handshake' programme, has accounted for this revival of the BRTC. According to BRTC chairman, the corporation was so rife with malpractice that 200 buses in sound condition were rendered out of order in just two years. A fleet of 700 buses and trucks in 1988 came down to 124 buses and 140 trucks by 1991. What a wastage of national wealth or better call it sabotage!

Now that the BRTC has come round, it should be a cause for celebration. Although it is yet to make up for the years of losses, the future looks quite bright. The message is very important. It is that even the public sector can run well and profitably, provided that there is honesty and seriousness of purpose. The fact that nobody seems to have a stake in the investment of public money, has been at the root of continuous running at losses of corporations and industries in the public sector. The BRTC achievement should set an example for others and the lesson it has for them should not go amiss.

The BRTC is now going for new commercial ventures through pressing into service luxury coaches. What is even more comforting is that these luxury coaches are not imported. They were turned into their new shapes through major overhauling at the corporation's Joydevpur factory which was earlier abandoned. New initiatives and ideas, such as these, can surely revitalise many enterprises in the public sector.

THE ruling party's predicament with the nation's civil service seems interminable. Thanks to its obvious leniency towards overt indiscipline and factionalism among the ranks and files of the civil service, the nation seems to be cascading into one crisis to another. Reports have it that the latest episode of the drama — involving transfer of a high-ranking civil servant — has sharpened the crisis further. Worse still, in an election year it seems extremely unlikely that the government would take a firm stand to resolve the crisis.

As a matter of fact, the current government never took serious steps to reform or streamline the country's bureaucratic leviathan. Thanks to its wait-and-see attitude — if not sheer negligence and buck passing tendency — struggles and strife among different cadres of the civil service have reached nearly despicable proportions. The rivalries between the administrative (BCS Administration) and Prokrichi (non-administrative cadres of BCS) capture headlines in national newspapers almost every day. Often their comments on each other's intentions and behaviours not only defy their code of conduct or government's Rules of Business but also basic civic sense.

Ironically, none of the parties involved — the government, the nation, the BCS (Administration) or the Prokrichi — seem to be benefiting much from such a deplorable state of affairs with the country's administrative paraphernalia. Thanks to the prolonged tug of war between the generalists (Administrative

# Bring an End to the Cloistered Worlds and Magic Paths to the Top

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cadre) and specialists (members of Prokrichi). The government found hard time in implementing economic reforms as well as development programmes. The nation, of course, paid the price in terms of missed opportunities for development and progress.

On the other hand, neither the generalists nor the specialists seem to be awfully happy with the way the government handles its bureaucratic leviathan. Both of them staged demonstrations — time and again — to ventilate their discontents and resentments, often in manners completely inconsistent with code of conducts or rules of business specified for them. The government seldom acted — either on pro-active or reactive basis. Worse still, most of the few actions the government ever undertook in this regard demonstrated inconsistent character. No wonder, most often than not they back-fired.

The transfer order of Mohiuddin Khan Alamgir is a case in point. Reports suggest that on May 21 last the government ordered his transfer from the Ministry of Science and Technology to the office of the District Gazetteer. Obviously the new position was not befitting to a senior civil servant who

have been serving the government as a full-fledged secretary. Subsequently, the executive committee of the BCS (Administration) threatened the government with a "programme of action" if the transfer order is not cancelled within a stipulated time. The Prokrichi, on the other hand, warned the government that it should refrain itself from "shameless submission" to the

government authority or overtly politicized conduct and behaviour of some civil servants.

Reports have it that the government decided to transfer the concerned officer because of his involvement in opposition politics. If that is true, that is certainly a violation of the established code of conduct for the country's civil servants — while in service

plinary actions against concerned officer — the appropriate authority could issue a showcause notice before ordering a transfer as a means of punishment. There is no scope to believe that the concerned authorities would be unaware of such legal provisions. Flagrant flouting of other's rights by the government can only undermine its own credibility.

Anyway, whether the crisis involving the transfer order of Mohiuddin Alamgir is apparent or real, temporary or long-lasting still remains to be seen. But there seems to be, no doubt, that the uproar that the decision has aroused in the concerned circles, especially among the ranks and files of the BCS cadres, may not fade out quietly in an election year. It may well open up the very Pandora's box that the current government tried to keep shut for years.

It is time for the government to realize that by hesitating or faltering to take firm actions, the government has only contributed to intensify smouldering discontents among the ranks and files of the entire civil service. Although sweeping reforms were carried out in the economic front of the nation, the

administrative paraphernalia of the country remained almost completely untouched. As a result, it still demonstrates many characteristics which are completely contradictory to the basic tenets of market economic principles or democratic norms. How can the nation build institutions and processes necessary for consolidating democracy and market economy having an outdated administrative machinery?

Above all, the government must not allow trade unionism in the cadres of the civil service — it not only politicizes the service that should remain neutral implementer of government decisions, but also undermines the credibility of the government itself. Moreover, time has come now to reform the entire civil service thoroughly — to make it market-friendly and democracy-driven.

To do this, the government must bring an end to the cloistered worlds and magic paths to the top — guaranteed route to the top — for both generalists or specialists, and open up all the positions of the civil service to persons of all ages, sexes and qualifications. Moreover, the civil service — at all levels and spheres of the nation — must be brought under democratic control. Much of the current controversies surrounding the administrative and non-administrative cadres in the civil service stem from the fact that there lies no democratic leadership at the thana, district or division levels, and the activities and operations of the government are coordinated by a controversial cadre of the civil service.

many more becoming invalid due to various tobacco-related diseases. The patients are to spend huge amount of money for their treatment. This amount is many times higher than the amount of tax governments are earning from tobacco industries.

Therefore, for the greater interest of the nation our democratic government should not only restrict the production of cigarette but also impose much higher taxes so that the price of the harmful product goes beyond the capacity of the common people. By stronger anti-smoking campaign and by co-operating with such bodies as ADHUNIK and the Bangladesh Cancer Society we can create a better public awareness than before. We must be mindful to safeguard our future generation against this deadly habit. To every nook and corner of Bangladesh we should preach the message, 'Smoking leads to self-annihilation. So none should smoke'. Let the No-Smoking Day this year be the day of beginning of that campaign.

## CROSSCURRENTS

by CAF Dowlah



administrative cadre. The government — as the executive authority of the sovereignty of the nation — definitely has the authority to transfer a civil servant to a position of its own liking. Moreover, in an ideal situation a transfer should not be considered as a means of punishment or reward for a civil servant. Unfortunately, none of these are uncontroversial statements in a society like ours — thanks to widespread interplay of political motives in exercise of

they are not allowed to be involved in politics, be that for the position or opposition. In such a situation, it would be most certainly within the jurisdiction of the government to take an appropriate action against the concerned civil servant. That, however, does not justify outright dumping of a civil servant by the government. The government itself cannot resort to wrong doing to stop a wrong doing.

In cases like this the government could initiate disci-

## WORLD NO TOBACCO DAY

# Smoking is Self-poisoning and Self-annihilation

by Prof Roushan Ara Hoque

In any public place. Selling of tobacco and cigarettes should be prohibited in that month. Seminar, speech, rally, special supplements in daily news papers, special TV and Radio programmes, distribution of warning pamphlets and hanging of posters with slogans may be done as a part of the drive. Essay competition may be organised among different age group students about the harmful effects of smoking. Advertisement of cigarettes should be banned in the media, print media specially, as it has already been done in radio and TV. No bill-board or poster with such ads should be allowed in any public place.

Smoking should be prohibited gradually in more and more public places and the instruction should be seen strictly to be observed. Political leaders, intellectuals, educationists and other honoured personalities can create a strong anti-smoking mentality in the society by themselves giving up smoking in public and encouraging their admirers to give up smoking.

Women are generally non-smokers in our society. But many of them fall victim to smoking of their husbands and near and dear ones. But it must be remembered that women as mothers, wives, daughters and sisters can play an important role in checking smoking. As mothers they can make their

children aware of the bad effects of smoking. They can guard them against smoking and against making friendship with smokers. By utilizing their emotional attachment wives can compel their husbands not to smoke. As affectionate daughters and sisters they can control the bad habit of smoking of their fathers and brothers. They can also discourage smoking by relatives or guests at home explaining to them the effects of smoking on children. The idea is, 'No Smoking Campaign' should start from home.

Teachers have got an important role to play in checking smoking by students of their respective schools and colleges. Smoking should be strictly prohibited within the compound campus. The teachers should also follow the rule. Selling of cigarettes should not be allowed near the educational institutions. Some chapters on health education and bad effects of smoking and other types of addiction should be added with the present curricula of schools, colleges and universities. The anti-smoking campaign can be made stronger by the students and social workers by each of them taking the vow to refrain at least five smokers to continue their bad habit.

Smoking has greatly been reduced in western countries like UK and USA by creating

awareness among the public about its deadly effects. Unfortunately, this has largely increased in our country resulting to a concomitant rise in death-rate from smoking originated diseases. It is an irony of fate that still more tobacco industries are growing to thrive at the cost of public health. Governments seem to be encouraging them just maybe to get high amount of taxes for the public, exchequers. Paradoxically, it is also true that governments are spending (public) money to create awareness among the public. It seems like 'encouraging the thief to commit burglary while warning the householder to remain awake'. As a result the innocent and illiterate mass fall easy prey to the habit of smoking, increasing the death-rate from tobacco addiction to one and half lakh every year, while

## OPINION

# Business is Business

Khurshed Erfan Ahmed

Industrialisation is generally associated with increased employment and poverty alleviation. So it seemed in Bangladesh, where entrepreneurship resulted in the setting up of several garment factories opening opportunities to lakhs of workers, majority of whom are women, and not excluding child workers, a significant source of contribution to a family's survival.

But child labour is a Child Rights issue. The reaction of the major importer (the US), international development organisations and the NGOs and the BGMEA have reflected different interests in the recent development on the child labour issue vis-a-vis the garment industry.

The US government feels it can protect the children's welfare through the legal action of the Harkin Bill. The international agencies and the NGOs support rehabilitation of child workers through healthcare and education schemes within the factory situation.

For the BGMEA, buyers are a crucial element in the success of their business. Child welfare is a secondary consideration and in the context, an imposed condition for getting on with the business.

A cooperative effort between the BGMEA, the US Government representatives and NGO-international organisations set out to draft an MOU which would enable the phased out elimination of child labour from garment factories (by 1997) with welfare programmes of healthcare and schooling for the retrenched under 12 years and the on-going child workers of a higher age.

However, BGMEA in its general meeting this month refused to agree to the terms of the MOU. Instead they have announced the total elimination of child labour from all garment factories by 31st October, 1995. This means, in effect 50,000 children will return to homes or streets without any allowances for their survival.

The US body, a coalition group of over 40 US national organisations, on the 20th of this month threatened to boycott garments made in Bangladesh as a reaction to

BGMEA's non-cooperation with strategies to protect Child Rights as supposedly laid down in the MOU.

This negative reaction is unfortunate. The negotiations need to be further understood clearly by all BGMEA members in a true spirit of welfare that might improve our business standards. The US body of collectives need to weigh its resolutions vis-a-vis the welfare of the working child for whose cause they project a conditional threat to the BGMEA.

One hopes the negotiations continue to formulate an acceptable MOU and one hopes that 'bodies' assembling to decide the future of garment industries and child labour will include representations from local trade unions, workers' organisations and the spokesmen/spokeswomen of the poor families.

On the 22nd May Ain O Salish Kendra (ASK), a legal resource centre, had a meeting of mothers and employers of working children in its school premises. This school is called 'Jokhon Tokhon School' to accommodate irregular attendance of working children. In discussion, when the garment industry question was put up the mothers of working children complained of the abrupt sacking of the children from the garment industries.

In the case of Rukaya Begum, who is a single provider for a family of five daughters and an unemployed blind husband, the story seemed hopeless.

Rukaya's daughter Ameena, an underage worker, was sacked from a garment factory recently. This retrenchment will have a damaging effect on Rukaya's family. Ameena, although a child, will be pushed to seek other less lucrative, insecure and exploitative jobs on the street or in domestic service. Rukaya is far from sure that her daughter will not be exploited by the employers of the non-formal sector.

'Business in business' when we are dealing with questions of profit and loss. Human Rights is a more serious business when global decisions sometimes create situations to extinguish the very right to exist.

## To the Editor...

Letters for publication in these columns should be addressed to the Editor and legibly written or typed with double space. For reasons of space, short letters are preferred, and all are subject to editing and cuts. Pseudonyms are accepted. However, all communications must bear the writer's real name, signature and address.

## "The Muslim ICS Officers of Bengal"

Sir, An article entitled 'the Muslim ICS officers of Bengal' was published in your esteemed daily on July 29, 1994. The illuminating and highly-informative article was written by A.R. Mamun. According to him, Mr. Akhtaruzzaman, a nephew of Prof. Humayun Kabir, was the only Muslim Bengalee who joined the Indian Civil Service (ICS) through open competition.

I would like to know more about this illustrious son of Bengal and would remain grateful if any learned reader kindly helps me find out the author (A.R. Mamun), of the aforesaid article, or he himself let me know his address/phone number.

Sayed Ashraf Ali  
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## Voter registration

Sir, Press report has it that Awami League chief Sheikh Hasina told meetings at different places of Natore district on Friday, May 26, that — "BNP is dropping the names of our partymen deliberately and enlisting the names of their own people."

Can we expect such a statement from one of our esteemed national leader? Such statement would only create confusions in the minds of the people and might jeopardise

the entire voters' enrollment programme.

Should there be any malpractice, Sheikh Hasina, or for that matter any body could file formal complain with the CEC office along with necessary evidences or one might even approach the court of justice.

It is known to all that with a view to preparing an upto date and genuine voters' list, the government of this poor country has undertaken this costly venture. Hence it is the responsibility of all of us to extend all sorts of cooperation to make the programme a success.

M Zahidul Haque  
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## II

Sir, May 28, 1995 was the fourth day of voter registration but no enumerator so far visited my house. If this be the performance of the Election Commission in the heart of the capital city, Dhaka, despite repeated announcements, assurances and declaration of government holiday on May 27, 1995 for smooth, prompt and efficient work of the voter registration, one wonders what is happening in the rural areas!

Why the voter registration is going on snail's pace? Would the Election Commission look into the matter and ensure registration of all voters with-

out fail in the national interest?

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## Stranded Pakistanis and relief

Sir, We refer our letter published in The Daily Star in December 1994. We are thankful to the administration for continuation of relief supplied to stranded Pakistanis living in Dhaka. Especially on the occasion of Eidul-Azha. We hope the supply and distribution of remaining arrears relief would be completed within couple of weeks.

We recall here the discussion held with Alhaj M Nasim Khan, Leader of Stranded Pakistanis and ADC (Relief), Dhaka on 13th October 1994 wherein it was agreed to hold fair and fresh elections to form new relief committee on the basis of one card one vote and even other criteria were agreed upon. In our previous letter we had also explained it.

Unfortunately, it is very surprising that administration seems to be silent on the issue of holding elections. It has been learnt that list of voters have already been submitted by relief committees in April. We don't understand where the matter stands now. On the other hand, it is widely speculated that incumbent DRRO Dhaka in an alliance with existing committee is doing his best to defer elections at least for one year. Our intention is to make it clear that nothing less than fair and fresh election will be acceptable to stranded Pakistanis, not only in Dhaka but also elsewhere. We once again reiterate our

firm determination to resist all vested quarters who might create obstacle in the way of smooth and fair elections. The following need to be observed to ensure fair and fresh elections:

- all candidates must be bonafide stranded Pakistanis by virtue of their enumeration during survey conducted by Pakistan High Commission and Rabita Al-Alam Islami
- All candidates must be educated. Candidates submitting nomination for sector-in-charge must be matriculate and those for Chairman/Secretary must be intermediate, preferably graduate.
- In no way a convicted person would be allowed to contest the election.
- All the candidate's family members must be physically present in camp.

It may not be out of way to mention that holding elections to form new relief committee is absolutely an administrative matter so it should not be given any political colour. The committee so elected will be responsible to administer the affairs of camps smoothly and from this point of view the significance of educated members is quite obvious which cannot be ignored.

We have every hope that district administration will immediately announce a date for holding elections in all the camps.

Abdul Wahab Khan  
For and on behalf of a number of stranded Pakistanis, Mirpur and Mohammadpur camps, Dhaka.