Dhaka, Friday, June 2, 1995

Why Nuclear Power?

A decision to revive the Rooppur project in Ishurdi has recently been taken, according to a report. This is for the fifth time in the last 34 years that such a decision to go ahead with the proposed nuclear power plant has been arrived at. Beginning in 1961 the project has come through several stages at different times but ultimately the actual work of installing the nuclear reactors was left in a limbo. Till 1969 Tk 140 crore was spent on building infrastructure, apart from acquiring 871 bighas of land.

We do not know what has prompted the present government to give a fresh start to a project that was thought to be long dead. Much as we may claim that the reactor of the plant'will not be used for any purpose other than producing electricity, it is a serious policy decision. One that initiates a country's nuclear programme. The nuclear plant is expected to generate 250 mega watts of power. But the question that has to be answered before undertaking the task is if the plant will be cost-effective. An investment of Tk 300 crore was finalised for the project. But that was way back in 1968. Now after 27 years the project is going to cost several times more.

Perhaps we must take note of a few things before opting for the plant. As far as we know no developing country - or even developed ones with far more resources - of our size has opted for nuclear power plants. After the worst nuclear plant accident at Chernobyl, even the rich nations are seriously deliberating over the fate of their existing plants. Besides the risks involved, the nuclear plants are not simply economically viable. For some countries it is more a showpiece than a highly useful set-up and for others it is necessary because they want access to nuclear weapons. We have neither of the ambitions. So we must make a judicious decision. Then the problem of nuclear waste disposal may prove to be a stupendous task for a small country like ours. especially with a very high density of population.

We agree that the country needs more power. But that does not necessarily lead us to opt for nuclear power plants. Have we carefully examined all other means of generating power? Why don't we take up an extensive study to find out the feasibility of alternative power generation?

Managing Our City

Why shouldn't Dhaka have an appropriately sized outfit to manage its affairs? DCC is simply not cut out to take on an eight-million city. Here was a chance that, with its first democratically elected Mayor, the DCC could have gone for big expansion and thorough modernisation. That opportunity is slipping away fast with DCC ploughing through an old old rut. Why? May be because of an unforgiving and non-cooperative government set to see the politically inimical mayor fail and fall with a thud. But our Mayor should have found ways to beat that.

Dhaka's problems are as giant-sized as its population. It would take a whole national government — and not just a municipal authority — to try to grapple those with any result. The government, whichever party is on the seat, must get the villages to live again in order to stop the townward exodus and allow Dhaka to get into curable dimensions. This is a big enough challenge calling for decades of unflagging care and application. And this is far bigger than the task of supplying enough water to Dhaka's fat population. But there is a still bigger problem than the swelling population. That is our having a government that is not effective and, worse, one that neither wants to be effective. And in consonance with that fantastic picture of unflappability, comes this trait of caring nothing for what others feel and say — about the state, about Dhaka, about government.

The Daily Star has been consistently trying to bring into focus the problems of this mofussil town growing into a megacity in less than two decades. But there is always that growing suspicion that all this is being lost on the government. For a test for whether they do hear we appeal to them: Please go out of your way to help DCC get into appropriate gear to engage their share of the challenges.

Sour Story behind Sweet Mango

Unconfirmed sources say mango harvest this year has been the highest in the past 30 years. The market, of course, is, to a certain degree, a reflection of a bumper crop. In deed, even the general consumers are getting quite a treat of the king of fruits at a reasonable price. But this piece of good news has been marred by the story behind the scene. That concerns the extremely low price at the growers' end. A grower is incurring a loss of Tk 5 to 10 for each kilogram of mango. What is even more unacceptable is the huge difference between the wholesale and retail prices.

The underlying message is not quite unfamiliar. We asks our farmers to produce crops, fruits included, enough to meet our need but the rest is left in a shambles. What we mean is the development of our market and other requisite facilities for ensuring fair price for the perishable produces. Transportation of such items to urban centres or other parts starving for them is not upto the evel of a vibrant economy. Godown facilities are scarce and processing industries of fruits like pineapples, mangoes, papaya and guava are nonexistent. But all these fruits are grown in abundance here and their potential is yet to be exploited.

No matter if it is fruit or crop, its bumper production should not necessarily bring outlandish prices for the farmers or growers. The market has to be developed in a way that can absorb the extra quantity economically. Under no circum- stances should the middlemen be allowed to eat the cream leaving the growers and consumers in the lurch. As for the glut of mangoes and other fruits, we certainly need fruit processing industries to can juice. We are at present importing such items. We can do without that and perhaps go for exporting our own canned fruit juice.

TADA has Become a Habit

Even with the most comprehensive legislation, terrorism will be hard to fight if the state police is corrupt, flabby or mixed up with the mafia as is the case today.

the capital itself and the unending terrorism in Punjab. large scale. In the name of terwas prepared for any step to rorism, the innocent have cope with violence and been hauled up because of politicians' personal pique. At The then prime minister many places the police have Rajiv Gandhi, shattered by the run amuck to use TADA to defeat liberal values of humanity. loss of his mother, rushed to equality, liberty and justice. So his cabinet to get approval for indiscriminate have been the the Terrorist and Disruptive Activities (Prevention) Bill. A arrests that 92 per cent of the few top officers warned him 80,000 detainees have been left off in the last eight years. against the misuse of such a measure but he brushed them

EN years ago, five per

explosions in old Delhi. The

benumbed nation by the shock

over Mrs Indira Gandhi's assas-

sination, the 1984 killings in

aside. He specially ordered the

then Home Secretary Sommaia

not to say anything on the bill

at the cabinet meeting. Som-

maia kept quiet even when

some pertinent points were

der the shadow of Mrs Gan

dhi's murder and the Delhi

blasts, was too dazed, too fri-

ghtened and too overwhelmed

It was not in the frame of mind

where it could appreciate the

dangers that TADA could bring

to the society, which was

already suffering from the

rough and ready methods of

ister assured the two houses

that what they were "trying to

do is, for a period of two years,

in an extraordinary situation."

even the conscientious objec-

tors lowered their standard of

opposition. Little did they

know at that time that the

government would extend the

life of TADA by another two

years, after every two years.

(The bill, passed on May 23,

1985, is up to May 22, 1995).

Some MPs suspected a

■ UOTING an eminent wri-

ter "cities are created as

a means of bringing hea-

foulplay. But never did they

expect its misuse at such a

ven down to earth and a

"Dhaka is also seen as an

epitome of such dreams, come

true with its skyline thrust out

aggressively toward the heav-

ens. Dhaka embodies the idea

of innovation and achievement

indeed a dazzling range of

human endeavour. But. despite

all such monumental achiev-

ements, violence stalks the

nation in a way that the glitter

of multistoried buildings and

hotels pale into insignificance

when we see men sprawled in

poses of frightening stupor, on

the side walks, in the railway

station at the bus terminals all

over the capital city and even

Mohammadpur. Mirpur

Basabo. Kamalpur. Lalbagh

slums and many other areas in

the metropolis represent the

dark side of the metropolis'

economic miracle. These are

the sad refuge for those who

have lost their way, and a sad

reminder that even a nation

that puts a claim to have

achieved social progress and a

halt in the lawlessness is not

immune from the same ills

that plague other societies.

Dominated by the gangsters

who prev upon their weak-

nesses and the police whose

job is to keep order, residents feel they are helpless pawns

with little control over their

lives. Just imagine that a police

sergeant was going to be

mugged and he could save his

life and could nab at least one

of these gangsters because he

was armed and had training.

But what about a peaceful and

unalarmed citizen who was

returning home after Eld

shopping with his wife and

children? The other victims in

the Mouchak area gangsterism

made their way to the hospital

and not home. Reports are also

there that some of these gangs

may have link with the law-

enforcing agencies and these

allegations have made people

much more unhappy about the

way law enforcing agencies are

taking stock of the whole

criminal activities that have

tity of these gangsters, one will

at once see that these groups

are people having no families.

no ties, many of them are ex-

convicts. Others have simply

failed to make a go of middle

class life. Many of them are

seeking solace in drugs. De-

spite all these crime activities

namely gangsterism, mugging

broad daylight, little help is

forthcoming from the police.

and gruesome killings, in

Looking closely at the iden-

been let loose.

in other mini-cities.

symbol of the possible ...

When the then Home Min-

Parliament, which met un-

disruption.

sons were arrested follo-

wing a series of bomb

The five persons, whose bomb explosions had provided the proverbial last straw, did not even reach the portals of specially designated courts for TADA. All the five had 'committed suicide'. They were the first victims of the law which was supposed to bring order to daunt 'the killers of democracy by gun'. Scores have died in police custody.

If Home Minister S B Chavan's plea for the removal of TADA has fallen on deaf ears. the government has to blame itself. Police third-degree methods and wrong detentions have denuded the measure of confidence and fairplay. When a state like Gujarat, which has no history of terrorism, detains some 1,500 people under TADA, what motive could have goaded the authorities except personal or political vendetta? The story of police is no different in most other states.

This is what the National Police Commission report, accumulating dust in the home ministry, said: "We find that policemen have a tendency to become cynical. We also find that frequently such cynicism is developed, within very few vears of service. Policemen

very rapidly pick up the knowledge that what the law requires is one thing but what has actually to be done in practice is another. Once this dichotomy takes roots in their minds, all training, all exhor-

tations are a waste." No doubt, terrorism is neither legally justified nor ethically acceptable. It is a crime against people and the country. The killing of 35,000 at the hands of terrorists is a tragedy beyond words and an act that should evoke anger. That the the Lok Sabha seats among them

Most political parties have also expressed their opposition. The Congress party has chinks in its armour. The Bharatiya Janata Party's anger was that the government was giving in to the demand made by Pakistan Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto, who has reportedly said that TADA should go because of "harassment to Muslims." The BJP does not know that she recently promulgated an ordinance to

BETWEEN THE LINES

Kuldip Nayar writes from New Delhi

state has to overcome such inhuman menace cannot be seriously doubted. But care has not been taken to distinguish between the terrorist and the innocent. If the state becomes the aggressor — as has happened in the last 10 years, what happens to our values or the constitutional guarantee of liberty? Every action of government has to be weighed in the scale of rule of law

New Delhi's claim, after holding a meeting of chief ministers, that the majority of states favour TADA is not cor rect. The number may be more. But those who said 'no' to the renewal are all big states: Andhra Pradesh, Bihar. Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal, apart from Kerala. These states have more than half of

introduce in Pakistan a TADAlike measure. Human rights groups have denounced it. But she has stuck to her ground in the name of terrorism. In Pakistan also, a detainee's statement before a senior police of ficer has been made admissible as evidence.

indeed, this part of TADA is

the most reprehensible one. Article 20 of our constitution says: "No person accused of any offence should be compelled to be a witness against himself." A confession is an admission of guilt. What is the guarantee that the superintendent of police has not obtained the statement under coercion? TADA negates the basic freedom guaranteed under Article

Supreme Court judge R M Sahai, who dissented on the

case (Kartar Singh vs State of Punjab) that upheld TADA, said that no civilised democratic entity "has accepted confession made by an accused before a police officer as voluntary and above suspicion. therefore, admissible in evidence." Still more obnoxious is TADA's clause about the possession of unauthorised weapons. Poor Sanjay Dutt has been languishing in jail for more than 10 months because of that. He had three AK-56 rifles in his possession for three days and then returned two to retain one for self-defence.

How does the mere possession of weapons make one a terrorist? It has to be proved that the weapon was meant to disrupt sovereignty, territorial integrity of the country or the like. Even under the Ireland Emergency Provisions Act. 1978, there is no such a harsh provision. Unless there is a relation between the weapon and the possessioner's intention to use it, the detention is arbi-

In fact, the entire exercise that the home ministry has been conducting for renewing TADA is futile because the law itself is counter productive. It smacks of bonapartism that has become the distinguishing feature of Congress since its authoritarian rule during the emergency 20 years ago. In a note to the prime minister. the home ministry has rationalised the opposition to TADA as a natural resistance to any special act.

This may be psychologically true. But there is no going

away from the fact that special laws or powers are feared because they have been misused. They have left a scar on thousands of families, which have suffered. Law and order is primarily a subject of the states. Not all of them are exposed to terrorism.

Therefore, those who feel that they have to arm themselves with special power to deal with terrorists, they can legislate for it. Why should New Delhi come into the picture? Even with the most comprehensive legislation, terrorism will be hard to fight if the state police is corrupt, flabby or mixed up with the mafia as is the case today.

Law courts are probably the real villian of the piece. Their disposal is only three per cent of the cases filed. Every year the 97 per cent of cases get added to the backlog. Stricter laws have to be enacted to deal with the culprits who should have normally been in jail. Curiously, the government is increasing annually the police budget but not appointing more judges or opening new

It is, however, unfortunate that India since independence has been having one detention law or the other on its statute book. It is sad because our national movement was guided by the principles of liberty and human dignity. I recall that EMS Namboodripad was the only chief minister who recorded his note of assent when the prevention detention act of the British days was renewed in the mid-fifties. Once a government begins to depend on the crutches of extraordinary laws, it cannot govern without them. TADA is a habit. The sooner the rulers get over it the better it would be for the

Violence, Poverty, Lawlessness Thwart Society — Should Administration Remain Silent Spectator?

by Md Asadullah Khan

Allegations of police brutality and kickbacks are also common. Police have never been questioned about the alleged links with the criminals.

People are venting their outrage through the media. As it appears if the inaction and the present trend continue to run like this the social conditions underlying the city will not be easy to fix.

Among the city dwellers it reinforced the spreading conviction that he cities like Khulna. Chittagong and Dhaka have spun out of control. A growing sense of vulnerability has been deepened by the belief that deadly violence, once mostly confined to identified crime-ridden zones is now lashing out randomly at any one, any time even in areas considered relatively safe.

Think of the hapless ward commissioner of Khulna who entered into a cloth shop in the city and was shot dead by the miscreants in broad dayGazipur and Savar, the city centre continue to roll in a place of aching poverty and little hope. While the ruling party remain ensconced in their abodes, political uncertainty grips the country and people are not convinced that the Govt. will be able to correct long standing-social and political problems or steer the

country out of moral drift. A telling example of general imperviousness to change is provided by the Dhaka city itself and the areas that form the metropolitan area. The wealthy still inhabit the luxurious villas, complete with manicured gardens, dine at fancy restaurants and hotels and send their children to expen sive colleges in the US. Despite a 100 to 200 per cent import duty on luxury cars. new cars abound in a city where 7 our of 10 citizens live

No other activities has attracted public attention than the violence and political ven detta that Dhaka city including other cities in recent times have been prone to.

The number jobless young people is likely to shoot up alarmingly because we have hardly any space available in colleges in the country to make room for about 5 lakh students who would come out with flying colours in the ongoing S S C examinations in the country under the four Education Boards. And what will, happen to the rest who will cut a sorry figure in this exam? Many of them would like to set up small commercial ventures and go for trading goods if they are denied access to educational institutions but business activities have so much shrunk and these vast co-hort of youths are so much cashstrapped, that these budding

want the autocratic regime to take over power once again then we should continue doing what the political parties. especially those running the statecraft have been doing arguing, quarreling and setting each other including the Govt. machinery at loggerheads. If we are not mincing words. people controlling the state craft has so hat shown no genius for leadership. Violeht crimes, drug-trafficking and homicide which were once confined into Dhaka city alone have spread to other cities like, Khulna, Rajshahi, Sylhet and Chittagong. The recent killing of a J P leader with his driver in broad daylight on the highway of the Khulna city indicates the ominous escalation of gangsterism, party feuds and political revenge. Indeed, Chittagong, Sylhet and Khulna's carnage dwarfs Dhaka's in absolute terms and this surge of violent crimes is a grim reminder of the fact that

in our region must be a pressing reminder to the leaders that it is people, in the absence of vast natural resources like oil, forestry, coal or other minerals that other countries are blessed with can sust an political/stability or act as catalysts of violent change. Our

that these resources can gen-

The widening disparities

and gap between the have-nots

country does not need nor can ill afford more violence. Our people don't need more words, however, well-meaning, They need alleviation of their pain and the creation of hope for better life.

Not that violence would strike the Bangladeshis with any surprise now a days. On the contrary, the bloody ide: ologies, inparty vengeance and extremism have been threatening to eclipse all norms of democracy in the nation. In the last few months, the country has witnessed an unprecedented wave of killings, looting and arson symbolising a fissure that has developed deeper into the soul of the nation that has taught and practised the virtues of tolerance, amity and peace. As it appears, the hopes and aspirations of 120 million people are almost becoming hostage to a terrible uncer-

The thought that looms in public mind. "What has this country come to?" We were an example to the world. Now we are a warning. The way people especially the students are falling victim to political violence and in-party feuds triggers and alarming situation slowing the pace of economic

reforms in the country.

The spate of violence, gangsterism and mastan-type activities that have overtaken the country pose a question over the future of an open political system. More than at any other moment in the country's history, the future seems dark and bleak, with differences sought to be settled with bullets, with consensus braking down. With the country torn asunder with political brinkmanship. Bangladesh labours under a potentially crippling foreign debt and a crisis of faith in politics. This situation can't go. The country will have to find leaders of some stature, leaders fired with pragmatism and vision. Politics in the country must not project an image of inaction and disunity at a time when people, more than anything else, are seeking some assurance and stability.

at or below the poverty line, A growing sense of vulnerability has been deepened by the belief that deadly violence, once mostly confined to identified crime-ridden zones is now lashing out randomly at any one, any time even in areas considered relatively safe.

light in the crowded market place, or a student leader who was gossiping with his friends in front of the B.L. College, Khulna and was targeted in the twinkling of an eye or an innocent cab driver taking his iftar in the DAS Case in front of the TSC at Dhaka University became a victim as a mis-target. No wonder, crime, gangsterism and group feuds are tearing at the vitals of the country and have completely altered ordinary life. The looming question in many minds was what if anything people could do to protect themselves when none in the safe boundary of his house. Truly speaking, these cities seemed so much consumed with crime that it was incapable of thinking about anything else.

What has dismayed the average city dwellers is the tepid response of the city's leaders to the surge of mayhem.

It is country where elections loom, but poverty and violenge reign and where hope once blossonted. Today, however, despair and confusion once again grip the country.

While more lands are being recovered for housing and business installations in and around Dhaka far upto Tongi,

which is pegged at a monthly income of 1500 Taka. Though the economy is showing some signs of revival, little of the effect has trickled down. For the poor, hope for economic and social advancement remains constricted.

The abodes of the well-off are vastly outnumbered by the shanties that flourish on side walks, in alleys, in such slums as Mohammadpur, Mirpur and Gandaria. Garbage trucks roll the streets with occasional haul of the garbages but most of the time these bins are overflowing. Still more annoying, these garbage bins are beset by scavengers with sacks and large straw baskets on their shoulders. They rifle the trash to grab the best bits: plastic containers, polythene bags, tin cans anything that can be re-cycled. The squatters have frequently been evicted by the authorities but they inevitably return to the city. They can't make a living anywhere outside the city

-As far as the urban poor are concerned, the question who remains in power are totally meaningless problems compared with the affordability of "Dal Bhat"

voung people vibrating with energy and vigour will slip out from the mainstream of nation building activities.

More alarming, in recent times the country's old woes have come rushing back and the old paralysis is spreading through the body politic once again. The country is embroiled in a virtual civil war. In Dhaka, Khulna and Chittagong, democratic movement has splintered into squabbling factions, each intent on preventing the other from accomplishing anything. Most important economic reform is sadly adrift. The possibility of an agreement among the different parties has floundered. People's patience is wearing thin. Now people are wondering whether the country having fought for democracy in 1990 is ready for popular government after all.

While the politicians are engaged in elusive dialogue that will never bring about any tangible result, the economy and the country are sinking like a stone. That means democracy is under threat and this really stems from the deteriorating economic situation and declining production at all levels. Bluntly speaking, if we

has no choice but to do it to

save Dhaka: The garments in-

from Dhaka to other towns. As

a first step telecommunication

will have to be developed

more. Preferably private in-

vestment should be encour-

aged in this sector. Since this

export-oriented industry must

be close to sea and air ports

government can make some

industrial plots available in the

vicinity of Dhaka and Chit-

tagong. Gazipur is a good sight

closer to Zia International Air-

port and Chittagong has

enough space. To encourage

them to shift from Dhaka, gov-

ernment may declare tax holi-

day for a couple of years.

Govt seem to have utterly failed to combat the crime activities, traud and deception of all possible forms.

All concerned with the development of the country must recognise that economic issues are as central to the peace process as political ones. Allowing the by-gone years as the lost decade — a period when international economic turbulence combined with poor domestic economic performance resulted in deteriorat ing conditions for most-people we have to lorge ahead now.

The aid promised by the affluent Western countries has not been forthcoming in as large measure as expected. That calls for addressing the pressing problems of economic development, desertification water and the environmental issues with all vigour and seriousness, our leaders must accept that they can ill-afford to ignore the hopes and aspirations of the silent majority, the growing numbers of unem ployed but educated youths the dispossessed, the men women and children who do not enjoy access to great natural resources and to the wealth

Save Dhaka

Sir, The Daily Star's concern for Dhaka city dwellers is very timely. In fact it has highlighted some of the important things that are contributing in making our city a hell. Thanks to Star for the series of stories.

living in this city want to draw

I as one of the poor guys

attention to some points. If we look at the growth in population, number of vehicles and buildings in Dhaka we find that it all started in 80s and is still continuing at an alarming pace. What so important happened to our beloved capital in this time? Tremendous growth in Dhaka's economy? Not at all. In fact, Dhaka experienced growth in Non-Governmental Organizations and garments industry. Both these, however, are making people rich and

also contributed 'substantially' in the economic growth and employment generation.

Well the NGOs are here to help the rural poor in improving their quality of life. Practically 90 per cent of these NGOs have their programmes in remote parts of Bangladesh. But they have their posh offices in Dhaka. Their highly paid executives live in expensive houses and drive expensive cars. These NGOs are also contributing in crowding Dhaka. I have a proposal to NGO Affairs Bureau that they should not allow anybody to have an office in Dhaka unless their activities are based in Dhaka. At best they can have a liaison office. Recently our communication system has improved significantly including the telephone service and it is not difficult to maintain

office in district towns.

Garments industries are also responsible, more than the NGOs, for crowding Dhaka. With all my respect to the foreign currency earnings, I can say that cheep labour being the main input of this industry it was supposed to grow in rural areas. However, perhaps the earlier poor communication facilities forced it to Dhaka and the unemployed workers also migrated to the city. These low paid workers are also a problem to the city. Their standard of living is very poor (they cannot afford anything better) and naturally most of them are living in slums. Whereas if this industry had developed in district level towns they could attain a better standard of living because of the cost factor.

These steps may bring discomfort to some garments in dustry owners and big shots of Now, although the task is some NGOs but to save our city quite gigantic, the government

which is sending SOS these seem imperative. dustry will have to be shifted M F Zaman Ciba-Geigy Bangladesh Ltd.

Indian scholarship

Sir. Every year quite a number of students go to our neighbouring country India for study. The Indian Government offers a few scholarships. This year also the Indian govt offered such scholarships. But this time some malpractices seem to have cropped up in the process of awarding these scholarships.

As per requirement, the student who has secured 85 per cent marks in SSC and HSC examinations is qualified to apply for study in BA (Hons) in Economics But one such

scholarship reportedly has been awarded to a (girl) student who secured 83.8 per cent marks in HSC. It's really a matter of regret that the scholarship has not been awarded to students who reportedly have secured 86 per cent and 87 per cent marks in the said examinations. Marks. in this case, is obviously the basis for determining the May I request the authori-

grievances forthwith by fairplay and justice ASU Ali

ties concerned to look into the

matter and redress such

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