Founder-Editor: Late S. M. Ali

Dhaka, Wednesday, June 21, 1995

Not in Haste, Please!

We cannot hurry up with an educational reform. which concerns not only the future of the largest segment of our student population but also the destiny of the nation. Nor can we treat it as an exclusive preserve for a display of arrogance of specialisation slamming shut the door to wider participation by a broad intelligentsia including the parents and students who know where it hurts in the existing system of education. No, we are not pleading for unwieldy maiden-size talks when representative groups are identified so easily for their pointed voices to be heard.

All these thoughts crop up when one reacts to the latest controversy among a limited circle of educationists and experts over the new draft curricula aiming to upgrade the free-falling standards at the secondary and higher secondary levels of a non-system of an educational edifice we have got through half-baked experimentation or the tinkerings with time.

It is good to learn that the proposed syllabus seeks to build an element of terminality into the HSC stage by imparting vocational skills for self-employment so that the seats of higher learning are not cripplingly crowded. What perturbs us about the draft curriculum though is that it comes as a fait accompli. The target date for its adoption has been set for January 1996. Accordingly, massive teacher training and book-writing programmes (authors having been already selected) are to get underway very soon. At the same time, formal phase-wise discussions on the draft curricula have been held. One should think that the discourses were designed to fine-tune the draft with new suggestions. But where is the time to allow for wider and intensive public discussion and debate on the subject given the time-bound plan for the adoption of the changes.

The perfunctory approach to a matter of vital national interest is what we find difficult to accept. We don't suggest that the draft is without any merit nor do we overlook that it has been prepared after a thorough study of the secondary education systems followed in India, Britain and Malaysia. Our point is, give it the benefit of a fuller discussion specially on such a point as the new syllabus supposedly increasing the existing load on teachers and students fourfold. The attitude that with the publication of the new books, allegations about the draft syllabi will evaporate sounds so preposterous. While the grounding in English language at the SSC and HSC levels should be like it was in the good old days, the examination system has also to be brought in line with the recast curricula. To be candid, we are for parliamentary scrutiny of the new curricula, as and when this would be possible in view of the vital national interest involved.

Special Policing

The plan for deployment of special police squads in all towns should generally be hailed. For the stated aim of the move is to specifically address street crimes, such as mugging, and violation of traffic rules. An instant action against crime is likely to provide a deterrent that was badly lacking. Codenamed Operation Speed Enforcement Squad, the drive is already underway in the city. Of quite a number of their plus points, speed and their sophisticated equipment should count most of all. Currently deployed at 10 strategic points, the police squads can only cover parts of this sprawling metropolis.

We do not know how strong the force will be to keep vigil on this as also other cities and towns and how soon the full contingent will be in place for duties. In the past, however, we have witnessed several such high-sounding operations - like Operation Durjoy, Jhatika etc — foundering on the lack of political and administrative will. This time however the squads have been formed to perform responsibilities within a limited area. Their task may not be as daunting as their predecessors' which took part in somewhat vague exercises.

Still the challenge might come from known areas like arming the squads with modern equipment and providing for their necessary training. On both these counts our shortcomings have to be overcome fast. Then there is the question of maintaining the vehicles and equipment in a continuous process. Even if this technical side of the operation is taken care of the police still would have to deal with an endemic problem. This is string-pulling by political persons and other godfathers behind the culprits whose requests the police have to comply with. In today's Bangladesh there is no guarantee that a criminal will not be released immediately after he has been caught redhanded, because a high-up has made a telephone call instructing the police to do so. This calls for political transparency. We ask for that to back up the drive.

Soil Quality

Agricultural experts have determined, according to a report, that soil in Meherpur district has become poor in mineral content. The fertility deficiency has reached such an alarming level that crop production is recording a sharp fall. Agricultural officials have also pointed their accusing finger at the overuse of chemical fertilizers prompted by the unacceptable level of soil deterioration. This is no revelation any way. By now people have voiced their concern over the indiscriminate use of fertilizers, of the chemical variety. But surprisingly there is no serious attempt to dissuade farmers from the harmful practice.

There has been an aggressive campaign urging use of chemical fertilizers over the electronic media. Farmers easily get misled. They think the more chemical fertilizers they use the better. Actually, the initial result of using this type of fertilizer is startling. Production goes up by several times. However, nobody warns farmers of the danger they are inviting in the long run by an excessive application of chemical fertilizers. As has happened in case of baby food or is happening in case of smoking, a double-standard is maintained regarding publishing and advertisements. Nobody asks for caution against any reckless use of chemical fertilisers and pesticides when advertising these. Surely our farmers could be better served if the cautionary notes were sounded to them.

Agricultural experts' advice to use natural or organic fertilizers gets lost in the commotion. Moreover, organic manure has other uses. They are yet to be mass-produced. So what is the way out? Some tested methods can be of help. For example, the land can be used for cultivating different crops in alternate seasons. Today the stress is on paddy cultivation. Recent experience has shown that production of cereals may not always be profitable. Instead, other cash crops such as pulse or lentil may give dual benefit in the shape of high return on them as well as an improvement in the soil nutrition through a mix of nitrogen in it.

Budget 1995-96: Political Expediencies will Cast Dark Shadow on its Performance

Imperatives for economic realities and political expediencies hardly coincide... Efforts aimed at harmonization of such contrasting imperatives -- more often than not -- end up in impractical propositions...

so than others. No doubt, the proposed budget contains wide-ranging, if not sweeping, proposals for tax cuts, especially geared to promote growth in the manufacturing sector. The budget called for slashing import duties on raw materials for manufacturing products ranging from electronics to cosmetics, leather to melamine, and ceramics to optics. Such cuts in import duties, several chamber bodies have rightly pointed out, should help in boosting manufacturing sector, and thereby spurring higher employment and economic growth. Al-

INANCE Minister Sai-

have got it right -- there

is nothing wrong with a pro-

election budget as long as it is

also good for the people and

the economy. The problem,

however, is that something

like this can only be

livered. After all, as the

minister knows it well, imper-

atives for economic realities

and political expediencies

hardly coincide. Moreover, ef-

forts aimed at harmonization

of such contrasting impera-

tives - more often than not --

end up in impractical proposi-

tions, if not visionary

Taka 247 billion (revenue and

development combined) bud-

get for the fiscal 1995-96 --

that the finance minister an

nounced at the parliament

last week amidst conspicuous

absence of the opposition

seems to have pleased every

one talking about it, except

of course, a few disgruntled

economists. These econo-

mists, whom the finance

minister at his post-budget

press conference criticized for

having "socialistic views,"

opined that the budget aimed

at woomg the industrialists

and the middle class -those

who matter in the polls in the

Of course, proposals like

reduction in corporate taxes,

lowering and in some cases

elimination of duties on agri-

cultural inputs, and almost

across the board reduction of

import duties on more than

one thousand intermediate

raw materials, may lead many

to this kind of conclusions

But none should underesti

mate the intrinsic strength of

this strategy -- there are

plenty of evidences around

the world that convincingly

demonstrate that lower tax

rates and simpler tax adminis-

tration result in higher in-

vestment, larger employment

No attempt, however, is

being made here to argue that

what is possible elsewhere is

possible in Bangladesh as well.

After all, all nations and their

potentials are different, and if

the past records are any

did not show any sign of a

particularly good year for

Japan. The year of the pig -

as 1995 is marked by the

twelve-year cycle zodiac signs

of the Chinese calender — is

supposed to be a relatively

better year in any term. But

for Japan that relative positive

indication still remains

nessed the devastating Kobe

earthquake that left more

than five thousand people

dead and a thriving city

largely devastated. The allout

effort for rebuilding Japan's

second largest port city was

no doubt thorough and com-

prehensive. It did not take

much longer for different con-

cerned agencies to restore the

disrupted facilities of electric-

ity, telephone, gas, railway

and transport system. When

everything, including coun-

try's recession-hit economy

seemed to be returning once

again to normalcy, then came

the second blow with the

continuous rise of the value of

Japanese Yen against US dol-

lar. Many of the business

companies that started look-

ing forward toward brighter

days were once again forced

to recalculate their possible

future gain and take more

cautious steps to avoid any

further slowdown. And before

there was any chance for that

dark shade to disappear came

the latest shock, most un-

thinkable so far for Japan. Yes,

it is the Sarin gas incident at

Tokyo subway train in the

morning pick hour of 20

March. The poison gas attack

and subsequent development

related to the incident even-

tually directed public atten-

tion toward one possible per-

petrator - the religious sect

Aum Shinrikyo. The sect it-

The month of January wit-

T E are almost halfway

through the year, but

the year 1995 so far

and robust growth.

However, the proposed

rhetorics

promised, but hardly be de-

fur Rahman seems to

The proposed budget

guide, as a nation we are more ready the industrial sector's share in the country's gross domestic product (GDP) is about 19 per cent. The proposed budgetary measures should contribute immensely to speed up further growth of

however, is not solely geared to manufacturing, for that matter, industrial growth only. Its attention to agricul tural and service sectors is no less remarkable. Still question remains, how high the overall economic growth may be? The Finance Minister expects that the growth rate will exceed six per cent in 1995-96 provided "we are able to effectively deal with the colossal mismanagement of the public utilities and public industrial corporations who operate with little accountability or performance standards. The point is, what his government has done to stop the hemorrhage on the economy during last four and a half years? Why the minister's speech fell short of a concrete programme for doing so in the remaining days of the regime? Why the votes of the public sector employees will be so strong that the whole economy has to remain hostage in

self and its cult leader Shoko

Asahara overnight became a

media celebrity not for doing

something praiseworthy, but

precisely for doing things con-

sidered to be very wrong.

Almost two months after the

incident Japan seems to be

still under deep traumatic

shock if not the public in gen-

eral, then of course the

cially the country's different

television stations, are not

finding it at all difficult these

days to fill up their transmis-

sion-time. Aum has opened

the door of great opportuni-

ties for the producers who are

not hesitating at all to utilise

everything that is being pro-

vided to them. Every since

suspicion started to centre

around the religious sect Aum

Shinrikyo, it is not only the

Japanese police who started

the onslought against the

group, but parallely seven

different channels of Japanese

television also launched their

somehow confused campaign

against the same suspected

culprit. As a result, forgotten

are Kobe, dollar's continuing

slide, US-Japan trade dispute

and all other important issues.

And in the confusion of iden-

tifying the offenders, the

Black Box has gone under vir-

tual control of no body else

but the Aum Shinrikyo and

Bangladesh, are much aware

of the importance of control-

ling the Black Box. Our expe-

rience throughout the period

of existence of television in

We, the people of

its leader Shoko Asahara.

Japanese mass media, spe-

Japanese media is.

CROSSCURRENTS by CAF Dowlah

their hands? How long the nation will pay for the political expediency of the rulers? How the budget that clearly demonstrates ruling party's political expediency can be claimed to be equally good for the nation as well as the economy? Moreover, six to seven per

cent economic growth will require a big push in our investment rate - it should range between 18 and 20 per cent of the GDP. How the government plans to reach this level from the existing rate of 13 to 14 per cent in a matter of a year, and in an election year? The economy, according to government statistics, is growing now at a rate of nearly five per cent a year. How the government can attain a growth rate of more than six per cent in 1995-96 and at the same time keep the inflation rate at or below the current level of four per cent? Possibilities are very strong that such economic promises will turn into

political rhetorics. The proposed budget's overwhelming emphasis on primary and secondary education, infrastructures and increased domestic contribution to Annual Development Program (ADP), however, deserves appreciation. The government plans to spend almost 25 per cent of its total expenditure- Taka 58.85 billion --for the social sector comprising mainly education and health, and 26 per cent Taka 60.18 billion- for physi-

our country has taught us the

ever appears most frequently

on the screen holds the magic

lamp of power and impor-

tance in his or her own hand.

Ever since television was in-

troduced in our region in

1964, we had gone through a

long process of military dicta-

torship and military democ-

racy. Except for a brief spell

during the early 70s, the pro-

cess continued uninterrupt-

edly for almost three decades

until it finally came to an end

in 1991. Nevertheless, it left

such a strong legacy that we

are still a long way from

thinking democratically about

the Black Box. For us the

Master of the Day is the per-

son who appears most fre-

quently on TV screen. And

may be from such an under-

standing which unconciously

flows deep inside our mind

we psychologically feel a

strong reluctance to allow any

of our opponents to appear

on the same screen. That is

why no one else except the

Master and his humble fol-

lowers can be seen on TV

screen. Our eyes have become

used to this practice and we

probably consider it some-

this probability :

Bangladeshi young man, with

his heart and mind tuned to

the pre set idea about the

Black Box, the idea that has

been formulated from practi-

cal experiences since his

childhood that he spent under

military dictatorship and mili-

tary democracy, comes to

Now, just try to imagine

thing as granted.

important lesson that who-

Aum and the Japanese Media

Monzurul Hug writes from Tokyo

Our experience throughout the period of existence of

television in our country has taught us the important

lesson that whoever appears most frequently on the

screen holds the magic lamp of power

cal infrastructures, such as roads, water resources and flood control, etc. Preeminence of primary and secondary education at public cost should be remarkable in a country where the vast majority live below subsistence level. The government, however, must initiate appropriate mechanisms to make sure that the children of the poor receive quality education throughout the country. Almost 43 per cent domestic contribution to ADP is an-

other important achievement - but this should result in abandoning of unproductive and donor-dictated projects and encouragement of bottom-up and participatory planning and programmes at both local and national levels.

The proposed budget calls for so much tax-cuts that one gets almost paranoid about its potential revenue side. Customs duties, corporate income and profits taxes have been slashed one after another - almost endlessly. How then the government plans to finance its operations? Here lies the gimmick of the proposed budget -- all the tax cuts -- reductions in tariffs and customs duties, exemption of VAT -may result in a total revenue losses of only Taka 3.5 billion while the overall revenue target of the government remains at Taka 113 billion.

The principal source of the Taka 113 billion revenue budget, however, will be the VAT - the value added tax. In fiscal 1993-94 it contributed

Japan for a short visit during

one of these recent days.

There is a strong possibility

that he might return with a

very wrong idea about Japan.

The wrong assumption will be

that, it is not Tomiichi Mu-

rayama who is the leading fig-

ure of present day Japanese

governmental politics, but a

tat, rather unimpressive

bearded man wearing a

strange dress and eyes half

closed is ruling the country

with a microphone in hand.

Yes, he is Shoko Asahara, the

fugitive spiritual leader of the

Since the 20 March inci-

religious sect Aum Shinrikyo.

dent of Sarin poisoning at the

subway trains, Japanese media

is continuing to give exten-

sive coverage of every details

of Aums activities. There is

not a single day when some-

one from the sect, or some

expert explaining the motives

of the sect, is not present on

the TV screen. Since Shoko

Asahara himself has gone into

hideout, television stations

are not in a position to find

out recent footage of his ac-

tivities. As a result, most of

the channels are running the

old pictures of Asahara medi-

ating or speaking to his fol-

lowers holding a microphone

in his hand. The same pictures

of Asahara are being broad-

cast by all the channels re-

peatedly, Forgotten is Tomi-

ichi Murayama, forgotten also

is the opposition leader, one-

time prime minister with

polka-dot necktie Toshiki

Kaifu, and gone into oblivion

the strong man in Japanese.

politics Ichiro Ozawa. So, if

our hypothetical Bangladeshi

youth returns with a very

wrong idea about Japan, do

not blame him outrightly.

Rather blame our own legacy

of military dictatorship and

military democracy, and also

the media that easily turns a

Mandir Road-Toynbee Circu-

lar Road-Kaptan Bazar/Thatari

Bazar Road-Nawabpur-BB Av-

villain into a national hero.

ment exchequer, while the customs duties - the traditional top revenue earner contributed only 33.7 per cent With the ever widening net for VAT and successive inclusion of excise duties in the VAT-net, this will be contributing about 50 per cent in proposed revenue budget. Although Saifur Rahman knows it no less than others that VAT is an extreme form of regressive tax, he intends to keep the rate high. VAT's burden is awfully high on the poor and low income people as they pay a substantially higher percentage of their income as VAT than do the rich people. In many countries VAT rate is less than ten per

42 per cent to the govern-

cent A real tax cut could only be effected by slashing the rate of VAT from existing 15 per cent to 10 per cent at this stage of the economy. Saifur Rahman -- who served Bangladesh government for ten years as a minister for commerce or finance- knows it well that the poor hardly matter in budget as well as politics Saifur's calculation in this

respect may be right, but perhaps he committed a mistake - in his nationally televised speech- by calling upon the people 'do not ask what the government can do for you. Ask yourself what you can do for the Government." Of course, he can make such an appeal. But invoking the reference of John F. Kennedy's inaugural address in this connection seems out of context Kennedy's appeal was "ask not what your country can do for you - ask what you can do for your country." Perhaps, the Finance Minister knows that a country and a government are not same

Buchwald's COLUMN



Hooray for Hollywood

UST when we thought that the American people had nothing more to worry about than how many jurors will survive the next weeks of the O I Simpson trial, Senator Robert Dole raised an issue that caught fire in the country. He attacked the motion picture industry for turning out trash which is destroying the minds of our

There are few people who

understand is how Hollywood movies are made. Whether he likes it or not, every motion picture starts with "one-note"

These people make their living creating the plots that are eventually developed into films. Since the best actionwriters are constantly in demand, they are responsible for 90 per cent of all the productions that Dole is complaining the Rio Grande.'

In order to understand how this process works, the Claude Ban Damme chain-saw Senator should sit in on a story conference at one of the

script. It's lacking something. Why can't we have a scene at the end where the hero crushes the villain with a bulldozor against a church

"We did that in Sly Stal- UNB

young people.

He hit a home run because, unlike Dan Quayle, he didn't mention "Murphy Brown.

would take issue with Dole on the amount of violence shown on the movie screen or on television sets. The dilemma is, how to stop it. What Senator Dole doesn't

about.

studios.

lone's last film." "So it worked. Let's do it again. How many people get

killed in this picture?

"So far we have 67, not counting a busload of German tourists. But we can give you more if you want." "Schwarzenegger had 86 in

his last movie. Let's go for broke and machine-gun 100." "Chief, I used this in a mar

tial arts picture two years ago. The heroine is about to be ravished by a Sumo wrestler when she kicks him below the belt with the steel toes on her shoes. While he is rolling on the ground in agony she takes the black belt from around his waist and chokes him with it."

"I like it, especially as it gives the girl in the picture something to do.

"Do you remember the Bruce Willis scene when he threw 10 Canadian Mounties into Niagara Falls?" "Not really."

"That's because the first time I wrote it, it was for a Dennis Hopper movie. But instead of Canadian Mounties they were corrupt Mexican Federales chasing him across

"I remember it because it reminded me of the Jean

scene in India." "I wrote that one, too," As you can see, Senator "OK, guys, I read the Dole has a tough job bringing Hollywood to its senses, particularly since the same top screenwriters are writing (ital

> By arrangement with Los Angeles Times Syndicate and

all (unital) the pictures.

Save Dhaka

A Husnain

Here are some proposals This will relieve the pressure for DCC, Rajuk and other relevant bodies

1 (a) Relocate the hundreds of NGOs' offices to a complex of multistoried buildings in one or more areas. This move will ease the housing shortage, and bring down the average rent. This decision may be backed up through proper legislation to preempt evasive action.

(b) Construct several multistoried government office complexes to relocate the thousands of government offices scattered throughout the metropolis. The private sector may tie up to speed up the project, and the ex-landlords may get some business.

(c) Construct low-cost multistoried housing complexes for the middle and lower category families. It is understood this is under way under foreign tie-up with a Singaporean company. The Malaysians are good at this job, and may take up projects at the other divisional headguarters (subject to MOUs).

2. Shift the 2000 garment factories from the city into a satellite town outside the Dhaka metropolitan area, and provide all linkage facilities in transport, communication including rail container terminal and housing. This move will relieve the city of the movement of one million people. Multistoried hostels may be built for the female workers. A 5-year plan can do a lot, if powerful vested agencies are not allowed to intervene (though political decisions will be necessary - no lip service please). The landlords won't like it, and there will be powerful opposition lobbies leven within the administration | Public interest may be sometimes unpleasant to many groups with own in

ternal interests 3. Introduce taximeters for

on the cycle rickshaws to some extent (no bargaining, no hassle, lower fare). 4. Introduce regulation in

city bus service standards (all private operators will provide the same minimum standard of service, including vehicle fitness and fittings, seat width and spacing. No "standing" inside the bus should be al lowed, and no over-halt periods at the bus stands. All bus stands must be 50-100 metres away from any road intersection. Bus halt-areas should be box-marked in white lines. Fines for violation should be

Designate parking areas in the shopping areas and markets. No waiting outside these areas. The park attendants must be in uniform, and parking tickets must be issued. There are lots of quar rels daily in the parking zones due to misinterpretation or misapplication of rules, with the police nearby turning a blind eye to the altercations.

6. Clear the footpaths and pavements of hawkers, and shop extensions. Start with a political consensus; otherwise the regulatory measures must be of deterrent nature.

Change over 100 per cent to wireless telephone system. No wiring, no linesmen, no road digging, less ghost bills, better mainte nance and service. Cellular phones are available at digital wired telephone rate. This scheme may be evaluated thoroughly

8 All the above proposals will fail unless discipline and respect for authority could be restored; as per experience since 1991 The governance must be strongly visible in a developing country! Unfor tunately it is not A weak government may be popular, but the work is simply not

Muslim ICS officers

Sir, The only Muslim ICS (Indian Civil Service) officer from Bengal that I know of was Mr TIM (Tajul Islam Mohammad) Nurunnabi Chowdhury of Gaibandha, who. joined the service on the 1st November, 1921 for the Presidency of Fort William of Bengal and the East Indies. His "Covenant", with a forwarding letter from T M Steven Esq ICS, the then Under-Secretary to the Government of Bengal, dated 14th February, 1922, is available for reference, if necessary.

M Nurul Hag 58. Shershasuri Road, Mohammadpur, Dhaka

Sir, This is in reference to the letter of Absana Begum published in your daily on 14th June '95. I would like to

add a few lines to this context. Mr Mujibur Rahman was one of the meritorious and distinguished Bengali Muslims whose Academic feats from the very school life kept pace in distinction of merits with his Hindu counterparts. A wizard of a mathematician among the Muslims his nomination for the ICS was a token of respect from Sir Ashutosh Mukherjee. But the only confusion is whether he hailed from Urdu dominated Muslim community of West Bengal?

Mr Akhtaruzzaman holds the proud distinction of being the only Muslim ICS on competition. Mr K G Morshed, Mr Nurun Nabi and Mr Alamgir Kabir were all officers of high calibre but their nomination lied on the recommendation of certain influential Muslim family.

A senior citizen Dhaka

Well done DCC

help implement the decision.

Fakirerpool bus terminal is not the end itself. Let now the DCC make decision, phasewise, one after another and help mitigate the sufferings of the people in respect of Dhaka's knotty and dirty traffic problem.

After successful operation of Fakirerpool area the part of Dhaka-Narayangani road from Folder Street, Wari Jai Kali enue to Gulistan Cinema junction now need to be cleared off from all sorts of impediments. First of all the illegal motor workshops in the area

from Folder Street to old railway crossing at Nawabpur may be evicted immediately. Thereafter, parking of buses,

rickshaws from old railway crossing at Nawabpur Road to Gulistan Cinema junction may be banned. If considered fit and necessary the so-called "Children's Park" opposite Bangabhaban which has now become a safe haven for some anti-social elements may be

taxi cabs and auto-rickshaws

Dhaka

Sir, Who would bell the cat? The long standing problem has at last been solved. We congratulate the DCC for evicting the unauthorised bus terminal from the busy and crowded Fakirerpool Road Well done DCC. We all feel a sigh of relief. It is now also confirmed that DCC is over all responsible for the administration of the public road. The DCC would make policy decision and the DMP would

The eviction of illegal turned into a temporary site for parking of buses and rickshaws, if at all necessary.

O H Kabir