Dhaka, Thursday, July 13, 1995

## As Good As Its Implementation

The new law just passed in Parliament providing for death penalty for raping, murdering for dowry and trafficking in women and children should generally be welcomed. Both the demonstrative and deterrent aspects of the law were badly needed for dealing with the rising crimes in question. Repression on women and children has been taking uglier forms, both at the individual and social levels. Here the emphasis, however, has been given on containing the first kind. Still, the law seeking to protect the rights and interests of the vulnerable member of a family can be highly useful for fighting the malaise at the social level, too.

While we hail the merits of the new law, we cannot but be concerned about its operative part. The provision to form special tribunals at all the district headquarters gives some idea of the seriousness of the purpose no doubt. Thoughts have also been given to speedy disposal of cases by fixing specific time-frames for pursuance of various parts of the proceeding. All this is good thinking, to be sure. But the problem is that the death sentence - one that is the ultimate provision for penalty - operates lousily if the fear and deterrence associated with it are not allowed to sink in the minds of potential offenders by an unfailing application of the same in appropriate cases. We have had a law providing for death sentence for acid throwing but it has not been implemented in the way it should have been.

The important point is to ensure effective and judicious use of legal provisions. In this context, can we ask if the existing legal provisions have been effectively applied to contain repression on women and children? The answer is going to be in the negative. And if those laws have not been properly implemented, what is the guarantee that the new one will be - in its letter and spirit? There is a need to ensure that the cases are properly framed, not weakened by the police at the time of recording — before going to the tribunal.

Afterall it is the police who receive the complaints and it has to be ensured that no case of woman repression is misinterpreted at that point. A sort of supervisory mechanism - perhaps with help from vigil bodies like human rights groups - has to be introduced. That will minimise the chances of bungling the cases of repression on women and children. At the same time, let us admit, the stricter the law the greater is the onus on the law enforcers to apply it with caution. Any possibility of such law's abuse has to be removed. Sure enough, laws lose their utility both through its arbitrary application and non-application.

The updated law against repression on women and children, in the meantime, needs to be brought to public notice through its publicity on Radio, TV and in the newspapers. The would-be of fenders might get the message in full so that they can think twice before committing the crimes.

## **Total Farming**

What is man's largest material output? All of the six billion of them considered, the most plausible answer, would be disconcerting - and unflattering to boot. It is waste. Everything under the sun is being laid waste by man - air and water, land and hills, forests and sunlight, and all species of flora and fauna of the world. The depredation wrought by man on nature will eat up man himself in the end - if wiser and less greedy ways do not prevail very soon.

It is only decades that man has turned to making wastes into asset - mainly by recycling them, that again largely through mechanical and chemical means. And this recycling thing has not yet caught up even with the tip of man's prolific waste-making capacity and compulsion.

Bangladesh is just ripe for a far-going role in this matter. Perhaps ripest because of the pressures on it coming from the world's densest population it has now. Bangladesh's land is being ever-exploited and abused for centuries without any organised attempt at replenishing or rejuvenating it. This is as big a problem as stupendous is the challenge of finding fuel for this nation's 20 million ovens.

George L Chan, a Chinese scientist now in town, on Tuesday talked about what he calls integrated farming. And his counsel touched on both of our tremendous needs - making our land and water as fecund as these always had been and answering to the fuel and energy requirements of our society. Professor Chan's emphasis on exploiting organic waste for generating energy is known to us as an idea although it remains to be practised as standard and extensive technology. This and his other idea differ from prevailing recycling practices in that these wholly depend on organic agencies and processes.

In a very short time Bangladesh has become dependent on farming very largely cushioned by chemical fertilizer which boosts production but degenerates soil and - yes - also water and positively harms fauna of the land. Far from sustaining our agriculture over a long time-frame, continued use of chemical fertiliser is sure to seriously tell upon the overall liveability of this place. A very promising and effective way of avoiding stewing in this hell in the making is Professor Chan's integrated farming which is but a technique of optimising agricultural production through the maximum recycling of human and other organic wastes. And this technique promises both returning natural fertility to land and re-greening of all the forest lands lost to population pressure and human greed.

This is surely a break-through in agriculture. But to get any benefit out of it we shall need to involve our whole society in its practice. That is a very big challenge for Bangladesh.

## **Incredible!**

This is incredible. A vernacular national daily with an enviable credibility record reported on Tuesday that seven well-furnished classrooms of the Chittagong Government College were being used for commercial coaching purposes by the Jamaat student front -Shibir. This has indeed been going on for years. Each season up to three thousand pupils are coached here for admission tests for a fat return of about Tk 30 lakh.

According to the report, things have gone to absurd levels this year. The HSC examinees are placed in rooms inferior to these seven well-lighted and fan-fitted rooms. The coaching commences daily at 3 pm when the normal business of the institution is supposed to be running full steam.

We are at a loss as to how to react to such a gem of a news. Before a convincing rebuttal of this, the report has to be taken as true. But how? Isn't there an administration in that college of wonderful legacy and incomparable setting? Three thousand pupils could not have been taught for hours just on the stealth. All Chittagong must be knowing the facts. And yet how is this unbelievable thing continuing there? Still unbelieving, we prefer to put an 'if before saying, found true, the principal must forthwith be required to answer for this and face the consequences that should issue. If he is at fault, how could it be possible that his whole team of teachers went along with him and not one protested?

An enquiry must be made and action taken right now. If the news is confirmed by lack of a rejoinder and even then there is no action - it is the education department that will face the consequences.

#### Bangladesh, Sonar Bangla HE propaganda dished out by the government media gives no clue to the actual state of the economy in any third world country. Nine times out of ten, this

Now it seems likely that the dream of a Bangladesh, having a market in the Indian States on Bangladesh's borders, viz West Bengal, Meghalaya, Assam, Tripura, Mizoram, Manipur and Nagaland may become an economic reality.

senator Sartai Aziz and Dr Manmohan Singh, to take the fundamental steps necessary to unshackle the economy and rejuvenate the process. A major achievement has been the institutionalising of Value Added Tax (VAT) at source, rapidly becoming the mainstay for revenues. Ushered in during the late 70s by the present PM's husband, late Gen Ziaur Rahman garment manufacturing is today vying to become a replacement for BD's once-traditional dependence on jute as the mainstay of economy. Small business are in fashion all over the country, poultry farms, dairy farms, restaurants, barges and tanks, transport, etc., the world renowned Grameen Bank has even unshackled the peasants from the moneylenders and given them basic entrepreneurial skills that allows them to earn more while paying less interest. The commercial turnover can be gauged at Aricha Ghat, where the maximum wait for a ferry used to be 20 minutes, a 7 km long traffic line of trucks laden with cargo awaited crossing when one ferry went out of order.

will be false and misleading, the tenth

time (maybe) the normal exaggera-

tion will be toned down to moderate

levels. The basic indicators can be

found in the streets of the country's

towns and cities, the number of vehi-

cles (and the types), people throng-

ing the shopping areas, the "housing

Any discerning eye can easily separate

stranger than fiction. Dr Henry

Kissinger's "International basket

case" has risen phoenix-like to make

him eat his words in his lifetime. The

roads are jam-packed with an as-

sortment of vehicles of all sizes and

shapes, many of them carrying ce-

ment and steel, the basic ingredients

of economic development. Where

the Dhaka skyline once only boasted

a handful of multi-storied structures,

high-rises are now sprouting up ev-

erywhere. Not only are the shops full

of goods and produce, the shoppers

seem to have the requisite buying

power. As the new status symbol the

cellular telephone (the mobile) is

fairly abundant in the hands of bud-

ding entrepreneurs. Signs of poverty

are everywhere, much more than in

Pakistan but there are fewer beggars

in the streets than in earlier years. One

can literally feel a palpable sense of

economic dynamism in the air, many

compare Dhaka with Bangkok of the

third straight year of tax cuts and

utility rates remaining mostly un-

changed has been unveiled by Saifur

Rahman, the Minister of Finance, the

third technocrat in South Asia, after

A which is not signed by its author. According to a

government order of August 31, 1982,

no action is required to be taken on

anonymous petitions. But what do

you do when there is a signature, a

name and an address, but you have a

strong hunch that these are fictitious,

but not the content? Would you

straightaway take cognizance of the

petition and send it for enquiry, or

would you first verify the sender's

identity? How much time can you

spend verifying the identity of the

petitioner, when there are hundreds

of such petitions everyday? On the

other hand, if you take cognizance

of the petitions without verifying

whether these are anonymous or not,

the 1982 government order but also

perhaps unwittingly putting a good

officer to harassment by ordering an

So, we have at hand a compli-

cated situation because, based on

differently by different organisa-

consistency within the government.

Before suggesting a way out of this

fabricated.

Nanonymous petition is ne

which is not signed by its

An election year Budget with a

In Dhaka today fact is becoming

starts' visible to the observer, etc.

fact from fiction.

Bangladesh has still some distance to go before it can get out of the economic morass it was put in by the heedless nationalisation during the early day of its Liberation. Pakistan faced the same economic problems due to late Bhutto's similar disastrous moves for centrally controlling the economy but our economy was much more resilient and diversified. Moreover Pakistan's position at

a geographical crossroads (Middle East, South Asia, Central Asia, China) makes the parallel economy pull the organised sector along. Now it seems likely that the dream of a Bangladesh, having a market in the Indian States on Bangladesh's borders, viz West Bengal, Meghalaya, Assam, Tripura Mizoram, Manipur and Nagaland may become an economic reality. This market would encompass all the In-

Rahman. Begum Zia has shrugged off political turmoil to usher in economic stability and a changed attitude of mind that is amazing for neutral observers who saw money concentrated in the hands of a favoured few, at most none belonging to the soil. The lack of entrepreneurial potential was a psychological mindblock fostered in the locals by the handful of businessmen-migrants from India who

## AS I SEE IT

#### Ikram Sehgal writes from Karachi

dian States aforementioned as well as Nepal, Gorkhaland, Sikkim, Bhutan, Bodoland and NEFA (North East Frontier Agency) because only the ports and rivers of Bangladesh can give this entire region a genuine reason for any hope of economic eman cipation.

To the credit of Begum Zia's regime she has continued the prag matic economic policies of her hated enemy (and predecessor in government), Hussain Mohammad Ershad. One must give credit where credit is due even though it is not fashionable in BD's intellectual circles to favour Ershad's slate with any good deeds. Blessed with a instinctively entrepreneuriai Finance Minister, Saifur

reaped the financial rewards, thereby causing economic deprivation and laving the seeds of national disinte-

What does Bangladesh look like politically in an election year to an outside observer? Presently a legal tussle is going on due to the en-bloc resignation of the Opposition MPs, the President has made a reference to the Supreme Court on the advice of the PM to determine the status of those who have resigned. The Supreme Court will shortly take up the issue, having invited 6 of the country's eminent lawyers to help it in its

size of the strikes (hartals) Begum

Zia should be in deep political trouble. In the first-ever directly held municipal elections she lost control of the two major cities. Dhaka and Chit tagong while winning the lesser cities Khulna and Rajshahi. Without control of the capital and the major port city and in the face of organised periodic shutdown, Begum Zia has successfully ruled the country, a noteworthy democratic achievement that should not fail to get the attention of Ms Benazir with respect to Karachi and the MQM's hold over this port city. While sporadic arrests and violence do take place, notably in the country's higher educational institutions, which are mired in politics, there is no calculated political vendetta against the main Opposition, the Awami

Begum Zia's ire is reserved for BNP's ideological partner, the Jatiya Party (JP), and that too mainly for its leader, Lt Gen (Retd) H M Ershad, the former President who is in jail facing many charges, some on which he has already been convicted. The most important charge involves the postarrest murder (supposedly on the orders of the then COAS, Lt Gen HM Ershad) of Maj Gen Manzoor who had earlier led an abortive revolt that killed the PM's husband, then President, Gen Ziaur Rahman. The net result of this is that she keeps Ershad in the public eye.

The former President reportedly On the surface and going by the remains quite popular in the countryside, enough to give him nuisance

value of some political consequence. There have been scandals in Begum Zia's time, none so potent as the one that led to the recent fertiliser crisis but the public memory is short and the Government seems to have weathered the issue of corruption in government which remains endemic.

At least two major business houses owe their financial creditors more than Rs 5 billion. Like in Pakistan, chronic loan defaulters who are the old (and nouveau) rich make a significant election issue but unlike in Pakistan the BD Finance Minister seems determined in recovering the money from such predators. It should be interesting to see how many such people still manage to get party tickets, case in point, Maj Gen (Retd) Mahmudul Hasan, formerly close colleague of Gen Ershad and labelled "Thief of Baghdad" in his role as Mayor of Dhaka, has now been accepted in the BNP fold by Begum Zia, a remarkable volte face that she passed off with the remarks, "that even a thief may become a good person in the company of good people' a philosophy that is long on political expediency but rather short on prin-

Politics is based on economics whose main concern should be the amelioration of the misery and privation of the masses. While many factors, namely natural disasters and India's machinations, viz Farrakka Barrage, Shanti Bahini, etc., may tend to derail Bangladesh's march to economic prosperity, there is a basic amity and unity among the intelligentsia and the masses about the nation's sovereignty and independence that we need to take lessons from While Sonar Bangla may yet remain a dream to Bangladesh's impoverished millions for many years to come, it is no longer in the realm of fantasy.

## How to Deal with Anonymous Petitions

These are written in a particular style, distinguished by exaggerations, superlatives, digressions, additives, colourings, etc. even when the intention is to be very specific and concrete.

rather difficult situation, let us delve a little deep into the causes of anonymous petitions. Contentwise, there can be only two categories of anonymous petitions, namely the genuine and the fictitious. In the fictitious petitions, vengeance appears to be the prime motive, and this vengeance may be the outcome of either misunderstanding or actual loss or harm suffered by the party concerned. Public humiliation rather than actual punishment is sometimes the you are not only violating the spirit of ultimate objective in such cases. Another motive is to frustrate and frighten the official into inaction or enquiry against him, if indeed the to bring about the reversal of an ear lier decision. The architects of such complaint in the petition is false and petitions are generally members of the elite, including officials, some of whom are as fond of this instrument as of litigation. In some districts different interpretations, anonymous which I dare not name, sending ficti petitions are presently being handled tious petitions is supposed to be a tions, giving rise to anomaly and inprime pastime. These are written in a

sions, additives, colourings, etc. even when the intention is to be very spe cific and concrete.

Thus, for example, some sexual offence is bound to be attributed particularly to a young and unmarried officer even if the main complaint is regarding his or her alleged financial corruption. Similarly, people will be

petitions, besides influencing journalists to publish items in the newspapers and periodicals. The main intention here is to arrange a review so that at least some delay may be suffered by the party which has won the contract. I am not suggesting here that no bungling at all is done in deciding contracts and business deals.

# Making Government Work

by Analyst

branded in these petitions as supporters of political groups to whom the government of the day is strongly allergic. It may be mentioned here that nowadays a large number of fictitious petitions are also issued by a section of the business community All those who have lost out in the bid for a contract or any other business deal generally resort to anonymous

On the other hand, genuine anonymous petitions are generally authored as a last resort by honest but timid people who are terribly afraid of the powers that be. Such people may certainly belong to the elite, but generally they are poor or lower middle-class people. In their petitions, the main concern is usually self defence against oppression by the

powerful, rather than with big business contracts or other similar things. However, there are always many exceptions to the above generalisation.

Thus, it may be well appreciated that there are no easy and straightforward solutions in dealing with anonymous petitions in Bangladesh. However, conscientious officials may like to consider the following in sifting the genuine from the fictitious anonymous petitions. Firstly, actions on anonymous petitions (whatever these may be) should be taken at the highest level in an organisation, and at the processing stage these should be handled by a trusted lieutenant of the organisational head. This subor dinate official should brief the boss from time to time about the contents of such letters. This step should be able to prevent hasty and irresponsible actions in general, and in particular the settling old scores through harassment in the name of enquiry. Secondly, the head of the organisation should consider initiating action

on anonymous petitions only when these are repeated time and again, and he/she also receives corroborative information through the grapevine. Thirdly, one should look for specific allegations and issues which are easily verifiable before taking action. Fourthly, at one stage or another, the informal response of the concerned officials on the allegations in the anonymous petitions should be obtained and considered before contemplating further action. Fifthly, where prima face an anonymous petition appears to be genuine. an attempt should be made to locate its author and with the assurance of genuine confidentiality, further leads should be obtained from him or her so that mischief may be punished and prevented.

Finally, by using the informal channels, efforts should be made to locate one or two authors of fictitious anonymous petitions, so that they may at least be warned, if not punished, and this itself should serve as a deterrent for potential mischief

In the long run, the problem of anonymous petitions can be minimized only by strengthening the rule of law and greater transparency and accountability in all government

## Extension of NPT: Legitimising Great Power Hegemonism

by Monaem Sarker

HE global talks on NPT and nuclear weapons issues conduded in New York on 12th May, 1995 without agreement on how to evaluate the past performance of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). Those who gathered at the United Nations for nearly four weeks, ended their deliberations on a sour

In a historic decision on May 11, the 173-member states of the NPT had agreed without a vote to make the 25-year old Treaty a permanent international arrangement. Under the Treaty, five nations — USA, Russia, Britain, France and China - are allowed to keep nuclear weapons and all other states agreed not to acquire them. Pakistan, India and Israel are among the few states that have refused to join the Treaty.

In fact, the indefinite extension of NPT divides international society permanently into nuclear weapon haves and the have-nots, and even more seriously, reinforces for ever,

Great Power hegemonism in international society and relations. This is a grave, backward step because at the end of the cold war and the disappearance of the Soviet Union, of a bipolar world, we are faced with a unipolar society and US hegemonism. which is not conducive to the good of international society, international relations and organisations.

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aggerations, superlatives, digres

The deliberation in the global conference clearly highlighted the international contradictions in the proliferation theology of the western powers and the lack of coherent thinking on the part of non-aligned nations on this issue. The more they talk of counter proliferation strategy the faster they undermine the credi bility of the Non-Proliferation Treaty, the safeguards system of the International Atomic Energy Agency and the Export Control Regulations of their allies. Their counter proliferation strategy is ineffective against terrorist attacks like ones carried out at the World Trade Centre. It is not

even necessary to use nuclear explosives. There can be terrorist attacks with the dispersal of radioactive materials in closed areas like subways.

What they profess today. If they do not play such a role what will the five nuclear weapon powers gain commensurate with the enormous expenditure to maintain these nuclear weapons? Most of the senior military commanders are of the view that nuclear weapons are militarily unusable against other nuclear power states. There use against a non-nuclear weapon state would be genocidal and war crime. It is quite obvious that those conditioned by the nuclear theology of the past four decades have not thought through these basic issues.

Unfortunately, great power hegemonism has been integral to international society and relations ever since the Sovereign nation State System

(SSS) came into existence about three hundred and fifty years ago. Despite the foundation principle of the SSS-namely that states are independent, Sovereign and equal, inspite of tremendous diversities of all kinds among them. And this principle has been continually confirmed and reconfirmed by traditional international laws. Thus hegemonism of the self appointed Great powers have lasted all these centuries although the number and identity of these powers has varied over centuries despite the continual protests and efforts of the overwhelming majority of the small and weak states to moderate, if not eliminate, it. This hegemony received, in effect, formal recognition in the so-called Concept of Europe early in the 19th century (after the Napoleonic wars), then in the League of Nations and since the end of second world war in the United Nations too. Once again this hegemonism became, in effect, integral to the present world organisation-UN (in the form of the 5 permanent members of the security council) despite the formal & express principle that member

ship of the organisation is based on Sovereign Equality. This contradiction was openly,

but under protest, accepted by the 'Little Forty Five' members at the foundation conference of the United Nations in 1945. On the claim of the Big five (USA, UK, USSR, France and [the then] China) that power and responsibilities should go together. In the context of still on going struggle of these powers against one of the Axis powers (Japan), this recognition of the role of Great powers was understandable if not unavoidable.

But, then, for the last fifty years of the UN, this claim of power and responsibility going together has been blown to smithereens, for it is plain that the great powers have functioned irresponsibly in initiating or backing many tragic dispute and wars( for example Vietnam & Latin America, Eastern Europe and Afghanistan, Suez canal area, South East Asia, etc.). It was (and is) therefore time to debunk these pretentious claims of the Great Powers that power and responsibility should go together, at least in the 50th Anniversary of the United Nations, which has somehow survived the four

decades old cold war between two groups of nations headed by the USA and USSR. And also in memory of 50th years of Atomic Bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. This demand for eliminating Great power hegemonism in international society. relations and organisation has been regularly asserted by the Non-Aligned nations, particularly since the establishment of NAM in 1961.

The world has changed greatly in the last decade. We have continued to witness a situation, the states both industrialised and developing, possessing or striving to possess nuclear capabilities. Not much has been done so far to achieve the basic objectives for complete nuclear disarmament. It is high time that all those states possessing nuclear weapons must destroy them totally including the stockpiles of fissile materials, stop their researches and production of new weapons. Let us eliminate all weapons of mass destruction and prevent nuclear war so that resources so released can be channelled and saved for development purposes.

The writer is a leader of Awami League

Graffiti

Sir, Writings on the wall can be traced back to the cave age when primates scribbled their messages of life, weal and woes, and painted events and associations of daily life. Over the ages, the graffiti underwent change in keeping with the advance of civilisation, way of life and its evergrowing ambitions and frustration. In our own life time we have witnessed such changes in the writings of the wall in and around our metropolis. The tone is urban, and messages overwhelmingly political. Every household, business-premises, educational institutions have walls around for protection and demarcation. However much the owners implore verbally or by stickers like "stick no bills" this has failed to dissuade the enthusiasts from daubing walls in and around the city with bold writings in loud paints conveying from love to hate, or to propagate political aspi-

Indiscriminate writings on almost all the walls in conspicuous points have made the look of the city, already choking, under various civic inadequacies, lousy and ugly. But the young painters are undaunted. Whoever wants to have a stroll braving milling crowd on the pavement littered with make shift vendors of all sorts will find the writings a treat in themselves. They will indicate the ethos of the nation at large, sentiments of urban unemployed youth, political temperature of hundred and

one parties and the like. Writings, as of necessity, are of various kinds and multifarious. Walls serve as handy platform for propagat ing all kinds of message and senti-

ment, even verbal duel. For example, — "ভাই এর নিঃশর্ত মুক্তি চাই" (we demand unconditional release of dear leader). Obviously, that Bhai is no angel to have been put belind the bars. But to impress that he is not an ordinary mortal like you and me the message is cleverly coined. The person concerned is loudly touted as a "somebody" of some political party as if without him the country is surly to go to the dogs. Then, somebody differing from the message advocating "unconditional release" will find it

convenient to daub the word "मृङि" (release) with "ফাসি চাই" (instead of release the scoundrel should rather go to gallows). Travesty of truth is contents of some other messages which no level-headed man fails to notice.

Some such writing proclaim "ভাই এর

চরিত্র ফুলের মত পবিত্র" meaning the hero of the message has an unblemished character — nay, he is as pure as rose-petals. A busy pedestrian passes with a chuckle knowing full well that in reality the character of the person eulogised is a veritable scoundrel. Then some of the graffiti written

in English are replete with howlers while some others are funny. In any case, they display the poverty of knowledge of English - an outcome of doing away with the language born of euphoria and jingoism of past decades. Some of them make funny readings like "cust (sic) our vote," "Vote for poor friend ......, advocating in reality to cast vote for a candidate who is a friend of the poor mass. Indiscriminate writings on city walls do not make it any better looking, but they do not fail to convey

the intrinsic message that money and

muscle can make a hero of a villain and the otherway about. M Gholam Mostafa Dhanmondi, Dhaka 1205

#### Manpower export!

Sir, Either our policy makers at national level cannot see beyond their nose or the rest of the population is taken for fools. Such a conclusion becomes pertinent from a news head line appearing in front pages of na tional dailies recently. The news is about an agreement reached between Bangladesh Govt and a Singapore manpower importer. Singapore will according to the agreement struck import Bangladeshi girls to work as house-maids. Judging by the emoluments and other lavish benefits offered no wonder even many educated girls will be lured to land the job from a country where employment oppor tunities are non-existent.

of these young Muslim girls of the hazards that they will be exposed to in a rather liberal society. As a layman I am concerned with the fate awaiting them. The memory of a Philipino girl committing suicide after intolerable sexual harassments meted out to her by a Singapore master should have been fresh in our memory. As we gather from newspaper reports Singapore also is a high-AIDS risk coun-

The government should seriously consider the matter again and refrain from any foolish venture. The deal may bring in few dollars but with it may accompany endless miseries and hurt religious sentiments. M G Mostafa

Elephant Road, Dhaka

## OPINION

### Plight of Dhaka Commuters

Can Dhakaites be ever confident that they will go to work and return home everyday in one piece? The question need not surprise — far less puzzle, the readers. The risk they run everyday is an obvious fact of every-

day life here. Dhaka City has become so accident-prone that nobody can even make a safe guess whether once out he or she will be lucky to avert an accident, major or minor. As soon as one steps out and boards a public transport - be it a rickshaw or a scooter or a tempo or a bus or a minibus - one is at the mercy of its driver, licenced or not. The man at the steering of an auto may be a mere helper. One can avoid this hazard only by keep walking, but alas, one's physical power cannot take one too far. So you cannot help being left to the mercy of the drivers.

On board a paddle rickshaw, you have got to be an efficient observer looking for any approaching vehicle which might ram into your threewheeler. Interestingly, this has become the obligation of the passengers and not of the rickshawpuller who does not bother about other vehicles crowding the roads. He seems to feel ashamed if he cannot overtake other rickshaws in front of him. Sometimes had becomes so stimulated that he is stirred by an inner urge to overtake even cars and buses. The

passenger has to be a helpless witness

Sajjad Zabir

to the dangerous manoeuvres as his cries of caution often go unheeded. Rather such cries might bewilder the rickshawpuller which may prove still more hazardous.

A baby taxi or mishuk passenger seems a little less unsafe than a rickshaw passenger although the risk of a head-on collision with other vehicles increases as the drivers, particularly the newer ones, do not want to be 'sluggish" in driving their autos. Their craze for speed sometimes proves dangerous and brings fatal consequences to the innocent passengers who have to accept the sombre destiny for no fault of theirs.

A bus or a minibus journey is perhaps the safest of all as there is less risk of their being dashed and pushed by other vehicles. Once you get into a bus or a minibus you are hardly likely to be treated as a human being. If you are hapless and do not get a seat you have to be a standing passenger who is always pushed by the conductor for making room for more. They are almost literally sandwiched and packed like sardines. In a way, the passengers standing on the foothold are slightly better off as they seem to get some relief, although they also run the risk of being dashed by other ve hicles or slipping into the road to be crushed under the wheels of the vehicles coming behind

Perhaps by now, it has become evident that the misery of the city dwellers commuting on public trans port knows no bound. But there is nobody to listen to their grievances There is no forum or organ except newspapers through which the aggrieved commuters can communicate their grievances to the proper place and the authority seems determined not to be bothered by such petty grievances

In fact, Dhakaites have learnt to take road accidents for granted. It has become a part of their lives. Not a single day passes, when they do not find news of such casualties in the newspapers although not all of them are duly reported. These accidents occur mainly due to the sheer negligence on the part of the drivers but the passengers are nearly always the losers and sufferers, but the drivers frequently "manage to escape" leav ing the law enforcing agencies agape.

The ordeal of using public transport will remain as long as this situation continuous. We do not hope to have fully risk-free roads overnight But at least stricter enforcement of traffic rules, effectively checking violation of speed limit, overtaking, reckless manoeuvres, among other considerably reduce the incidence of road mishaps. There may not be full emancipation from pain, but is a little relief too much to ask for?.