Founder-Editor: Late S. M. Ali

Dhaka, Monday, July 17, 1995

## Inequities in Labour Market

Once again the World Bank has released a very useful report. This time it deals with the labour market, and brings out the inequities and segmentation that exist in it. The most important point that the report makes is that from '86 to '93 real rural wages have decreased by 48 per cent, while urban wages, during the corresponding period, rose between 10 and 33 per cent. If this vast inequity is seen against the situation that only 10 per cent of the estimated labour force of 59 million (in '94) work in the urban areas, then we are forced to realise that 90 per cent of our labour force has actually suffered nearly 50 per cent loss of their real wages during the past eight years.

How could such inequity exist? The simple answer is that the urban based labour force is organised, and have the capacity to impact upon the government through strikes and hartals. It can also add to the strength either of the opposition or of the government depending on who is giving or promising them what - and thereby use its bargaining power to extract favours. Given the fact that most political agitations in Bangladesh are urban centred, organised labour has immense influence in manipulating it. Thus whichever party is in power, it feels extremely vulnerable to pressures from organised labour. All this, coupled with the fact that autocratic governments, devoid of popular mandates, survive through dishing out favours, have added to the capacity of the organised urban labour to force, to push up its wages from time to time.

The World Bank's report puts a straight question before us. How long are we going to pander to the demands of the minority urban labour force at the cost of the 90 per cent rural labour? The question is for our political leadership — both of the government and the opposition — to answer. The populist tendency is to increase labour wages to get instant support. But as the report points that every rise in the cost of labour acts as disincentive to investment, which prevents labour market from expanding. Thus the real impact of wage rise is to decrease employment opportunity for the new comers. So what we end up with is better and better terms of employment for those who already have jobs, with less and less employment opportunity for new entrants.

The consequences of government intervention in the labour market is now clear. Time has come for us to shift our policy to benefit the majority of the labour force, who are in the rural areas.

## A Study in Incongruity

There is a most elevating news from a very unlikely place. Rajshahi University is to set up two new post-graduate institutes under its fifth Five-Year Plan programme. Two new departments will also be added under the same programme. The subjects the institutes will be devoted to are interesting — business administration and environmental sciences. RU has planned well to fill voids that shouldn't be there.

The touch of the visionary is also there in the thought of having a department devoted to population science and human resource development. And the other new department that has been planned - that of genetics and molecular biology - is such without which a modern university is inconceivable. Bangladesh is placed by manysided compulsions to go for biotechnology in a big serious way. This department will have quite a role in that together with the existing biochemistry department.

If all goes well three other institutes will be built — with forestry, education and English language as their subjects. We congratulate the university for such fine forward-looking exertions, albeit still on paper. But having done that we are in two minds as to whether we haven't proved egregious fools of ourselves. For don't we too well know RU is a place where everything comes to nothing and, conversely nothing grows out of anything? It hardly even deserves to be called a university for it is perpetually under siege mentally and physically - of forces opposed to that seed of humanity and progress by whatever name you call it — humanities, liberal arts, spirit of questing by questioning, paramountcy of reason so on and so forth.

On the same page of The Daily Star that the elevating plans were published there was a bigger and bolder news dwelling on the plight of 56 thousand applicants for three thousand places in RU first year classes. Their admission tests were due on June 3 and even by Julyend those are not going to take place. This has been caused by leakage of question papers from a local printing press. And this very month a high official of RU, in charge of a student hall, resigned protesting police attempt to raid his hall unauthorisedly. The police charged him with protecting terrorists sitting on an arms cache inside the hall. Ever since the very bad days of Dr Bari's vice-chancellorship of partisanism non-pared, things have been plummeting relentlessly to worse and worse. After a whole month of RU's remaining open and working, it has been said most students were still to return to campus. Violence including stabbing, shooting and arson hangs heavy in the air of the campus. And certain halls are under occupation as always.

High-minded plans and very very mean state of affairs combine to make RU a study in pathetic incongruity. Politics specially of the fascist persuasion is culprit number one. Starting with RU, the question of the nation's universities has become a national question of a very urgent nature. A government unable to rise above petty party interest is failing the nation by not addressing the problem with the priority and seriousness it warrants.

## Cruelty to Children

This is as unkind as can be. This is cruel. This is decidedly criminal. A Bengali national daily on Sunday frontpaged a picture of a boy child — hardly 12 — lying naked on a road in drenching shower. His hands and feet tied with cord and his mien wrought with the utmost signs of suffering. The caption explains that to have been caused by hunger, humiliation and a goodly spell of beating. The boy was said to be pestering shopkeepers of the area for giving him some food. The angry shopkeepers stripped him of his meagre clothing, beat and bound him and threw him on the road. A nagging drizzle was making the boy cold.

Such a ghastly example of cruelty to children is totally unacceptable. When the nation is in the process of enacting capital punishment for persecution of women and children, what should be the punishment for the perpetrators of this mindless cruelty?

Can we appeal to the police to go into the matter and prosecute the culprits? Their crime has not quite amounted to any bodily harm of the victim. But the boy has, of course, suffered in his mind. He has been violated, abused. And again, the mindset from which such cruelties issue is the same as from which killings come.

Let the police prove to our nation that the person of all our citizens is inviolate — and that this specially applies to our children, by taking action in this case. This certainly would be a very good work which would surely help improve their public image.

### Untimely deaths seem common - but I don't remember hearing of a timely one

A his sudden demise Attorney General Aminul Hug has aguin proved that he was never atraid of death — as he was wont to say. He died in harness - a

fulfillment almost of his last wish. A valiant freedom fighter, Advocate Aminul Hug was soft spoken. ever smiling, evanescent in his presence - outside the court. I haven't seen him inside. I visited his house the night before, around 9:30 pm on July 12 little knowing that the morning after Advocate Aminul Huq would make a spatial journey to consort with the stars: the heavenly height to commingle with the best

Very often Aminul Huq used to quote a phrase. 'the worse the soci ety, the more law there will be. In Hell there will be nothing but law, and due process will be meticulously observed." It has a resonance of its own for a man of law because as a student of Oliver Wendel Holmes he certainly believed that the 'Life of the Law has not been Logic — it has been experi-

L pon my return from Oxford I

# Logic of Law

chanced into him at a reception on January 26 — after a gap of almost ten years. A man with deep seated eyes, his face was unmistakable. We almost ran to each other with warm greetings. He darted a significant question, "What are you doing?" My wordless silence made him speak again. "Please come and see me to-

buildings around. The mosque then was the only point of reference. Numerous houses have come up, shopping arcades abound and thousands of people milling around make the place almost unrecognisable. So much has changed.

The modest study lined with books was impressive in its simplic

# **ENCHIRIDION**

by Waliur Rahman

morrow. You must. We have a lot to talk." The brief meeting in his house at Chitra . 25. New Elephant Road. was almost like a world restored.

Not far from his two-storeyed simple house is the landmark mosque topped with a two-winged aeroplane which we used to visit in the late fifties from Dhaka College to say our lumma prayers. The contrast today of course is unmistakable. Thirty years ago it was a patch of green, no

ity. The Attorney General of Rangladesh was innately shy to be so identified. He always wanted to be known as a simple citizen of a country born on the blood of million mar-

A warm cup of tea marked the renewal of a friendship which moved me and restored the confidence which perhaps I needed. He was very proud to point at a framed picture hanging on the wall. It was that of his brother Sergeant Zahurul Huq. Very often in his conversation he would bring up his brother, and his memories, which to him and to the listener, was the story of Bengal and the quest for identity of a people, a nation. The closeness of the brothers went beyond the normal pale of filial affection. It foreshadowed certain noble and great intimations, the war of liberation was just round the corner. Aminul Huq never missed an opportunity to say so.

His two juniors. Advocates Obaidur Rahman Mostafa and Farid Ahmed were close to him and imbibed in full the integrity and character of the Attorney General. They impressed me with their seriousness of purpose and action.

On the Eid-ul-Azha day his lady wife personally entertained us. She sent her domestics on leave.

Advocate Aminul Hug was essentially a contemporary man. His determined approach to the legal issues of the day might not have endeared him to everybody; but that was him.

... Aminul Hug's memory fits well into the epistle of William Cowper an honest man close-buttoned to his chin: broad cloth without, and a warm heart within. May his soul rest in eternal peace.

# An Apple a Day Keeps the Tourists Away

T never happened the way its authors contemplated! The bird simply never took off. For about quarter of a century. Bangladesh Parjatan Corporation's feathers logo has been the sole witness of several abortive attempts to make the tourism industry in this country flourish. Despite the tourism business booming in neighbouring India and Nepal, the BPC officials have this far failed to find their Wright (also spelt right) brothers.

In the absence of any insight pancity in forethought and lack of prudence by the powers that be, the Bipicians could afford to make a scapegoat of the local political and law and order situation. But, are things less volatile in Delhi or Kath-

Then again the officials (under the protection of the winged bird with no flying experience) are so overawed by everything phoren that they hardly can find the right

artefact to lure fellow humans from abroad. So, they go on these learning trips abroad and return with the ideas which foreigners are using to entice Bangalees. Consequently, BPC is busy implanting on our fertile soil tourism notions that may at best allure the affluent deshis and veritably

tourists the very things they are running away from. Unless the visitors can find something unique in Bangladesh, they are cheaper off staying home.

BPC has most often been offering

Playing Western music to this chap from Philadelphia is like Clinton

Pinch of Salt

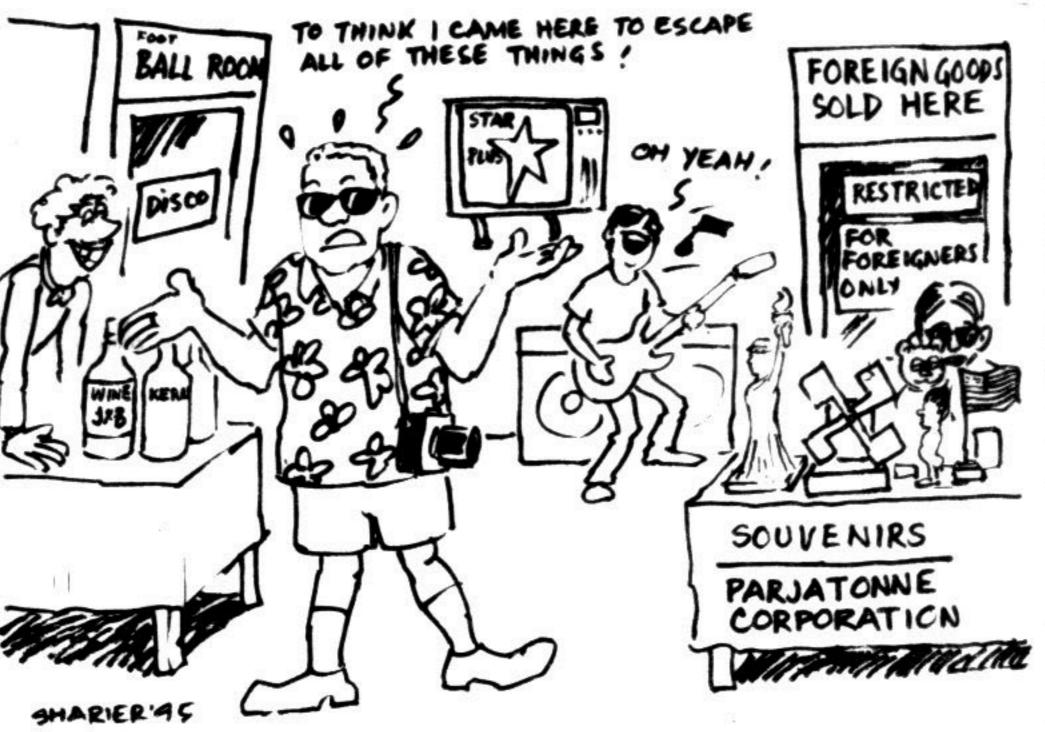
by Chintito

keep away the foreign exchange. For God's sake! You can't outdo the tourists in terms of swanky bars, discotheques, fashion shows, ... But, try daaber paani Introduce an Am-Kathal Festival where people have to pay to wear lungi and squat on the floor to relish in these truly Bengali dumplings.

Actually, tourism has always been heading in the wrong direction. So, the bird never had a favourable wind.

crooning Barir manush kone anume bhoote dhoreche to Runa Laila in the White House. For all your know this Phili could be a pop star who has just had enough of it and was looking for some shade under a coconut tree beside some dried up river of Bangladesh. So, give him just that and take his dollars. Haven't we been robbed abroad?

Stop serving imported apples to these imported people. This guy at



the table could be owning the biggest apple farm this side of California. He is perhaps vacationing to see anything but an apple. And the first thing he encounters is this waiter with a Jamas type grin pouring out the "Apple a day-keeps-the-doctoraway" poppycock. The Apple lord is out on the next plane. Actually, this apple a day business could be keeping the tourists away. lourists are looking for some-

thing new, some adventure, some thing to write home about. For those interested in climbing, we have tall buildings where the lifts are either inadequate or not working. People interested in weightlifting could be asked to carry their luggage at Kamlapur and Sadarghat. You want sauna? We have plenty of sauna, including in-house movie. So, put them inside a cinema hall showing Booker Dhawn (don't even think about translating that). For roller Coaster thrill seekers, a seat on the roof-top of an Aricha-bound bus should cost at least \$50, excluding insurance. I tell you these they will write home about

Offer them bed and breakfast in a mud house in Mymensingh. Queen Elizabeth II (as far as memory goes) was on the tree-tops of some Kenyan jungle when she ascended the British throne. The visitors would love a romantic night trek through a real Bangalee village. Trekking is a passion to many. Boating across Padma would rival any similar excitement down any mountainous rush. If we can partake in "Pick Your Own" afternoons on English Raspberry fields, why not let Jack and Jill bring down their own coconuts? Oooh! How exciting. Come on, BPC! there is much more to Bangladesh than imported liquors, borrowed music, out-of-nowhere dresses. Show the world the true Bangladesh and don't forget to take their yens and marks. That's why you are paid in Takas.

For tourism to flourish, this land has all the resources. BPC should cultivate the one they lack — imagination. If tourism declines any further, BPC may begin to mean Biriyani Poorey Chai or Bird Perhaps

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

## Rain/flood water conservation

Sir, After liberation, Bangladesh experienced the worst drought in 1978. The Government of the day made certain short term measures. These, however, were rudimentary and failed to achieve any long-term solution. Again we have suffered another agonising drought this year. We do not yet know if the Government has at all adopted any plan to face such droughts in future in order to reduce our dependence on rain in the dry months.

Back in 1978 an American water resources expert visited Bangladesh following the drought. Among other things, the expert advised the government to take steps to conserve surface water available in abundance during the rainy season. Unfortunately for us the governments till date have not done anything to heed to the advice except for the much publicised canal digging programme which ended up in a fiasco.

It is a natural phenomenon that in our country there is plenty of rainfall during the monsoon period. A great mass of water from the adjoining states of India flow through our land. This two factors cause billions of gallons of water to accumulate and stagnate in the rivers, canals, low lying areas etc of our land until finally drained out by October. Since ancient days our tradition is to wait and wade through this monsoon period of five months helplessly and then sigh and pray for rain in the following dry season. What a shame. The drought of this year has brought our country to the door-step of famine. But we have learnt nothing. Both the party in power and the opposition politicians and planners have blissfully forgotten the drought. Now,

however, we are facing the flood! The people should no longer allow such gross negligence of the political parties. If they do not come up with definite agenda on vital national is-

sues like widespread irrigation through rain/flood water conservation they may be ignored by the people. Water conservation should become a national culture where individual farmers will participate. The government must build the Ganges Barrage without any delay and also build dams and barrages across the small rivers like Gumti, Sangu, Halda, Muhuri, Feni, Salda, Khuai and many more all over the country. The NGOs working in the country may also help motivate the people and implement some model conservation works.

M F Islam 146/2, Ahmadbag, Dhaka

## 'Stunning Revelations'

Sir, 'Stunning Revelations' written

by Mridul Chowdhury that appeared on June 30 in your esteemed daily on "Teens and Twenties" page was really stunning to me since no survey as such was ever conducted at Radiant International School. Therefore, findings and their analyses by some classmates and friends of the writer on the respondents from Radiant are not only misleading but definitely unreliable in respect of sampling of population and method of collecting data.

In our school, pupils are taught history, society and culture of Bangladesh as part of curriculum; significant dates are mentioned in the morning assemblies and due importance is given to events, festivals and life and works of famous people of Bangladesh and also Bangalees in general. Special occasions are also marked by bringing out wall magazines, taking up projects etc. and holding cultural functions in a befitting manner. Our own country and its people are not in the least disregarded due to ours being an English

medium school which, in my view,

does not make education worth its

essence.

For understanding students' apathy towards learning history and culture of their own country, there are many variables that must be taken into account of which the school curriculum, be it English or Bangla medium, is only one, otherwise a piece of research is bound to suffer from serious error like unreliability. It is not a matter of medium of instruc tion rather the philosophy of education upheld by the concerned author ities that matters more in such a

It is surprising that a survey research was done so perfunctorily and in an unauthoritative manner.

Nazma Yeasmeen Haque Radiant International School Dhanmondi, Dhaka

### Karachi is burning Sir, I was a student of the Karachi

University in 1964-66. Pakistan was at war with India in 1965. Karachi being an important port city of Pakistan was the target of attack. The Muhajirs (Indian repatriated Muslims) stood side by side with other ethnic groups of people at that time. Karachi is the biggest town of Pakistan and internationally reputed one. But this beautiful town is now experiencing violence everyday. The innocent children, men, women are being killed in the fight between the Muhajirs and Sindhis.

The people of the densely populated city passing their days with great anxiety. We are also shocked to see the scale of violence everyday. It is the Muslims everywhere Bosnian, Ethiopia, Sudan, Algeria, Afghanistan, Mindanao, Palestine, Chechnya and now Pakistan are being gunned down.

Islam is the religion of peace and justice. It is only Islamic teaching which can stop this type of mindless violence. I appeal to all Muslim leaders to exert their influence to stop these killings.

Mahbubul Hague Chowdhury Kalabagan Dhaka

## 'Jeepney' in Dhaka!

Sir. It is encouraging to learn that a new mode of public transport will start plying in the streets of Dhaka city within the next few weeks. This transport called "Jeepney" is not only

popular but also cost-effective and viable in metro Manila and other ci ties of the Philippines. In fact, such a cost-effective and viable transport should have been introduced here long before to mitigate the acute transport problems faced by a fast growing city population. Although it is late, the sponsors and the entrepreneurs deserve an appreciation for undertaking this commendable initiative.

I remember of availing frequent jeepney service in the late seventies when I was a student of the University of the Philippines. An efficient jeepnev service was in operation in the sprawling campus of the university in the Quezon city. The jeepneys were kept well decorated and often furnished with some musical system reflecting the taste and outlook of the owners. There is no harm in being optimistic that jeepneys in Dhaka will be maintained properly with a view to providing comfort and satisfaction to the commuters.

The introduction of jeepney in Dhaka is an outcome of closer link and cooperation between the two countries of the South. There is no doubt that the nations of the Southern hemisphere can benefit themselves in terms of economic growth and development through transfer of technology and knowledge.

Md. K M Uddin Zigatala, Dhaka

### White paper and letter size

Sir, The Daily Star was being published partially on white paper for a long time. But since the 7th instant the daily has come out fully in white paper. This is indeed a welcome event for the readers.

But with the full white paper the letter size has become so minute that the naked eye is under pressure to recognize them. The size of the paper has also been reduced a bit. If the letter size does not return soon to nor malcy, all the good qualities of the daily compared to other papers, I am afraid, may be lost.

Therefore, the editor and the publisher of my favourite daily are requested to do the necessary

> M A S Mollah Member, BAAS, Dhaka

## East-West Bid to Stop the Nuclear Traffickers

Thomas Land writes from Vienna

HE customs authorities of Russia and the West have joined forces in a top-priority venture to stop the illicit trade in plutonium and other materials used in the manufacture of nuclear

The scheme is being launched under the authority of the United Nations International Atomic Energy Agency (LAEA) in Vienna. It includes the establishment of a global database on the transport of such dangerous cargoes, practical assistance to Eastern European countries with traffic screening at ports and the strengthening of national systems for the accounting of fissile materi-

This is the biggest single cooperative venture linking the national security agencies of East and West since the end of the Cold War. The scheme is advancing despite sharp disagree ments over the nature and extent of the illegal transport of fissile materials and the best means of suppressing

After a meeting of the board of directors of the IAEA, director-general Dr Hans Blix said the agency's view was that the control and protection of nuclear materials should remain a national responsibility.

His initiative follows an accord by Russia with Western countries to exchange intelligence and synchronise customs and police action against the traffickers. This is a sensitive issue because influential voices in the Russian Ministry of Nuclear Power speak of a plot by Western intelligence agents to demonstrate Moscow's incompetence in preventing nuclear smuggling.

Nevertheless, Russia shares Western concern over the safety of the nuclear stockpile which it has inherited from the Soviet Union.

The widening traffic has led to arrests in Germany, Hungary, Turkey and elsewhere and the seizure of restricted fissile materials available to the highest bidder. Czech police recently arrested three men, including a nuclear physicist, holding a three kilogram consignment described as weapons grade uranium. The first big trial of alleged smugglers is under way in (crmany.

Specialists have warned ever since the implosion of Communist power that the remaining nuclear materials poorly guarded and hardly accounted for in the former Soviet republics may fall into the hands of international terrorists or "rogue states."

There is far more weapons-grade nuclear material at large in the former Soviet Union than anyone realises, cautions Vladmir Chernenko, outspoken former director of the Chernobyl autonomic power plant which exploded in 1987. According to one authoritative

estimate, up to 400 tons of plutonium and 700 tons of enriched uranium are stockpiled in Russia alone at various installations, in the absence of any reliable accounting system. The scheme to arrest the trade in

dangerous cargoes obtained by criminal groups involved the creation of a clearing-house for the exchange of secret intelligence, backed by a database on missing nuclear materials. Its establishment will cost perhaps \$ 10.5 million.

Most of the money has been raised already by Germany, the United States, France and Britain, the countries most anxious to confront the smugglers. A specialist unit to combat nuclear smuggling has been established within Interpol, the international police agency, comprising investigators from 24 European coun-

The customs authorities of some of the most affected countries. mostly in Eastern and Central Europe, but also in Sweden and Germany, have already introduced specialist training programmes, as well as radiation detectors for routine cargo

The global intelligence clearinghouse and database are to be set up under a resolution passed by an international conference at IAEA headquarters. It expressed "grave con-

cern' over nuclear smuggling and emphasised the importance of cooperation in the search for a remedy.

Significantly, the resolution in troduced by Germany on behalf of the European Union projects a wide range of much tougher further measures. It calls for the establishment and upgrading of national systems of accounting and control of nuclear materials as well as the authorisation of additional options for the collection, verification and analysis of crime prevention data.

Further proposals now being prepared by the IAEA member states are to be published shortly. They will include measures to help the former Soviet republics to protect fissile materials from criminals.

Russia has acknowledge 700 incidents involving the theft or at tempted theft of nuclear materials over the past two years. Germany alone made at least five seizures of weapons-grade plutonium last year and apprehended more than 500 people suspected of involvement in nuclear smuggling. No-one knows what quantities of fissile materials may have been amassed for criminal purposes.

The export traffic tends to follow the route of rare metals shipped to the West Illegally from Russia through Estonia. Smugglers also favour a southern route through the Czech Republic, Austria, northern Italy and southern Germany The best-equipped couriers use

stand radiation for some time. Some smugglers, unaware of the nature of their body-packed contraband, have been killed or maimed by radiation. Police in Frankfurt once seized inadequately-shielded radioactive

lead containers designed to with-

materials left in a railway locker. They fear that the smugglers may one day simply abandon their deadly wares if they are unable to sell them. The black market price of weapons-grade plutonium varies from \$ 250,000 to \$6 million a kilogram. A

8 kilograms of plutonium, according But much smaller quantities could cause enormous damage through radiation, if successfully ignited. And as little as one kilogram of plutonium could cause thousand of deaths if

military device would contain at least

The Washington-based National Resources Defence Council believes that recently de-classified technical reports describing US weapons research could enable terrorists to build a one kilotonne nuclear device

dumped into the public water sys-

with just one kilogram of plutonium. President Boris Yeltsin has assured the West of Russia's willingness to ensure the safety of the country's nuclear materials. There is no doubt about the security of Russian nuclear weapons still awaiting dismantling under close military protection. But the civilian atomic power industry, as well as the many nuclear institutions once under heavy guard, are

now wide open to abuse. Top intelligence officers from Britain, Germany, France and the United States have recently visited Moscow, accompanies by a back-up team of experts, to investigate Russia's entire system for the control of

nuclear Materials. Their advice remains confidential. But their governments are vigorously demanding tougher measures to prevent smuggling, including a substantial tightening of controls and international inspection of nuclear installations and stockpiles.

Supporters of Russia's powerful atomic energy ministry have vociferously opposed all such proposals as an attempt by the West to gain control over the country's nuclear instal-

lations. But the Kremlin's commitment to international safeguards coordinated through the IAEA suggests that their campaign is running out of steam. -**GEMINI NEWS** 

THOMAS LAND is a writer and a freelance journalist. specialising in international relations.

