Founder-Editor: Late S. M. Ali

Dhaka, Saturday, July 29, 1995

Log-jam

The Prime Minister's directive to the metropolitan traffic police authority to the effect that they streamline the completely broken down traffic system without much ado, could not have come a day earlier. In fact, had it been issued at her high executive level much earlier, to a wider range of relevant authorities, the collapse of the system would have been well on the mend by now. However, now we are urging her to pursue the question of com pliance with her instructions till the very end.

The high functionaries of the government who are there to advise her must be knowing all along that whatever may be the city traffic authority's own shortcomings they are exposing these while handling the end-results of other people's and agencies' inadequacies and uncoordinated performances. When we talk of a system conking out we are hardly concentrating on its parts and meaning all things to everybody.

In our sustained 'Save Dhaka' campaign, setting right the chaotic traffic has been high on the agenda. With the benefit of consultation with several multidisciplinary experts we have a recipe to offer on the subject. It is based on delineation of each agency's responsibilities and then their discharge in a flawless coordination with each other under the scrutinising eye of a compact supra-authority ensuring both intra-and inter-agency accountability.

As for details, the maximum allowable number of rickshaws has to be fixed with the unlicensed ones phased out; all forms of encroachment on pavements and roads have to be eliminated including the unauthorised busstops; unplanned road-diggings must cease; underground car parking lots need to be developed and extensively used; existing parking spaces must be clearly marked out; and overbridges laid across suitable points.

It is time our obsession with eve-level development work starts yielding place to overbridges, flyovers and underground parking lots like the tiny Singapore has gone for with what a tremendous effect everybody know.

Let These be Sustained

Congratulations to the police. They reacted with rare speed and effectiveness in both the Tanbazar and Islampur cases. Moreover, both the cases were example-setting ones in that they ideally combined watchdog journalism, human rights action and police operation. It was indeed encouraging to see Shadhina being rescued basing on a newspaper report, and the 'terror of Tanbazar' Shilpi nabbed. Subsequently in another record-setting performance the police raided the Narayangani red-light district as if under the leadership of two women lawyer human rights activists and rescued six children from there. What remains yet to be achieved is to sustain the action and rid the country of organised child prostitution through the formation of a special force to be charged with the job, as suggested in the columns of The Daily Star.

How far Islampur is from the modern capital of a modern state? Spatially it may not be more than 50 kilometres. In this backyard of the capital city was going to be enacted a horror show befitting mediaeval Europe: burying a pregnant young woman upto the breast and killing her by flogging and stoning for the simple reason of being abandoned by her knight errant cousin who had set the course by raping her. Here also police wasted no time to react on activist and newspaper reports. Journalists preceded police to the spot and saw all arrangements for the lynching complete. Police arrived in good time to undo the occurrence for which the whole village was agog with both apprehension and anticipation.

Two questions foul up this happy picture of things happening as they ideally should. Why wasn't there any local resistance even after the shalish broke up with people disagreeing with the punishment? The villages seem to be under some spell of terror from anything resembling fatwabazi. This must go for we cannot expect our villages to be transformed into bastions of just and humane society by police action alone. But perhaps we still have miles to go before we can have social conscience to react. There is this question: how could a moulana who had decreed an infamous fatwa on the horrible case of Brahmanbaria's Shopnahar be declared this year's best madrasha teacher? - begging for an answer.

Towards a National Theatre

Yes, this is quite a milestone. A two-day festival was opened on Thursday by Mayor Hanif, to celebrate that theatrical milestone. That evening the group theatre held the 200th stage presentation of Mamtazuddin Ahmed's play Shatghater Kanakori. This was a record presentation of any original play written by a Bangladesh writer. Quite an achievement to celebrate — and we join the ranks rejoicing over the event. And we hope other milestones would continue to be set in our world of the theatre.

The big leap forward in the theatre in 1972 could take shape but for the very practical step taken by Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman: exempting theatrical presentations of entertainment tax. This was only to be followed by another long-awaited action of building professional show houses designed to cater exclusively to theatre, and there could be a revolutionary transformation of this art form so reflective of our life and society. But, since then, two full decades rolled by without there being any move towards its fulfilment. Now a close follower of the leader is taking unusual interest in the theatre and if Hanif lives up to his pledges we could be having at least three theatre houses before his present tenure comes to an end.

The Mahila Samity and Guide House-based theatre movement is heroic but too much too constricted to house a national endeavour. With more show houses, groups would have multiplied as would have the number of spectators. Theatre is about man — man in society. The more our theatre draws on our people and our society, the better the prospect and justification of our national theatre. We felicitate Shatghater Kanakori and its creator from that standpoint.

HERE is, perhaps, no FM's Frank and Fledgy Frustrations doubt that the fall of the autocratic regime in 1990 and its replacement

It is upto the voters to judge whether the ruling party bagged more debits than credits or vice versa during its tenure in office. Unfortunately, there is very few, like the Finance Minister, in the present cabinet to tell the truth and frankly admit frustrations.

rate: a slimmer budget deficit; more endogenous resources for ADPs etc. These are the gifts from reform measures which policy makers can rightly boast of, if they prefer to do so. One should share the view

that economic reforms and

with an elected government

through a neutral, caretaker

government in 1991 injected

some glimmer of hopes for

the citizens of a so-called

"hopeless" and "bottomless"

state of Bangladesh. Stepping

into the lifth year of its exis-

tence, time is ripe enough

for the ruling party to pres-

ent its accounts to the nation

and let them know to what

extent the hopes and

aspirations that people of this

country so patiently nurtured

and nourished during the last

four years, have come to mat-

erialize and if it is otherwise.

the reasons behind. App-

arently it seems that with the

dust closing to settle one

could, perhaps, return home

nent of the ruling BNP to air

such frustrations. The

Hon'ble Finance Minister M

Saifur Rahman himself venti-

lated some of the vital gaps

between the ruling party's

preachings and practices

during the four-year rule as

our elected government. It

may be mentioned here that

the Finance Minister is con-

sidered to be the architect

of the various reform pro-

grammes so far spearheaded

in Bangladesh. In a discussion

meeting organized by the

Metropolitan Chamber of

Commerce and Industry

(MCCI) last Wednesday, the

Minister is reported to have

expressed his full frustration

over the unfulfilled economic

reforms programme. The re-

form measures, as we all

know, were initiated to put

this distorted, rent-seeking,

inefficient and subsidy rav-

aged economy on an even

higher growth and lower

poverty path. It all started

well with vigorous drives at

liberalizing trade, reforming

tax polices and containing

government revenue expen-

ditures. As a result, over the

vears, the economy of

Bangladesh witnessed a level

of macro-stability, perhaps

yet unheard in this part of

Asia: a trimmed inflation

Koirala, former Prime

Minister and Nepali Congress

other opposition parties. Says

Surya Bahadur Thapa of the

Prajatantra Party: "The com-

munists are trying to thwart

parliamentary democracy by

recommending mid-term

sparked by a deft political

manoeuvre by Prime Minister

Man Mohan Adhikari to pre-

empt an opposition vote of

to a request for a parliamen-

tary session in which a de-

bate and no-confidence vote

date was reached Adhikari

nounced fresh elections for

November and asked the

Prime Minister and his

Council of Ministers to con-

tinue in office until the for-

mation of a new government.

plain that the minority gov-

ernment's move is a violation

of democratic norms and that

it is too soon for another

election: the previous polls

and the judiciary. By seeking

to distodge it, we were only

doing our national duty."

ous for the democracy."

Opposition leaders com-

The King agreed, an-

asked for a dissolution.

King Birendra had agreed

Opposition anger was

His view is echoed by

Rastriya

leader.

right-wing

no-confidence.

and thus to assure a

It does not need an oppo-

with freezing frustrations.

adjustments are those economic imperatives, of today's global and local scenario, that we can hardly live without. The de trop state interventions in every sphere of our economic life, the monumental losses of our public sector enterprises, the pervasiveness of loan defaults, the greed of the ill conceived private sector, and the skyrocketing public revenue expenditure at the cost of developmental needs, the unfortunate vagaries in the social sectors etc. appeared to be the rules of the economic games in the 1970s and the 1980s. Whether the reforms programme could lift the economy out of the wreck is a different question but the fundamental premise is that one can possibly hardly dream of creaming an economy without such endeavours. The economic policies of the present government and possibly of the future ones also) have been in right direction (though may not be in right earnest) which should have yielded a much larger dividend than the nation tends to have pocketed so long.

No Loaf is Better than Half!

There is a saying that half a loaf is better than no loaf. As far as reforms are concerned, the reverse could be true where 'no reform' rates better than 'some reforms'. There has been very little progress with respect to legal reforms - the capstan of a private sector-led development. Throughout its long

four-year tenure, the government has miserably failed to table any reforms on this score. Needless to mention. growth or investments (both local and foreign) and commerce hinge on the legal framework of the country and our legal framework, as it exists now, seems outdated and not in touch with the growing global changes. The Law Ministry, for its slow and unsteady performance, should be accountable for this sordid affair. The banking sector is reported to have conceived many reform programmes but produced very little. The Finance Minister,

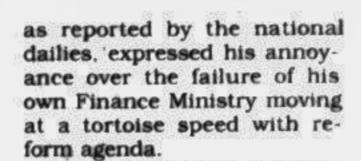
phants.

The public administration is perhaps at its lowest ebb in terms of efficiency. Corruption, red-tapism and unionism go rampant in public administration. While the economic policies are made outward oriented and market. friendly, the public administration still groans under centralized, politicised environment. No attempt so far could be in evidence in finetuning public administration.

While the journey towards economic reforms started with full enthusiasm, it suddenly stopped in the middle It is being hypothesized (and

Beneath the Surface

by Abdul Bayes



The power and telecommunication sector, historically under the public sector continues to miserably fail in delivering goods at reasonable efficiency to both households and industry, commerce and service sectors. The privatization of the telecommunications sector is yet to take place and with it, the growth of the economy is shelved for the distant future. Attempts to re-structuring the jute sector, revitalizing the public sector through various drops of reforms are hovering around failures. The nation is yet to feed the sector cooperations with 2-3 per cent of GDP which are continuing to exist as white ele-

the Finance Minister is also reported to go by that) that half-hearted and donor-dosed reforms did more damage to the economy and to the society. Economic reforms should be treated as a pack age, and any element of that package not fully cognized. might adversely affect the performance of the other members in the package. For example, suppose the trade liberalization measures in Bangladesh tend to suit and soothe the investors who feel tempted to invest in Bangladesh. After deciding to jump, the investor finds that the state machinery through its legal, financial and political ailments is to gripe him and his investment. In this situation, investments could be in the book of BOI or in some other agencies of the government but not in the

field. What the government

failed to deliver so far is an assurance to the investors that all is well with the available package.

In every country, any-

where in the world, reform programmes usually do not get a clear 'go'. Since adjustments and reforms bear terrible costs to the society or to a part of the society at least for a period of time, the obvious resistance always tends to reside and it is the initiator of reforms (in this case government), who has to build consensus around reforms. How far the government succeeded in doing that? The Finance Minister is reported to have aired the need for a political consensus but seemed very little enthusiastic in describing the reasons behind the failure. Here are possibly some of the reasons: From the very beginning, the government opted to choose a path of "go alone", perhaps, boomed by the fact that people's choice is only BNP and not others. So, it expected other political parties to hear its songs (whether one likes it or not). That the capsule did not work is clearly evident from the fact that the Finance Minister had to place three of the five national budgets without the opposition in the parliament. More itching is that the opposition has been out of the national parliament for more than two-thirds of the total tenure of this government.

Feckless Feathers

It is upto the voters to judge whether the ruling party bagged more debits than credits or vice versa during its tenure in office. Unfortunately, there is very few, like the Finance Minister, in the present cabinet to tell the truth and frankly admit frustrations. If there was any vision with the

ect, the government embarked upon some bold measures. But unfortunately these few bold measures placed the boat with the people in the middle of the river facing a storm. The opinion of the Supreme Court to the reference of the Hon'ble President only points to the fact that the present government is without any card to fiddle around the political game. Whether the opposition should have been forced to go so far and whether the parliamentary proceedings should have been drawn to the premises of our Supreme Court is a serious question to be answered immediately. In the meantime, we all are frustrated as our Finance Minister seems to be. The future government should learn a few lessons

government at all to start

with, that was the vision of a

market economy to revitalize

the economy and to that ef-

from the success and failures of the present government First under a democratic set-up, you need to pull all talents together to do something good to the nation. especially, if you want to venture upon costly reform measures; second, reform mea sures need a "complete" treatment rather than a partial one, otherwise incomplete dosage might adversely affect the health of the economy even worsen it: third. the opposition should be placed in every forum of economic management policies to make them own the changes and thus share the debits or credits; fourth, bad governance is the most powerful weevil to undo the benefits of reforms. Good governance is the touchstone of pure economic management and not the otherwise. The frustrations of the Finance Minister could be turned into celebrations if his government could present signs of good governance. And last but not the least, every cabinet should have at least a minister of Saifur Rahman's kind who would like to courageously reveal the rots rather than concealing them.

An Election?— That's Not Democratic, Claim the Opposition

T EPAL'S communist Mukul Sharma and Mohan Mainali writes from Kathmandu government is being

accused to trying to Nepal's new minority communist government will be asking for a stronger mandate for subvert democracy - by its reform programme when the country goes to the polls for the third time since a mass holding an election. movement against the monarchy erupted in 1990-91. Gemini News Service reports on "It is a conspiracy or grand design against democan election that the opposition claims is against the spirit of democracy. racy." said Girija Prasad



Adhikari, however, blames Opposition Parliament's short life: "Why didn't they wait for our first policy paper and Budget before they decided to topple the minority government?" he asks. "I did not have any

was in November 1994. Adhikari says that the "The people were fed up Communist Party (United Marxist and Leninist) with the government," says Congress leader Koirala. "It which won 88 of the 205 was systematically annihilatseats in the November elecing its political opponents tion - will campaign for an and attacking the roots of even stronger mandate. democracy, such as the press

other option."

"We will be more pro-people, more pro-village, more progressive in the coming months.

A former Speaker, Daman "We will go the people with our own comprehensive Nath Dhungana, considers programmes. We will say to that "The frequent dissolution of the House is dangerthem that we are not being allowed to implement our

policies. The politics of this country will be sharply polarised between the Left and the Right; but we will fight

and win." One of its key programmes is the "Build Our Village Ourselves" programme, under which the government plans to provide Rs500,000 to each of 4,000 village development commit-

A resident of Moolpani village near Kathmandu told the press that "this type of development mechanism has started for the first time in this country and it works honestly. Now we are in a position to decide whether we want to construct a school or a road."

Support for the government's policy of providing re-

lief even before trying to change the basic structures of society came from Mani, a young agricultural worker from Khuria village: "Now my children are getting free ed ucation until class nine. There is some financial help for deprived communities and they are also trying to in troduce a public distribution system for essential commodities."

The government has promised a land reform bill and measures to abolish bonded labour. Estimates put the number of bonded labourers and landless people at

Opposition parties are worried that the caretaker government may "bribe" voters by launching populist programmes, and have drawn the attention of the Election Commission to what they call "abuse of state power and treasury to influence voters' by the communists.

The Commission has instructed the government not to introduce any new programmes in the pre-election Budget and not to introduce administrative changes.

The communists are annoyed at the ruling. "Free and fair elections should not be an excuse for bringing development activities to a virtual

And there is a price to pay. Last year's election cost more than \$23 million -

halt," says senior party official

Devi Prasad Ojha.

which would finance a literacy drive for 200,000 people in a country with a literacy rate of only 39 per cent and average income per head of under \$200 a year.

But as Kanak Mani Dixit. editor of Himal magazine points out, "We are a fastforward democracy. A series of events took place within a short space of time. But the positive thing is that we are successfully experimenting with democracy, without resorting to any other way out."

MUKUL SHARMA is an Indian journalist. MOHAN MAINALI is a Nepalese free-

Traffic and Roundabout

M M Ahmad

A correspondent suggested in your 'opinion' column that the overcrowded street intersections in Dhaka city fitted with traffic light signals be converted into roundabouts without lights. The idea looks all right on paper, but practically it has been found, in Kuala Lumpur and New Delhi, for example, that roundabout is all right for low-density traffic; as, later, with increase in traffic density, traffic lights had to be installed at the four roads around the roundabout to control the entry and exit of vehicles into and out of the roundabout. This can be easily verified through computer simulation.

The problem is not with the system, but those who use the system; that is a human problem of indiscipline. This chaotic condition at the traffic lights or intersections is due to the disparity in the level of the drivers of the different types of vehicles. There are two types of disorderly behaviour: one while stationary, and other while moving, or beginning to move. Generally it is the lack of civic sense, not seen in cities like Tokyo, where the traffic is as dense. Do not allow lane changing before the red light, and the situation will ease considerably. An insecure mind (in an undeveloped society) is in a hurry not to miss his rights (that is why the queue system

does not work). The main roads may be widened. Remove the footpath from one side of the road (when there is no other option' left to widen the road). There should be separate lane at a different level for the non-mechanised vehicles such as pedal rickshaws, hand carts. Other types of restrictions may be tried. Depending on the loca tion: no entry; restricted right turn; no halting or

parking within 25 metres of intersection (this is a universal practice; the skirt is marked yellow); no parking

on main roads. The present bus stops on the main roads are designed for one bus, whereas two to four buses need the stop at one time. Cut down the waiting period. Remove a section of the footpath (equal to three bus lengths) to create a diversion for the bus stop. away from the road. No rickshaw may use the boxed bus stop area.

Any arrangement will fail (Murphy) if the road is overloaded four to ten times the designed load condition. Secondly, the current sanctioned strength of the traffic police is utterly inadequate to handle the vastly increased number of vehicles plying today in an environment bor-

dering on anarchy. It is necessary to curb the demand-supply situation; unlimited growth simply cannot be allowed in any sector (note the huge tax on private cars in Singapore). Some unauthorised rickshaws and drivers have been challenged, but the effect is not visible although the hiring charge is creeping up a little bit. The new business and shopping areas and multistoried buildings have to be carefully approved so as not to increase the density. Dispersal is the name of the game.

Democracy does not mean laxity in regulation, implementation, supervision, control, and prosecution. In the first place, a situation may not be allowed to get out of hand. Secondly, strictness has to be imposed (we are willing to suffer in public interest). The overcrowding and unauthorised use of the footpaths is as bad as that prevailing on the roads. Can we please have some system in the madness? There is a limit to means of popularity.

John Major and politicians

Sir, British Prime Minister John Major has taught all the politicians as to how to glow the leadership with brightness and effulgence. He does not posses any famous trade mark like umbrella of Nevelli Chamberlain or the cigar of Sir Winston Churchill. But his simple "put up or shut up" theory has made him great.

John Major resigned from the party leadership after a bitter policy squabbling over European union. He, however, won a clear victory in his battle for the leadership of the ruling Conservative Party. He has confuted his critics that politics is meant for the personal benefit of an individual or a group of persons. We congratulate the

Brush Prime Minister on his

political courage, foresight and success.

We planted the sapling of British parliamentary form of government holding the first general elections and electing AK Fazlul Huq as the first Chief Minister of then Bengal in the year 1937. But we have still a long way to go to institutionalise and practise parliamentary form of government in our country and enjoy the fruits of democracy. Shouldn't we be a bit more effortful? O H Kabir

What are the rules of load shedding?

Dhaka-1203.

Sir, Is there any specific order or instruction from the DESA for enforcing load shedding. These days we find electricity goes and comes of its whims. But what a disturbance, inconvenience and

heart patient. There must be lot of other old and serious patients in the city. Who will be responsible for the deterioration of their conditions? Who will bear the medical expenses if they are to rush to the hospital or private clinics due to disruption of electric supply leading to discontinuation of utility op-

people, are living in the greater Mirpur area comprising Mirpur, Shewrapara. Ibrahimpur, Kachukhet Puran Bazar-Natun Bazar, Uttar Kafrul-Paschim Kafrul-Purbo Kafrul-Dakhin Kafrul etc. Loadshedding has been 'impored' in these areas permanently. And to add salf to injury, the power supply is disrupted almost every now and then, though for a short period. Thank God, residents

no such loadshedding in those days, although corruption was prevalent in all walks of life, but certain not at such scale as of to-day.

May I be permitted to ask a pertinent and salient quesclass of people!

Dhaka-1206.

torture inflicted on us! I am a

eration in their houses?

We are, a several lakhs of

Flt. Lt (R) A B M Mahtuddin

of this area (South Kafrul when I live) do not know (except my close friends) that I had served with Power Development Board for long 20 years as a Dy Director till retired in 1983. There was

tion: Why there is no load shedding in Banani, Gulshan, Baridhara, and Dhaka 'Cantonment areas? Answer to this question is perhaps very clear - posh areas where the elite side. So they cannot be put to suffering where as nobody is suppered to bother about the sufferings of our