The Baily Star

Founder-Editor: Late S. M. Ali Dhaka, Wednesday, November 6, 1996

Govt-NGO Cooperation

The report entitled "Pursuing Common Goals: Strengthening Relations Between Government and Development NGOs" was published on Monday breathing fresh air into an atmosphere otherwise surcharged with myopic self-righteousness. It has lent a powerful voice to the felt need for a mutually reinforcing relationship between the government and non-government organisations and what is even better, has provided a recipe for meeting it.

The entire gamut of the existing relationship came under fire as both sides let off their ammunition in earnest so that the encounter produced filtered results in the end. All of this happened in the most appropriate presence of finance and agriculture ministers and the World Bank resident chief.

The NGO activists made a point of 'the unjustified interference in their legitimate activities.' This came as an upshot of the regulations and procedures applied, sometimes with stringency, which produced burdensome paperwork for them. To our understanding, paperwork can be reduced substantially by cutting down on the number of stages involved in giving decisions at the government level. Some legal fine-tuning may be necessary to demonstrate a greater liberalism towards NGO operations.

On the other side, the NGOs ought to see the government's viewpoint in order that the latter's answerability to parliament is amply served.

For the purposes of national development, the government and non-government organisations should look upon each other as partners in the same endeavour bound by the commonness of goals. Now, if their visions and strategies are synthesised only then one could expect incremental dividends from their partnership.

Among other things, we look towards the harnessing of the NGO potential in the area of social mobilisation encompassing health, literacy and family planning sectors. And then, with government and non-government agencies running complementary poverty alleviation programmes based on widened distribution of micro-credits, we really can change the face of rural Bangladesh.

System Needed

The daily changing spectacle of more dazzling new cars on the streets and the sprouting of car dealers' display centres on their sides more in the manner of fast-food joints, gives one an instant impression that cars are really on sale here in Bangladesh. This trend, backed by a widespread and largely vindicated remark that cars are selling at a relatively cheaper price, has been going strong for the last five years or so. The crammed car sheds at the Chittagong port, reported with visual support in yesterday's The Daily Star suggest that the pattern can only continue for any unforeseeable length of time.

Behind this encouraging facade of proliferation in the number of car-owning people in the country, there lies one or two causes of concern which the said report has also focused on. We have been put in the picture of two complaining camps on this issue: the car importers and the customs officials. The importers, according to customs officials, take recourse to underinvoicing while procuring the cars which purportedly has become a source of great delinquency. The government is being deprived of a huge amount of revenue regularly. So, the customs authorities withheld the release of the merchandise for a time but at present cars are being pulled away from the customs sheds by 'temporary' court orders subject to adjustment of taxes in future, if any.

Importers have been no less vocal in airing their side of the story. It is the custom officials, they say, who are at the root of the problem. Customs Department is being accused of overpricing the cars unreasonably. The importers are of the opinion that original prices of the cars are much less than registered in the chromatically exclusive record books of the concerned department.

The real story possibly lies somewhere between these two conflicting versions. The situation may not appear very serious since court orders, after all, are ensuring the government dues to the car importers but the spirit of healthy trade is definitely missing. Besides, the present state of affairs makes the consumers or car buyers absolutely vulnerable to the orchestrated exploitation of a section of car dealers. As the report says, only a handful of importers are making the most of the situation. Unless a streamlined system is evolved, unhealthy competition in the car market could soon run into chaos. Taking into consideration that a country or two in the neighbourhood may be facing a similar problem, could we not perhaps take a remedial cue from them.

US Chamber

American Chamber of Commerce (AmCham), the first single foreign country business body in Bangladesh began operation from yesterday. Novelty apart, it does have a great potential for evaluating and further boosting Bangladesh's trade relationship with the HS

While the formation of the AmCham will definitely serve as a beacon to the potential US investors, one hopes this should also pave the way for a genuine search for an expanded trade horizon for Bangladesh. Because, by the year 2005 the US quota of garment exporting countries will have gone and a progressive reduction of export in that sector will be the ruling pattern leading up to that time from now on. The AmCham can play a vital pathfinding role in helping Bangladesh to an alternate area of business in the US. These are, however, more futuristic thoughts related to the newlyformed body.

The AmCham or for that matter any other body would be no guarantee for enhanced business prospects involving Bangladesh unless political stability is maintained by all concerned. The government and the opposition need to share the responsibility for political stability in the country. Apparently, the government appears pretty focused on the order of the day which is economic development. The formation of the AmCham hot on the heels of the Prime Minister's recent exploratory visit to the US is indicative of an increased American interest in us.

The Afghan Cauldron

Pakistan will continue to remain a major player in the great game to bring Afghanistan back into the comity of nations as a respected member... Pakistan's clear interest is in a moderate government in Afghanistan that is interested in internal development and opening of various commercial trade routes.

Mazar-i-Sharif but stays in confrontation with government forces at the Salang Tunnel.

HE polarisation in Af-

warring Pashtun tribes having

banded together under a strictly

Islamic (mainly Sunni) banner

being opposed by the leaders of the Uzbek and Tajik minorities

if not the whole community.

with the Hizb-e-Wahdat repre-

senting most of the 13 per cent

Shia community in Afgha-

in short historical order

since 1979, we have (1) the nine

major Afghan Mujabideen fac-

tions fighting the Soviets and

their Alghan surrogates includ-

ing Jumbish Milli leader Dos-

tum: (2) all Alghan guerrilla

factions carried out an extended

guerilla campaign against the

Afghan communist regime in-

clusive of the Uzbek militia: (3)

a vear or so after the Soviet

withdrawal mercenary Dostum

changes sides and combines

with Rabbani's military com-

mander. Ahmed Shah Masood

to take power in Kabul and set

up the first post-communist

regime. An accord is brokered

by Saudi Arabia and Pakistan

in which Mujaddadi, a leader of

a comparatively smaller fac-

tion is made interim President

Afghanistan remains banded

into canton-like independent

Mazar-i-Sharif, Jalalabad, etc.

with the government in Kabul

exercising only that much

power that the local warlord al

lows them. Hekmatyar keeps

fighting government troops led

by bitter foe Masood; (4) Rab-

bani takes over peacefully as

President when Mujaddadi's

term expires, the situation re-

mains-the-same till Rabbani's

term expires and he refuses to

step down. Fighting rages east

of Kabul between government

forces and Hekmatyar's on one

side and Hizb-e-Wahdat on the

other: (5) With Afghanistan in

the grip of local chieftains act

ing as feudal warlords but vir

tually as bandits, collecting

"toll" from everyone with the

help of chains strung across the

roads: (6) the Taliban, who had

gone back to their Madrassas

after the Soviet withdrawal, de

cide that enough is enough

their first attempt to take over

Kandahar succeeds spectacu-

larly without any particular

fighting. They confiscate all

weapons, remove the chains

and bring peace to the city as

well as on the highways. Other

provinces and cities decide they

want this type of peace and go

over to the Taliban without

even a semblance of a fight: (7)

in the meantime. Masood's per

sonal animosity towards is-

mail Khan. Governor in Herat

makes for a classic error in

changing a winning horse and

appointing a military com-

mander Gen Alauddin whom

the Taliban soon engage in bat-

tle. Ismail Khan evacuates

Herat and Aladdin's forces in

Shindand Air Base simply melt

away. Taliban walk into Herat

without a fight, capturing many

serviceable aircraft at Shin-

dand. Taliban's ranks are now

augmented by many trained

troops shifting their alliances

from their former warlords, in

effect most of the Mujahideen

faction merge into the Taliban

entity: (8) to ease pressure from

Hekmatyar in the east and the

Hizb-e-Wadhat in the south-

west Rabbani asks Taliban to

come to Kabul and share power.

The Taliban attack Hekmatyar

at Charyasab and force him to

flee to Sarobi, they also squeeze

the Shia Hizb-e-Wahdat, Rab-

bani's Defence Minister refuses

to allow Taliban to come fur-

ther towards Kabul and attacks

them frontally, causing them to

lose ground; (9) Hekmatyar

makes up with Ahmad Shah

Masood and President Rabbani

inducts him as PM as per the

original version of the Afghan

Accord. Dostum remains away

from the tray in his own field at

enclaves like Kandahar, Herat

nistan in support.

ghanistan is somewhat

on ethnic lines, the

The Taliban resumed their offensive a few months ago, going first for Jalalabad to cut off the government's remaining supply route, this they achieve with less than 20 casualties. A pincer movement now develops towards Kabul with Taliban now actively assisted by some of the feudal factions opposed to the Rabbani government in Kabul as well trained government troops defecting alongwith their weapons and equipment. Unable to hold Kabul, Ahmed Shah Masood makes a hasty but orderly retreat at the end of September to his original guerrilla base in the Panjsheer Valley. A western media deeply enamoured with Masood has spread a canard that this retreat without a fight was a strategic ploy, a well-laid deception plan. The truth is that the Taliban normally send advance parties to prepare the local population about their advent but in this case because of the sudden collapse of the government and their hasty exit northwards, they did not do so and made a reckless chase. Fed by adverse propaganda, the local population, including the women, rose up against the extended Taliban all along the route. Masood took good advantage of this Taliban setback and almost succeeded in encircling them. In the meantime Rabban made up with Dostum and the mercenary warlord's well trained Uzbek fighters, first shored up Masood's forces as they drove south to Kabul but are now actively engaged along side in a bid to force the Talibar from Kabul. The Taliban are holding their ground north of Kabul. Money and weapons are pouring into Dostum and Ahmad Shah Masood from Iran Russia, India and the Central Asian States while the Taliban are relying mainly on stocks captured from the retreating

government forces The world perception is that the Taliban are Pakistani sur rogates being armed, trained supplied and directed by the ISI Nothing can be further from the truth! To retain some influ ence, no doubt Pakistan has some inter-action with the Taliban but not on the scale being propagated by Ahmed Shah Masood, India, Iran and now, of all the people Dostum Pakistan supported the Rabbani regime till a Masood-inspired mob burned down the Pakistan Embassy. Dostum is not only been a major recipient of Pakistan largesse, he maintains a wile and residence in Pakistan, his Balkh Airline operates twice weekly to Pakistan Iran has been supporting the Shia Hizb-e-Wahdat and anyone allied with them, air-lifting weapons and supplies to Dostum recently. The mercenary warlord should be anathema to Iranian ideology but expediency seems to triumph over principles. As for Iran giving the Taliban "obscurantism" label, they should do well to read what the western press has been labelling Iran. Because, of Pakistan's massive support to Hekmatyar seemingly during the Alghan war relative to smaller quantities given to Masood. Masood has been virulently anti-Pakistan, even after he has made up with Hekmatyar, seemingly the raison d'etre

And what is Pakistan proposing? In a sophisticated display of intense shuttle diplomacy, the only bright spot in the extended blight of the

ASISEEIT

Ikram Sehgal writes from Karachi

present ruling regime, the Pakistan team comprising Gen Babar, Ijlal Haidar Zaidi and supporting ISI personnel almost brought about a ceasefire in Alghanistan, envisaging (1) a demilitarized Kabul under UN control. (2) a broad-based government representative of the areas under Taliban control. the Uzbek and Tajik minorities as well as the Shias. The Taliban preference is for consensus only on the form of government and a referendum in the 25 per cent area not under their control but in contrast to their preference Pakistan is going in for real-politik, recognizing that Afghanistan has histori cally a fragmented society where neither the Uzbeks, Tajik and Shia minority can rule the Pashtun majority, nor is it right that the Pashtuns rule the Afghan roost because of their bigger numbers. Ostensibly Russia's policy is to contain the spread of "Islamic fundamentalism" on its southern flanks their actual aim is to keep the Central Asian States logistically dependent commercially upon Mother Russia rather than look south. Instead of exploiting their age old dream of easy access to the warm waters of the Indian Ocean, Russia is short sightedly pursuing a dogin the manger policy. Given the Iranian fear that

anything Pakistan does is a the behest of Saudi Arabia and the USA, its policy is not realistic. Ostensibly it is to also provide support for the Shia minority but even Iran has a more commercial aim, to ensure that trade via the land road/rail route from Central Asia remains through Iran to the Gulf negating Pakistan's pre-eminent status as the natural conduit for commerce in the region. As the only country in the region opposed to the Afghan Mujahideen throughout the war and having no common border with Afghanistan, India should not have been invited by Iran to attend an emergency regional conference on Afghanistan. That would have meant Pakistan accepting the fait accompli recognizing that Indians have a legitimate interest in Afghanistan. This would give them a serious nuisance

value in the future in the Cen-

tral Asian region. If Pakistan

and Iran were to have a com-

mon approach, there would be

no Alghan problem. As far as western propa ganda about Taliban, some canards and outright lies require nailing down. First of all the Taliban did not appear out of the blue, every Afghan Mujahideen faction had a Taliban group (Islamic students from the Madrassas) fighting along side. Fed up of what was happening around them the Taliban bands came together to make up their present strength. Trained troops from other factions joined them. The "Babar-Benazir force" labels as well as Pakistani sponsored mercenary" label was given by Masood and his Indian mentors to antagonise local population vis a-vis Taliban's credibility as an Afghan-sincere group Once they had captured the city the Taliban did ask working women to stay at home, with the stipulation that they would continue to be paid salaries

pending certain decisions to be made about the modus operandi to be adopted at work. In the presence of large numbers of guerrilla fighters and an uncertain law and order environment in Kabul, this "curfew" was necessary though it's real purpose could have been better explained to the population. We are not dealing with sophisticated administrators but basically inward-looking leaders who must be handled with care. Even then despite the continuing war barely north of Kabul,

women doctors and teachers

have been allowed to go back to work, so have female security guards at the Airport. In the first stage, girls up to nine years have gone back to school. The Taliban leadership will never become liberal-minded on the western model overnight, on the other hand the areas under their rule have absolute peace

and unhampered commerce. Whatever may be the present circumstances, the Babar-Zaidi shuttle has shown that Pakistan will continue to remain a major player in the great game to bring Afghanistan back into the comity of nations as a respected member. We have suffered mightily as a nation because of the severe deterioration in the quality of leadership in the ISI in the crucial period after Asad Durrani's stint as DG. However, the circumspect and locussed senior officers

who have been at the helm of ISI affairs for the past year have redeemed the situation somewhat. Diplomacy can only be effective when it is based on good information and contacts, leading to "proper" structuring of events and personalities. Pakistan's clear interest is in a moderate government in Afghanistan that is interested in internal development and opening of various commercial trade routes.

How can Pakistan be suspected to supporting the Taliban's purported extreme views? Pakistan itself needs to be more apprehensive than others since most Madrassas (Islamic schools) are on Pakistan's side of the Durand Line. the relatively young clerics who are the Taliban leaders may well ask one day, who was "Mr Durand" and where is his mythical line? The truth of the matter is that the Babar-Zaidi shuttle initiative have shown that Pakistan's policy vis-a-vis Afghanistan is not only pragmatic but are based in the best interests of the Afghan people.

OPINION

Clinton to Stay on in the White House

HE American Presidential poll creates a keen interest in the political arena — not only in the United States of America but throughout the world. The United States being a superpower dominates the global politics. So it is natural that a general curiosity surges in the minds of all people across the world as to who is going to be the next president of the United

States of America it is well known to all that a two-party democracy is in operation in the US politics. Traditionally, the Republicans and the Democrats are the two rival contestants in the presidential election. After a long lapse of time, the democrat candidate Bill Clinton occupied the White House for a period of four years in 1992. The victory of Bill Clinton raised new hopes in the minds of American voters about a bright future for their motherland. The Americans did not expect a transformation of their country overnight into a dreamland; they had reliance on the imagination, courage and active habits of young, handsome and agile governor of Arkansas.

The American people were

very anxious to see that the new incumbent, of the White House comes up to their expectations. During the electioneering campaign in 1992, Clinton did not make so many tall promises. His promises responded to the popular hopes and aspirations of the American people. He specially stressed the urgent need for an immediate change in the economy. He impressed upon the American people at that time that the change was necessary for introducing meaningful economic reforms. The main items of his promised reforms were to lower the cost of health services, to create more jobs to fight the menacing problem of unemployment. In reply to the Republican criticism about Clinton's experiences in diplomacy and foreign affairs. the democrat contestant said that economy of a country was

by M A Bari

its mainstay and that if the economy collapsed, no amount of diplomacy in foreign affairs could keep the banners of the country aloft. He felt that the economic collapse is bound to bring about a total collapse in all spheres of national life. He had also assured at that time that the chronic budget deficit problem created by the previous three presidential periods of the Republicans would have to be dealt with efficiently to reduce the gap between the receipt and the expenditures of the American budget.

During the current hectic electioneering campaign, the Republican Bob Dole and the Democrat Clinton were seriously engaged in impressing the American voters about their respective merits and performances. In course of the last two preelection presidential debates, telecast and broadcasts by the national media. Clinton claimed that during the last lour years of his tenure of of fice, the American economy had been more or less steady Both at home and abroad, the United States of America has not faced any serious set back. It has also been proudly declared by Clinton that in the private sector of economy. about ten million jobs have been created. Clinton had clearly hinted immediately before his election in 1992, as the American presidential candidate that the American administration needed to be stream lined. BY streamlining, he meant an administration small in size but vigorously efficient Clinton had fulfilled this promise by retrenching about twenty five thousand not -so-

It was the general expectations of the American people that if elected to power. Clinton administration would lay emphasis on health, education and environment. By now it clear to all Americans that Clinton has

Bob Dole, the other aspirant to the White House has started a scathing criticism against Clinton's ethical morality. In Sandiago University debate, he challenged Clinton to declared that Clinton would not pardon anybody or organization who would criticize the presidents morality. Clinton maintained a grim silence and said. "I could reply word for word and tit for tat, but I prefer to speak about America's future and individual American's prosperity. In short Clinton did not like to waste time on undesirable mud-slinging. This liberalism has paid Clinton rich dividends, as a result of which inspite of Dole's do or die campaign for winning the election, he has not been able to make any dent on Clinton's popularity. It may be noted that Bob Dole is widely know as a responsible and trustworthy gentleman. It seems that although the Republicans have been trying their level best to tarnish the good and praise-worthy image of Bill Clinton by frontal at tacks on personal life and unsubstantiated scandals about his public life. These unfounded aspersions could not find any credibility among the voters.

Bob Dole did not spare Clinton for his deep involvement in M E peace missions and other ventures around the world, and bitterly criticized his opponent for hugue wastage of public money for sending and maintaining troops in far-flung parts of the globe. But one can easily understand that the peace mission of Clinton established American leadership almost everywhere in the world. This proves that Clinton's administration both in domestic and foreign affairs have been simply splendid and one can say with confidence that the American people will shower further laurels on their national hero Bill Clinton.

We can conclude safely that President Clinton will stay on as the President of America and the resident of the White House for the second term.

Injustices and Irregularities in Promotion

been pursuing this very policy.

From the news items published in local dailies including "The Daily Star" on 13.9.96, it was known that 16 officers were promoted to the post of joint secretary to the government. It may be a welcome thing for those who have been promoted but surely humiliating for the seniors who have been by-passed almost in the same manner they were treated during the gono promotion (mass promotion) made in 1992 (which later was declared illegal by the High Court in Nov

This time too, about half a dozen of seniors have been superseded by their juniors. This was not expected and hence very

Among the deprived, if some one was made to suffer on proven disciplinary ground, it could be understandable and perhaps, he too might have accepted that as a matter of fait accompli

But the ones dropped off were for little or no reasons or on whimsical reasons like bagging a little less mark than the juniors in arbitrary evaluation process. It is agreed that there has to be some process to evaluate an officer to reward or punish him according to one's performance. But the process has to be a just and democratic one so that none is unjustly affected or rewarded, subjecting the authorities to question and criticism. For a long time the practice was to evaluate the officers in qualitative terms within the meaning of the phrases "very good", "good," "average", "bad' etc. together with the observa tions like "fit" or "unfit for promotion". A man declared fit by no means was supposed to be dropped from the consideration of promotion making way for his junior to be promoted. In case of the observation like "unfit for promotion", this terminology was considered as adverse and supposed to be communicated by the authorities to the incumbent officer. He thus had a chance to defend himself. In case he could genuinely defend, the adverse observation was either waived or expunged from his records and he was

considered good enough to run a

race for promotion along with

other equal eligible ones.

should vacancy or vacancies

Abu Imran

arise. This was fair.

In case of his failure to prove innocence, his being debarred from consideration for promotion was understandable and even acceptable. There was nothing wrong in that since

none would like that an ineffi-

cient or a proven controversial

person should be rewarded.

But unfortunately, a new process was devised out by the past regime whereby the concept of numerical supremacy coupled with believably personal whimsical consideration were introduced. Under this system a 100 mark was made as peakmark. This was further divided into two parts — 60 per cent earmarked for counting number from the ACR (annual confidential report) and 40 per cent privilege mark to be given by the committee unconstitutionally formed for promotion

Through application of the above system hundreds of juniors were promoted then in 1992 to the posts of Deputy Secretary/Joint Secretary to the government superseding hundreds of seniors. This being un-constitutional, the High Court declared this as illegal in Nov. 1994. The court decision was not implemented rather to uphold the whimsical action the then government countered it by filing an appeal against the decision with the Supreme Court, which has since been pending causing immense dis-

It was expected that the new government would do justice and promote all the deserving but deprived seniors. But alast the list of officers promoted to the post of joint secretary to the government published in local dailies on the 13th Sept still missed a good number of seniors who were again superseded by their juniors, even by as junior as a one batch below (around one year junior).

What was wronged by BNP government, unfortunately not righted by the Awami League government, although MPs of Al. pointed out the BNP's irregularities in matters of promotion in 1992.

This perhaps will not be righted because the officials in-

volved in promotion exercise more or less towed the same line of action minus the interview. They followed the numerical supremacy formulae arbitrarily. For instance, it is alleged that, they set a cut off point at 75 per cent marks obtained in the ACR ignoring the seniority. Now if someone has obtained say 74 per cent or 74.5 per cent marks, even if he was senior, he could not be considered although presumably his record was satisfactory and rated as "fit to be promoted" These all were ignored and one fell a prey to the mechanical computer system of "G-in G-out" (garbage in garbage out) although he deserved a humane approach to ease his longstanding suncrings This was logical too since if

one bagged 74.5 per cent and the other 75 per cent then what would be the qualitative difference between the two? And if the former happened to be a senior (74.5 per cent) it would be even unethical to promote the junior by-passing the senior since such thing creates bad bloods and un-healthy competition. A senior is a senior. If he is condemned through due process on efficiency ground or eliminated on health ground, perhaps there'd be little to grudge or grieve. But if one is eliminated on the basis of arbitrary numerical evaluation made by different set of people with different bent of mind frame (some biased, some liberal, some miserly etc), then it would not be fair since it would not correctly reflect the quality of an officer.

An objective evaluation (as said earlier) within the meaning of "very good", "good", "average", "bad" followed by a summary like "fit", "unfit" perhaps would be a more desirable thing for consideration of promotion giving due weightage to seniority for the sake of equity, justice and fairplay. Anything short of this may be considered unjust in the above case if the same principles were applied, it is believed, the grievances of the deprived seniors would be minimised. However, as the same has not been done before, after and even now, we request the Prime Minister to intervene for a solution of this outstanding problem

JS question-answer session

Sir, The question-answer session in our Jatiya Sangsad is one of the most important, lucid and informative activities of our law makers and the members of the parliament which immensely benefit all concerned, widen the knowledge and wisdom of our public leaders as well as the people of our country.

We have, however, noted with strong aversion and great disappointment that the time allocated to our MPs to raise questions and to answer those in the JS is very insignificant which neither quench the thirst of our MPs nor the members of the public. Further there is no record, no publication of any book on JS question-answer.

We would request our Leader of the House. Leader of the Opposition and also the Speaker of the House to kindly allocate minimum two hours daily for the JS question-answer session, arrange publication of JS questions and answers in a booklet form and make necessary arrangement for the sale of the same in public book stalls at a nominal price. O H Kabir

Official lapses

Wari, Dhaka-1203

Sir. I commend the moral courage of the conscientious citizen (Star. Letters, Nov 2) who had the guts to point out the norms about the 'official' photographs/portraits of dignitaries.

There cannot be any sentimentalism in officialdom. The bureaucracy is supposed to brief the seniors; thereafter the responsibility is transferred. I also endorse in principle

Mr Mahfuz Anam's Commentary (Nov 1) on the recent visit of the PM to UNGA. Amateurism should not be a part of

official planning. Enthusiasm
is not a part of official
performance.

Why place a garland on a grave? And why with a name-placard? Who are supposed to be impressed?

Information propagands

Information, propaganda and (local) rituals have to be separated. "Official" observance of rituals needs careful screening. Why garland a photograph?

The show and the heart are separate areas. Motivation cannot be hidden for long, good or bad. A mother does not have to 'advertise' her love for her children.

Let us show commercialism in moral and official spheres.

A Zabr

Dhaka

Trickle down nepotism?

Sir, Like many other columnists and editors. Mr Mahfuz Anam has quite eloquently pointed out the indecorousness of choosing one's companions on state visits at government cost without transparent justification. I have very recently learnt from my son — a fairly bright student of a leading school — that the bureaucrats of the prajatantra are also taking advantage of the situation.

The Prime Minister will

leave soon for the World Food Summit in Rome. Some time back an essay competition was hastily arranged by the Ministry of Education among school and college students on food, hunger and related topics and the first prize was declared to be participation in the Summit. There was no national advertisement for such an important competition, and most institutions did not get any notice. When the results were announced, unsurprisingly, the big prize for the college group went to the daughter of a senior bureaucrat of the Education Ministry itself, and even the school group winner was a close acquaintance of the same person. It is said that the judge for the handful of entries was an officer of an organisation directly under the same Ministry. To make it a happy family affair the Ministry has also agreed to provide for all costs for two guardians to accompany the winners. My son, who would have entered the competition had he known about it. is very angry. I really don't now how can console him. Bazhir Rahman

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Jamuna Bridge

Sir. The Prime Minister visited the Jamuna Bridge site on 12th October 1996 and got enough details on various aspects of the prestigious multipurpose bridge. She directed the Jamuna multipurpose bridge authority to complete this bridge in time though it is scheduled to be completed within December 1997. However, it reminds me that while foundation-laying ceremony of JMB was done around two years back by the former prime minister of BNP government, unfortunately the present prime ministers political party i.e. Awami League, observed day-long general strike in the country so as to create problems in the process of foundation-laying cere-

Under the above backdrop I am still in a dilemma in under standing consensus politics, politics of 'oikka matt' as often uttered by Awami League stalwarts! Jamuna Bridge is one of the top-most priority projects of the nation but till today I do not understand the politics of Awami League as above.

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