The Baily Star

Founder-Editor: Late S. M. Ali

Dhaka, Friday, June 20, 1997

Economic Back-pulls

Budget as an instrument of self-sustenance and incremental growth can hardly be sure-footed in its pursuit of national development goals when it is set against the backdrop of a default-induced liquidity crisis in the banking sector and the whopping figure of losses sustained by the stateowned enterprises. Finance Minister Shah A M S Kibria explained to the Parliament on Wednesday in reply to questions put to him on outstanding bank loans that while there has been a recovery of Tk 2002.98 crore during the period between January 1 and April 30, 1997, a huge amount still remained in default - to the tune of Tk 12,652.76 crore. Resultantly, the nationalised banking sector in particular is writhing under the pressure of a liquidity crisis which in turn have largely reduced their capacities to give loans to the industries, trade and commerce. Decline in investments led to the lessening of industrial production and a forced capping on new employment opportunities. What compounded the situation further is unabated government borrowing from the banks which again contributed to a credit squeeze on the private sector. After recovering one-seventh of the outstanding loans at an appreciable speed, the government finds itself on a hard pitch having to negotiate with the most wicked bunch of loanees now. There have been wilful defaulters and those that had taken out money on fictitious collaterals they hardly can now be pinned down on. The government has no option but to apply the laws they have already toughened up considerably to their credit against those who are found to be wilful defaulters regardless of their clout.

The conditions of 38 non-financial state-owned corporations having to do with public utilities, agricultural development and several industrial undertakings are even generally worse. Despite the artificial resuscitation from heavy government subsidisation and bank loans, 14 out of them accounted for losses worth Tk 1679.90 crore in 1996-97 fiscal. Twenty-four establishments made thinly spread out profits worth Tk 350.10 crore. The state sector contracted loans totalling Tk 3307.05 crore, a good 43 per cent of which remains unpaid to the banks.

Such a huge draining of resources in a cashstrapped country like Bangladesh cannot be allowed to go on without imperiling the lot of the commonman in the ultimate analysis. It is time the losing corporations ceased to be the happy hunting grounds for the corrupt, inefficient and wasteful elements. Only dedicated and skilful managerial hands and responsible trade unionism can save the day for them.

Human Rights

The Amnesty International (Al) has come up with an annual report that hardly projects Bangladesh in a very positive light. According to the report, as many as 13 people died in police custody in the country last year. Besides, allegedly political workers of the opposition political parties were harassed, tortured, or detained without trial. Death in police custody is unacceptable because the state is responsible for ensuring the detainees safety and care.

The Al report-based BBC programme aired on Wednesday night came on the heels of a tragic death of a Bangladesh Biman crew, Nuruzzaman, allegedly in police custody. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has been categorical that if his death was caused due to police atrocities, those found responsible will be given exemplary punishment. The prime minister has made her point clear about any death in police custody, which is likely to have a deterrent effect in the future. Even so, it would be better to devise institutional and administrative mechanism to bring an end to the untoward incidents that are interminably reported in the newspapers.

The government has already formed a permanent Human Rights Commission. Of paramount significance will be its effective role in all matters concerning human rights in the country. If the commission functions independently and actively, as it is widely expected to, both the government and the public will be beneficiaries of its work. So, it is important that the human rights commission gets all the cooperation it needs to establish the facts whenever controversy surrounds a death in custody or in similar other contentious matters. Let the much-vaunted police reform be carried out. In a democracy like ours, we cannot savour even a small scratch on our human rights record.

Veterinary Expertise

Yet another Himalayan black bear, a rare species, died in Chittagong Zoo the other day. This could hardly be news had the bear died a natural death. Before its death, it received no treatment. So did four others of its kind in the past five years in that zoo. Another important information is that they are of a batch of six that was impounded in 1992 when being smuggled out to South Korea via

Chittagong port. Apparently, the death of five bears at the Chittagong Zoo does not follow the pattern of the sensational killing of animals in Dhaka Zoo. But this is hardly an encouraging sign. That the bears received no treatment shows how inattentive the authorities there were to the animals. Reportedly, the last of the dead bears had been suffering from illness for a long time. Is there no doctor available in the country to treat such a rare species of animal? If not, how do we keep them confined in a zoo's cage? Over the years the bears' death should have moved the authority to prepare a veterinarian, if required by sending someone abroad, for their treatment. The authority neglected this primary duty. Why?

Providing proper care and medical treatment is a much neglected area of zoo management in our country. We surely need to develop the art of animal treatment in our country. So far as we know, the zoos — the one in Dhaka in particular — earn enough money to spend on such management programmes. Unfortunately, this side is given little attention. We want to see an attitudinal change in

this respect.

Bangladesh-India Relationships: How Much Do We Care?

by Dr Khandakar Qudrat-I Elahi

The questions and issues confronting us today do not relate to which political party we belong to or which

political party we sympathize. What is at stake today is our nation, our welfare and the welfare of our

executed a countrywide hartal on the 23rd March and vowed to carry on more agitations in future. It had announced to hold protest meetings and rallies and to start a region-based move-

What is BNP protesting against? It has many allegations against the government which include: load-shedding, deterioration of law and order situation, divulgation of examination papers, repression of BNP activists etc. The real reasons of protests are, however, laid open in the speeches of their leaders. Begum Khaleda Zia Chairperson of BNP, in announcing the hartal programme, had said, "The government has hatched out a blueprint of selling out the interests of the country; if the government remains in power, our sovereignty will be sacrificed. Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan, BNP Secretary General, had recently said, "The Foreign Minister has added a new chapter of slavery in country's history just on the eve of the completion of 25-year treaty with India by signing the JEC documents in New Delhi on March 12. The question now remains whether we will be able to remain as an independent nations as our sovereignty and independence are threatened. Obaidur Rahman had said, "The government must be toppled to save our country and safeguard our independence. We want gen eral elections immediately". And finally, Moudud Ahmed had said, "After 25 years, the

HE Bangladesh war had

by my reply. But he was taken

aback when I said that there

should harm our country."

Some 25 years have gone by

and I do not think that the press

has changed much since. The

armed forces are still a holy

cow. Any debate, which may

show them in a bad light, is

considered "anti-national."

Surprisingly, even parliament

does not discuss them. There

has never been any outside

probe into the affairs of mili-

tary, not even a demand for it.

And there is so much awe about

them that the instances of their

excesses, both in the north-east

and in Kashmir, are seldom

criticised, much less followed

misinformation has condi-

believes even such cooked-up

tioned the mind of the nation. It

The cover of secrecy and

ment or anyone else.

not yet started when the

then New York Times

future generations. Is it not the right time that we think over these issues in our right mind? country is facing a challenge: it has no economy, no foreign policy and no social policy. This government is overpowered by the spectre of destruction and

conspiracy: it is selling out the

country to India. An interim

election is a must to restore po-

litical stability in the country." It is not very difficult to figure out what are the primary motivations behind BNP's agitating activities: they want to destabilize the economic, social and political situation in the country so that they score on their fight to regain power. To achieve their goals, they have been using some very sensitive issues: issues that relate to the Bangladesh-India relationships. These issues are the treaties between Bangladesh and India on water-sharing and road transit. They are defiberately using these issues because they believe that they can win over people's support and sym-

pathy. All of us, irrespective of our affiliation or support or sympathy to any political party, need to analyze the situation with clear conscience if we do care about our welfare and the welfare of our future generations.

One fact of our national life, whose importance and impli-

cation must we understand adequately and remember in undertaking all our activities and thinking relating to our nation. is this: We have virtually only one neighbour that is huge compared to us in all respects that determine international relationships. India is approximately 23 times bigger than we are geographically, and her economy and population are respectively 9 and 8 times greater than ours. Above all, she is politically more stable and economically more advanced. All these facts lead to what constitute the notion of "Big Brotherhood", a concept that is used to imply domination, exploita-

To face the challenge of such a giant, we have to answer many questions and resolve many issues. Here however l wish to present three questions, questions that I believe are extremely important to settle our national crisis: (i) What can we do about this giant? (ii) What kind of evidence our political parties have created in developing relations with India? (iii) How are we going to benefit by harbouring anti-Indian senti-

tion and extortion for respect

and cooperation, if not obedi-

ence, in foreign relations.

First of all, we cannot even imagine to emulate India's size: whether it is economic, demographic, political or not to mention geographic. This means that the giant will remain with us for the unforeseeable future with the challenge to overpower us. The only way I see to face up to Indian challenges is through continuous stability and progressive development of our nation. We know very well that our records of political stability are not only deplorable but also devastating.

How have we fared in build-

ing our economic relations with

India? We have now three major political parties all of which have ruled the country: Awami League (AL), Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), and Jatiya Party (JP). During our 25 years of independence, BNP had ruled twice and perhaps for the longest period of time: from 1976 to 1981 (Ziaur Rahman was the key person in the governments during this period) and then again 1991 to 1995. The next party is JP which ruled from 1982 to 1990. AL got the least time to rule the country. The performance of these parties may be taken as an evidence to judge their current political slogans and promises

and to measure what they can

and cannot do. How had the economic relations between Bangladesh and

India developed during the regimes of these three parties? One important indicator of such relationship is the external trade. During the AL regime we used to import US\$ 11.34 worth of goods and services from India for every dollar of exports. During BNP's first ruling period, this figure came down to US\$ 6.10 but jumped to US\$ 23.14 in the second period. In the JP period, the figure was US\$ 4.94.

We have analyzed only the recorded trade data; the trade situation in reality is even worse since the smuggling be-tween Bangladesh and India is quite extensive. The trade data indicate how vulnerable we are to India. During the last BNP regime, we sold only 0.8% of total exports to India but bought more than 10% our total imports from India. Given these sorts of economic relations between the two countries and BNP's very discouraging performance, what BNP actually proposes to do to save our sovereignty from India's socalled evil desire if it is returned to power?

Finally for many reasons,

important, the Bangladesh-India relationships are very sensitive to us. The acrimonious communal relationships that developed in Indian sub-continent over centuries, which the British used very effectively to perpetuate their colonial rules, and which eventually resulted in the creation of Pakistan and India in 1947, still haunt many of us pervasively. Whether these feelings towards India are based on emotions or religious beliefs or some kind of valid reasons, is a quite different question. What is really important for us to ponder today is: How are we going to benefit by fostering anti-Indian sentiment: the sentiment that creates hostility towards India? The much more important question that we need to ask ourselves is: How do we expect India to be reasonable and agree to a relationship with us that is in our advantage when one of our major political parties is basically anti-Indian and will resort to any means to create hostility for their political advantage?

religions are perhaps the most

Again it is not a question of which political party we belong to or which political party we sympathize. What is at stake today is our nation, our welfare and the welfare of our future generations. Is it not the right time that we think over these issues in our right mind?

The author is a Visitor, Dept. of Economics, University of Guelph, Ontario, Canada.

Secrecy and the Cooked-up Brew

The cover of secrecy and misinformation has conditioned the mind of the nation. It believes even such cooked-up stories as the Samba spying incident. In the late 1970s and the early 1980s, dozens of army officers, JCOs and men reportedly spied on behalf of Pakistan at the Jammu border. It has turned out to be a concocted case.

correspondent to India came to me with a query. I was at that time the Resident Editor of The Statesman, New Delhi. He wanted to find out whether the stories as the Samba spying in-Indian newspapers knew that cident. In the late 1970s and the Mujibnagar was in the outskirts of Calcutta and early 1980s, dozens of army ofwhether 'some advice' had been ficers, JCOs and men reportedly spied on behalf of Pakistan at given not to print the informathe Jammu border. It has made no excuses and told turned out to be a concocted him that most editors were case. Some elements at the aware of it but did not intenarmy headquarters, for reasons other than professional, have tionally use it. He was surprised

was no 'advice' from governup in fail for life. In the secret category is a re-"We ourselves decide what is port on India's defeat at the hands of China in 1962. Till toin the interest of our country and keep out what we think is day, we have not seen what the not." I said something like that. inquiry officer, Lt. Gen. Hen-Still, I could not reply to his derson-Brooks wrote in the repersistent question: "Why?" All port. Maybe, the acts of omisthat I said was that "not many sion and commission by the years have passed since we were then prime minister Jawaharsubjugated and so we think it is lal Nehru and then defence unpatriotic to publish anything minister Krishna Menon, are so about defence forces lest we many that no government dares

ruined the lives of certain offi-

cers, some of whom have ended

two heroes. As a citizen, more so as a journalist, I have the right to know what is in the report. I have written several letters to the defence ministry, the last one to Defence Minister Mulayam Singh Yadav. But there is no acknowledgment, much less the courtesy of even a negative

to face the denigration of the

More recently, the defence ministry made a fool of itself when it forced Major General Arjun Ray, a serving officer, to cancel at the eleventh hour a press conference on Kasmir Diary. The book had been cleared for publication and was launched two days earlier by the chief of the army staff. What Ray has written should be dis-

cussed by the nation so that it comes to know that the armed forces have their failings. If they do not come into the open, the truth will never be told and, to that extent, people will not see the military in its true

Ray says: "In hindsight, banning the entry of the media into Tsrar-e-Sharif during early April of 1995 was a colossal blunder. Even after the first fire in the town on the night of 8/9 May, the media could have

blacken their face. But this is not correct. They may fear humiliation over the manner in which the Chinese forces cut through the Indian defence in 1962 like a knife through butter. But when all facts are before the public, they will expose politicians. The ministry can play the fool but why should the military?

The ministry does not realise that it loses credibility when it denies facts. One of our super-sonic planes intruded

I do not know what is the real story on the Prithvi missile. After Prime Minister Inder Guiral's categorical statement that Prithvi is not being deployed, I am certain that Pakistan does not have to entertain any fear on this count. But instead of leaks or plants, the defence ministry should have come out with an authentic statement on the Washington Post story that missiles were moved to Jaiandhar.

True, there is a difference between the deployment and storage. And India, if at all, has stored the missiles, not deployed them on the front Pakistan too has stored the Chinese missiles near the border. Why to beat about the bush? Why not to say what is the position? In a way. The defence ministry wants to hide the truth from the country when the whole world knows what the position is.

The defence ministry should handle at least foreign press better. It cut a sorry figure when it cancelled Ray's press conference where foreign correspon-

dents were present in full strength. On the missiles, the story told was full of holes. In the absence of authentic information, they sent such versions as are not even remotely correct. Our fault is that we tried to close the door after the horse has bolted the stable.

"The handling of foreign correspondents and the international electronic media leaves much to be desired and India's viewpoint on critical matters does not receive due attention," says a retired Lt. General. He is surprised why the militancy never takes the Indian press into confidence. He blames our obsession with se-

What is not realised is that secrecy only decreases the credibility of official assertions. Even honest claims of government begin to be questioned. In a democracy, where faith stirs the people's response, the government cannot afford to have even an iota of doubt about what it says or does.

Still I do not blame the government as much as the Indian press. It has developed an attitude where the armed forces can literally get away with anything. It is too ready to leave out, too nice, altogether too refined. The defence ministry should not ask for more.

BETWEEN THE LINES

Kuldip Nayar writes from New Delhi

been sent in to see the true picture for themselves. That the administration failed to seize this media opportunity, is also a fact." I wish the Indian newspapers had written about it. But, dutifully, it ran the version which the defence ministry

Such a bugbear is the secrecy that the defence ministry has not issued for public reading the accounts it has recorded on the India-Pakistan wars in 1948. 1965 and 1971. The one on 1948 war was partially distributed but hurriedly withdrawn. The ministry is afraid of informed opinion. Top military brass are no different. They are all determined to keep people in the

Truth, many believe, will

nto Pakistan's air space a few days ago. There was no purpose behind it. It was purely the mistake of the pilot. Why did we have to say that there was no violation and allow Pakistan to go all over the world to project us as aggressors. Islamabad would have probably trusted us if we had informed it that it was

a bona fide mistake. In contrast, we apologised to the Dhaka government the other day when one of our planes violated the air space of Bangladesh. The matter ended there and then. There was no outcry in the media as was the case in Pakistan. But then New Delhi had different standards for the two countries. That itself is not understandable and needs explanation.

OPINION

Outrageous, Disgraceful to Say the Least

Prof Mehrunnisa Ahmed Chowdhury

What an outrageous and inhuman and disgraceful series of acts are being committed on our womenfolk, particularly the teenagers of our society. It seems that the number of these sex-maniacs are increasing in leaps and bounds and no substantial steps are being taken to arrest the gigantic stride of this

horrible crime. Not a single day goes without the horrid news of young girls being raped, tortured or murdered. Even if they live, it will be a hellish life of perpetual trauma and agony. They never will be the same — lively, carefree and innocent child - again. I feel sick and extremely angry and frustrated, even guilty going through these disgusting news, how our younger generation the budding flowers are be-

ing molested, abused and destroyed, their youthful hopes and dreams shattered even before they have the chance to enjoy the light and freshness of their juvenility. Everyday

young girls are not only being raped but gangraped, and girls are dying even in custody. These monsters (curse be upon them) went so far as to molest a 4year-old baby girl and did not spare a cripple girl who was raped within the four walls of her home. Oh God! even Satan must have shed some tears over the tragic plight of these help-

less unfortunate children.

Are we living in a society of

mankind suppose to have some

semblance of conscience and morality or completely devoid of such human qualities? Words fail me when I hear of such frightful stories of indignities perpetrated on our young women and children. I am baffled and simply perplexed why these dangerous criminals are roaming about scot-free? Why they can't be brought to book and punished even when their identities are known and ample proof of the heinous crime they have committed? As citizens of the country don't we have the right to ask whether the wheels of justice have become so rusted that they cannot move to crush these atrocious forces out to destroy the every existence of 'Humanity' in our society? How are we going to justify it to our future generation? And then, why all these so-called investigations, discussions and publicity in newspapers on such act of humiliation and disgrace? Why is this sacrilege of the dead

body of a young girl to be exhumed for post-mortem and that also for that particular shameful reason? Why can't these human rabids be summarily executed to save innocent, helpless girls and children, who have become so scared that they can't even breathe in open air? It is not uncommon to see

news flashed about rapists and murderers being prosecuted in Saudi Arabia and Middle East countries who strictly follow Islamic laws. I know the mention of religion always raise eyebrows in some quarters; but I must say that Islam is a religion of mankind and the laws are formulated in accordance with the basic human nature. This fact, however, has been accepted in India which is a secular country and one of the biggest democracies in the world. I was immensely impressed and pleased by the news published in The Daily Star of 28th May, '97, that a 44-year-old rapist was hanged to death and that his mercy petition was rejected by the Hon'ble President of the country. It further says that 15 such cases were executed since the year '91.

There are people who really believe in the 'dignity' and 'honour' of their mothers and sisters. I heartily congratulate the people of India and their legal system that effectively protects and respects their womenfolk, for it is the people who are the real 'law makers' of that country.

And here in our country, to my knowledge, not a single one has been prosecuted, I mean awarded capital punishment to that effect. We have much hullabaloo and clamour but no substantial step has yet been taken. How do we justify ourselves?' I repeat it.

Here. I would like to draw the attention of our social organisations of women who are doing laudable services for the welfare of women and request them to come forward and take these cases more seriously, particularly our respected woman lawyers on whom we depend so much should find out the loopholes in our legal system so that these monsters when caught red-handed must be executed with immediate effect. They must be awarded 'capital punishment.' 'Death is what they deserve', and nothing short of

Let's find them

Sir, Recently, an American anthropologist William Haglund told the Washington Post about excavating a mass grave near Srebrenica of some 60 people to have executed by Bosnian Serbs.

He said: "You must think of these people as witnesses. Let them tell their story so that they might not have died in this place in vain."

I think we can take the ini-

Prayer and holiday

Sir, 'A citizen' wrote a letter in your esteemed newspaper on 12 June, 1997 which is one of many opinions expressed on the matter of working hours and weekly holiday recently. This particular one is quite sensible and tries to establish the rationale of the whole issue. I endorse the views so expressed. May I here mention that less than 10 per cent of our population are salaried i.e., having a regularly paid job with regular hours. The remaining 90 per cent or more of the population have no fixed working hours, do not have any 'weekend and probably work at all odd hours without any restriction of number of hours. The vast majority of this 90 per cent are devout Muslims even if not very vocal about that. When they have work, to earn their

bread, they do the same irrespective of day or time. When it is prayer time, they enter the nearest mosque. I have seen it many times. I am talking about a rickshaw-puller, a small shop-keeper, a day labourer with a spade and a basket standing in queues near Kathalbagan, New Market etc. They do not grumble about hours or days. They express gratitude to Allah for the meagre they earn. There are no 'union' or 'samity' for them to cry for more and more money and less and less work.

Will the fortunate 10 per cent stop creating a situation which only adds to the distress of the 90 per cent?

Another Citizen Dhaka

The myth of reduced rates

Sir, The BTTB in its various printed materials (e.g., Telephone Guide, Instruction Manual, etc.) urges the subscribers to utilise certain days of the week (e.g., public and weekly holidays) and certain hours (e.g., 10:00 PM to 6:00 AM) of the day to avail of the facility of reduced tariff.

Ever since my telephone went digital (thanks BTTB!) in January, '96, I, obviously, have made so many calls on those days and hours, but have never received any reduced bills! All these monthly bills contain total number of calls multiplied by a flat i.e. usual rate of Tk.

1.70 per call. Does the BTTB publish hoaxes? Or, shall I borrow Molla Nasiruddin's quip about cat and meat? It may run like this: if my bills included all the calls I made, where are the calls I made on those days and at those hours? And if my bills included all the calls I made, then where are the promised reduced rates for the calls I made on those days and at those

Could the BTTB or anybody enlighten me?

Dept. of Sociology, DU

Environment-friendly transport

Sir, Environment-friendly transport is everybody's dream. We often read news about rechargeable electric cars, solar energy for motorised vehicles etc., and then, nothing more.

But don't we have a near enough solution? I am referring to CNG as the motor fuel. This, think is a 'straw' which we, the 'drowning' people of Dhaka city. may try to 'catch at'. If the government issues an ultimatum for conversion of all 2-stroke engines (used in 3-wheelers) for use of CNG in 12 months' time or be banned from city roads, then there will be result. There is enough technological base in our country to do the conversion locally when there is a

pressure for the same. Some competent research body (say, BUET) should develop suitable injection system for these 3-wheelers ('baby' and 'tempo') for the necessary conversion. The existing fuel tanks are also to be modified or replaced with gas cylinders. Space constraint will necessitate smaller cylinders requiring frequent 'filling' or 'charging' This will generate employment to man the thousands of pumps or compressors of natural gas

all over the city. Stupid idea? But are not we already in a stupid mess created by us?

M A Haq Dhaka

Quota system in government service

Sir, Recently, the government has taken a decision to allocate 30 per cent quota in the government service for the offspring of freedom fighters. Those who had fought the Liberation War (1971), I recall them with great respect. Everybody living at that time contributed more or less something in achieving victory in the Liberation War. Therefore, I think everybody should be given equal opportunity in the government services.

A large number of true (there are many fake ones) freedom fighters didn't get any recognition as freedom fighters. Some of them were deprived of getting certificates because of several reasons. On the other hand, some received certificates without even participating in the war. This not all. Some of their offsprings belong to anti-Liber-

ation forces. So, I think the government should evaluate them in other ways. Such kind of quota service would be much more harmful for competitors.

Sabuz Zia Hall, DU.

Gobinda Haldar

Sir, I am writing to express my thanks to Bangladesh Writers' Association for opening a welfare fund in Dhaka to help poet Sri Gobinda Haldar of Cafcutta, who has become almost blind and leading a miserable life due to financial hardship. Hats off to the association's President poet Sabir Ahmed Choudhury for volunteering to help a man whose immortal songs kindled patriotism and valour of our people who successfully fought the War of Independence in 1971.

As one of the Bangladeshi friends and admirers of the distressed poet, I also tried in my humble way by writing some articles in a local daily to attract the attention of the government to the present plight of poet Gobinda Haldar. Recalling his visit to Dhaka shortly after independence, I am inclined to observe that this selfless and hitherto mirthful poet, Gobinda Haldar, is one of the finest Bengalis of our time, and is destined to go down in the history of our Liberation War for his patriotic and immortal songs which are still sung by our peo-

May I appeal to the esteemed readers of The Daily Star to contribute to Gobinda Haldar Welfare Fund so that we can repay at least a part of the national debt that we owe to him. Incidentally, I would suggest

that let Gobinda Haldar be honoured by granting him the 'honorary citizenship' of Bangladesh in recognition to his contribution to the war of independence.

Abdul Kader Bashabo, Dhaka

tiative in our country to find those freedom fighters of our Liberation War who were extremely dedicated to the cause and now living lonely. We should find them out.

Mostafa Sohel 4/8, Bangladesh Bank Officers Quarter Banani, Dhaka-1213.

> hours? M Imdadul Haque