The Baily Star

Founder-Editor: Late S. M. Ali

Dhaka, Friday, July 11, 1997

Public Accounts

We have so far been missing out on a prime exercise that parliamentary accounts committees in the democratic world routinely undertake to ensure financial accountability of various ministries of the government. By pulling the purse-strings on the basis of audit department reports and calling up files from any ministry the PACs have become powerful instruments for enforcing transparency in governance wherever the parliamentary system operates. The whole gamut of a government's character in terms of corruptibility, favouritism, depth of development concerns and commitments is vivified by its public expenditure patterns.

Nothing in the ultimate analysis can be a better watch-dog over governance than a parliamentary standing committee on finance; but its work will be of real efficacy if it relates to recent times rather than dipping toes in a hoary past. Although financial irregularities in the past must be placed under the microscope and persons responsible spotted for appropriate censuring and penalisation, we would nonetheless like this clearing of the backlog to be expedited to make the process principally contemporaneous.

The JS Public Accounts Committee burdened though by an avalanche of past audit observations. in its maiden report to the parliament concisely recorded their findings about six important ministries like those of works, telecommunications, energy, water resources, communications and cabinet division. Tk forty-five crore has been recovered and this could be a few times over if audit reports beyond 87-88 were scrutinised.

On the basis of their deductions, the PAC has recommended that each ministry has an audit cell to be headed by a joint secretary. Of the nine other suggestions made we would like to focus on two: the first one relates to piecing together all the different circulars issued from time to time by way of amending and reinterpreting the financial rules to suit different situations.

After fine-tuning the rules to the present requirement, the whole bunch ought to be published as an authentic guide-book for the ministries. Secondly, a law on misconduct should be framed to render current censures of past lapses materially deterrent.

Dealing with Fake Peers

Following a welcome police drive against fake spiritualists in the country, the frauds either went into temporary hiding or closed their shops. But now they are back in the business. A Bangla daily has cited specific cases of five such culprits who were earlier arrested by the police but have now returned to their deceitful profession by just changing tactics. As most of these impostors bank on childless simple people's ignorance and craving for children, they resort to all kinds of bizarre practices including sexual abuse of the female of the couple seeking their help. That a few of such couples were blessed with children was the result of purportedly such sexual exploits at their socalled treatment centres.

The fact of the matter is that no infertile woman could be treated by them to gain her reproductive capability. Now the fake spiritualists throw challenges that they will cure the infertility problem after being sure the female spouse is not infertile through a laboratory test. In the name of treatment | the woman is then forced to bear the spiritualists' or their selected persons' children, according to the report. Women so abused usually do not speak out, fearing they would be driven out of their fami-

Here again the arrested fake peers could not be put behind the bar because there were no specific charges against them. The problem is similar to that of cases against terrorists where the culprits most of the time are released for lack of material evidence or witnesses. Now that the present government has taken a stern attitude towards these peddlers of religion or spiritualism, some of the victims have started coming up with the detailed story of their repression and abuse. We would like to know why the police could not construct a few strong cases against the abusers. By apparently failing to do so the law enforcers have by default handed those culprits a kind of certificate to flaunt. their obnoxious profession gaining some validity in the process. Let them be arrested on specific charges so that they cannot evade punishment for their crimes.

What's Happening?

A nine-year-old girl of Siddhirganj has reportedly been sexually abused by the father of her playmate. The victim is fighting for her life in a Narayanganj hospital. We do not know how to condemn this most loathsome carnal crime. A society that allows children's innocence to be violated so outrageously can hardly claim to be civilised. Child abuse was thought to be a special problem in some of the materially developed western countries but recent trend shows that we are not immune to the vice either.

The outbreak of this particular libidinous perversion, particularly at our level of underdevelopment, may prove highly costly if not checkmated. now. It may be a proof of our traditional social and moral values giving in to a more aggressive temper. So it seems we have arrived at a critical stage of our development. We need to be analytical and even critical of our social mores and behaviours and decide how to get rid of the newly acquired vices.

Our society, however, need not be insular; rather it will have to be open and progressive to develop a rational approach to everything that is socially and culturally important for us. Are we ready to take up the challenge? We feel that the leaders in all areas must lead the nation by setting personal examples.

Small is Important for the Economy

"Small is beautiful" — is a slogan for promotion of cottage industry and self-employment projects under micro-credit programmes. Small is important, crucially important for us. Working on this bottom-line, let's also point out that small savings mean future for people, who can only start having one. . .

dio shop. a meat, or a vegetable, or a fish corner and a bookshop, you have the nailbiting photo-finish!

Most unsettling is the scouting for changes one strays in to on having reached a spot under tremendous time and traffic jam pressures by a threewheeler or a pedal rickshaw ride as its driver looks philosophically askance. Their starting the day without cash in hand should be the transport owner's headache, but as it happens, this is a seller's market with hardly any competition, and besides, isn't lack of consideration for others a social past-time here?

Perhaps the wholesalers are now-a-days shuffling the notes with some of the consummate ease they had earlier gotten used to because of a slight improvement in the liquidity picture of the banks, but the central bank cannot shrug off its responsibility in respect of making notes of different lower denominations sufficiently available to the big retail mar-

We never tire of talking about purchasing power, effective demands, buoyant retail transactions, etc missing out on the obvious fact that these

would not fully bloom, even though there might be potentialities for the same, if cash blockages prove to be offputting on the finishing line. One wonders, whether the unstated objective is to have sales turned off to make some savings possible for the consumers like in the case of two-day-long weekly bank holiday which, as

tion of the currency notes in high demand. It looks like a same-side folly

when reportedly the employee at the bank counter demands that gas, telephone or electricity bills be paid by dispositing the exact amounts billed for, so as to spare them the 'hassle' of having to give changes. One suspects whether the banks have the smaller notes in suffi-



to forced saving on the part of bank despositors.

As it is, both the wholesalers and retailers have been complaining of sales slumping lately, but although their godowns and shelves are stacked with goods, mostly of foreign origin though. One need hardly be surprised if some scooping research and market intelligence work goes to establish a correlation between 'poor sales' and inadequate circulacient quantities. This, in turn, raises a pertinent question about the rationale of Bangladesh Bank's printing of currency notes or their release in proportion to the demands of economic transactions.

Some regulatory angle can obviously be read into the visible shortage of lower denomination notes in the market. However, if one were to look at the waste of time in squaring off thousands upon thousands of

petty deals that make an economy tick then how is the country really helped by such a discreet squeeze on money supply? On balance, we think all economic transactions must necessarily be smoothened by legal tenders changing hands as and

when required to close deals.

The re-sale value of goods one wishes to dispose of also mirrors the reach, diversification and sustaining character of an economy. This signifies the creation of fresh demands through the sellers' craving for new products as well as catering to the suppressed demands of people who would not mind making do with old goods. Except for real estate prices which have sky-rocketed much to the blocking of liquid cash which otherwise could have bolstered the productive sectors, re-sale values remain as low as before. if not more, on most other items. These have to be sold at throw-away prices - say, a used gadget, or a car, or an abandoned metallic staircase having perhaps the slightly worn out look of a new one. Like they say in physics, energy is never lost it only takes newer forms in the universe, so also in the economy, every stuff or article is of some value and it has

to sell at a price determinable, according to the standard practice by after deducting the depreciation costs from it.

While an organised re-sale network and recycling industry exist as a common feature in many an economy, we are yet to develop these, except, of course, their apology we have in the Dholaikhal-cum-Tokai culture. In a metropolitan city elsewhere in the world all one has to do for a quick disposal of rejected items is to phone up a few dealers in old goods, including even junks, who can present registered trade licences on demand.

"Small is beautiful" — is a slogan for promotion of cottage industry and self-employment projects under micro-credit programmes. Small is important, crucially important for us. Working on this bottom-line, let's also point out that small savings mean future for people. who can only start having one when the metropolis and its suburban areas are girdled by a string of shuttle trains, like the Dhaka-Narayanganj private railway service inducing people to settle outside the metropolis and save money from low-cost living on the peripheries. Dhaka could then be only a work-place for them with the pressure on its amenities going down for the benefit of the remaining city livers. This small thing seems now to be of central importance, largely by default.

LETTER FROM AMERICA

Maggie Thatcher's Revenge — William the Conqueror!

Dr. Fakhruddin Ahmed writes from Princeton

EOPLE in Southeast Asia should take a bow. Ever L since Mrs. Bandernaike was elected Prime Minister of Ceylon (now Sri Lanka), India, Pakistan and Bangladesh all have had women as the head of governments.

HERE are certain vibes

car engine on ignition, in the

event they are positive, of

course, which speak volumes

about the vigour and vitality of

transactions in a society. When

in the negative, these read.

needless to say, like tell-tale

sounds of a sluggish, almost an

inert economy on the borderline

of the eerie silence of the grave.

news about the ordeals faced by

the public through their daily

bouts with changing higher de-

nomination currency notes after

shopping or commuting, and

getting money's worth through

re-sale of goods, which seldom,

if ever, exercise our minds —

thanks to the sonorous refrains

of highly sophisticated

economists and government

planners, some of them unwit-

tingly perhaps captives of buzz

words, which drown or crowd

out the inarticulate demands of

brant economy is a retail net-

work palming off different cur-

rency notes in a jiffy to round

off small deals. But how irk-

some and time-wasting it is for

the buyers presenting a Tk 500

or 100 note at a shop and be

non-chanlantly told by its

keeper that he has to wait for

the changes as a sales assistant

is sent romping places to fetch

these. Whether it is a grocery

store, a medicine outlet, an au-

The first visible sign of a vi-

There are two pieces of bad

so to speak.

the economy

off an economy, some-

what purring like a new

Western men, on the other hand, seem to have a mental block against women politicians. After what happened to Vice Presidential candidate Geraldine Ferraro in 1984, can anyone seriously think of a woman President of the United States any time soon? When Margaret Thatcher was elected the leader of Britain's Conservative Party in 1975, most British men were slightly amused. "She will be allowed to lose only one election", prophesied Oxford dons. Clearly, the upper class was not happy that a grocer's daughter had made it to the upper echelon of their

Of course, Thatcher brought some of it up on herself by making silly and provocative statements. Worldwide, the year 1975 was being celebrated as the "Year of the Woman". (Remember Aussie Helen Reddy's rallying song. "I am Invincible, I am a Woman.. "?). Right off the bat. Thatcher annoyed feminists by proclaiming that she owed nothing to the feminist movement for her position (leader of the Opposition in Britain's parliament). On top of that, she once admitted that she had stored away two-year supply of canned food! In response to the ensuing outcry, she calmly replied that she thought what she did was "prudent housekeeping!

As the Education Secretary in Edward Heath's cabinet, Mrs. Thatcher had already earned the enmity of the students. She

had stopped distribution of free milk to students, and earned the unenviable nickname. "Margaret Thatcher, Milk Snatcher!" Considering her somewhat of a lightweight, Prime Minister Harold Wilson tried to take advantage of her during question and answer sessions in the parliament. Instead of answering her questions, Wilson tried to ask her questions! Thatcher shot back! As she would repeatedly do, to any man or women who dared to cross her. This piece is not meant to be a discussion of the legacy of the "Iron Lady", except to state that as the longest serving Prime Minister of this century. Thatcher realigned British politics, economy and

By 1977, Harold Wilson had resigned the Premiership in favour of an older man, James

society.

Callaghan. The Tories sensed blood. The Conservative Party annual conference that year was full of excitement and expectation. Although Michael Hestletine, in a shrill voice. gave his rendition of Labour's marching habits ("left, left", instead of "left, right") and tried to hijack the conference towards the Right, the real showstealer was a young, mophaired boy of sixteen. "William"

The son of a soft drink company owner in Yorkshire, in his spare time, William read parliamentary reports and memorized many of Winston

Churchill's famous speeches. At the Conservative Party conference, he was allowed to speak as a Young Tory. He wowed the conference and the nationwide television audience with a brilliant speech in defense of Con-

eryone else thought. ~ -In the intervening years, as Margaret Thatcher went about changing the face of Britain, William went to Oxford to complete his education. In 1990. Michael Hestletine ousted Margaret Thatcher as the Leader of the Conservative Party and the Prime Minister. Another person who worked for Thatcher's

servative principles.

I still remember some of the

things William said. A true

right-winger, he ridiculed the

Labour Party for being soft on

competition. "They would like

some kid who finished second

in a race to get the first prize, so

as not to hurt his feelings!", he

satirized to thunderous ap-

plause. He even knew black

humour. "I care what happens

to this country thirty years

from now. I know, half of you

will not be here...". Margaret

Thatcher led the applause for

William when he finished his

speech. Displaying a rare moth-

erly instinct in public,

Thatcher also asked William to

call his mother to let her know

that he is all right! William was

the toast of the town. He ap-

peared on talk shows with

Shadow cabinet ministers.

"William the Conqueror" news-

papers screamed! His "fifteen minutes in the limelight", ovHestletine forgot that it does not pay to cross the Iron Lady. The person elected new leader of the Conservative Party and the new Prime Minister of the United Kingdom to replace Margaret Thatcher was not the Oxford-educated Hestletine, but a Thatcher protege. John Major who did not attend college.

In the aftermath of the Conservative Party's landslide defeat in the

British General elections and John Major's resignation last month, the Tories held another leadership contest last week. After days of bitter bickering, two candidates emerged for the final run off - fifty-six year old Kenneth Clarke, former Chancellor of the Exchequer, and a younger candidate, former Secretary of Wales. Baroness Thatcher remembers Mr. Clarke well; that did not bode well for Mr. Clarke.

Mrs. Thatcher also remembers the younger candidate fondly, and threw her weight behind him. He won! The name of the younger candidate, the new leader of the Conservative Party, the Leader of the Opposition, and most probably the next Prime Minister of the United Kingdom is, 36-year old

William Hague! Dr. Fakhruddin Ahmed is a Rhodes Scholar from Bangladesh, who currently lives in Princeton, New Jersey, USA

Human rights

Sir, The appointment of eminent Irish personality Marry Andarson as the High Commissioner for Human Rights by the UN Secretary-General is an appropriate choice and we, from underdeveloped countries, expect that she will give a new dimension to the human rights issues with a universal prospec-

The human rights, which the West so loudly proclaims, did not exist even during the haydays of British Empire - not even in the Victorian England. The ruthless suppression and rebellion in Bengal in the past shows the height of decomposition of human values - even the basic one. The basic need has to be sufficed. The years of imperial exploitation has made these so-called underdeveloped nations absolutely poor as they faced dual exploitation both by the British and the native subcontinental land lords.

The colossal exploitation has left the masses absolutely

wretched. The irony of fate is that even the freedom movement of these colonies were lead by the upper middle-class leaving no scope for any revolutionary transformation of social structure even after the freedom was achieved.

The poor parents had to send their children to work just to survive. Instead of trying to halt child labour, for God sake, try to analyse the socio-economic condition of this country. The government could arrange some sort of primary education alongside the work. If these children are thrown out of the jobs they shall end up as street criminals, primps or pick pockets and many of them will fall in the clutches of the child

Human rights must be evaluated keeping in view of the socio-economic and political condition prevailing in any particular country or zone. It will be exercise in futility trying to plant the western concept of human rights in the East. The human rights in the underdeveloped countries mean provision for food, clothing, shelter, health and education.

Al-Haj S M Khalid Chowdhury

Garbage trucks Sir, When you are passing through a busy street at about eleven in the morning, you have to swallow a usual scene parking the dust-truck by occupying the one-third area of the street, the cleaners of the city corporation collecting garbage from the dustbin and throwing it to the truck. Or, you have to overlook the cleaners clearing the man-holes and throwing the stuff on the street. The situation becomes as such that nobody protests against this assuming nothing can be attained from protesting. Are all these unwanted situations being overlooked by Mr Mayor?

Sometimes, it is seems the Mayor is being dominated by his subordinates, particularly when we have to see the 'who cares' attitude of the cleaners of the DCC. Mr Mayor, we are really confused. Who is controlled

Shakil-Al-Mamun Department of Finance and Banking University of Dhaka

Game of vanity

Sir, Whenever Indian and Pakistani cricket teams meet each other to play either on the Indian soil or anywhere else, it creates tremendous enthusiasm amongst the people of the subcontinent. Surely it creates a sense of togetherness, which is a good sign. But unfortunately due to the communal attitude of most of the Indian fans, including some leaders of purely communal parties of that country viz Shiv Sena and even BJP who have on several occasions been found arrogant. The manner in which the Pakistani team was treated in Bangalore on a recent occasion is still vivid in the memory of the whole world. Perhaps the Indians are suffering with a kind of serious inferiority complex.

The Pakistani cricket team and their lovers have also some responsibilities. It is equally deplorable that if Pakistan wins, they think as if they have hoisted Pakistani flag over the Red Fort and when the Indians win a game they celebrate their victory in a way as they have wiped of Pakistan from this globe. In the recent Pepsi Cup. we observed that both the teams played with their whole might. It was not bad. But the saddest part of it was that they were found playing neither in brotherly or friendly mood, but hatred and enmity were behind the spirit of 'do and die' policy. This is one of the causes that both teams are often defeated in final by less important teams. This actually has happened once again in the Pepsi Independence Cup-97.

I suggest the Indians and Pakistanis to keep the spirit of sportsmanship alive above all kinds of cynicisms.

K R Zakhmi Khulna

Vacation and

examination Sir, A vacation is the only way, to have some relief in student life. Life then becomes enjoyable, and innovative ideas pour out. Vacation helps the students to prepare themselves to start their studies with renewed strength. It is a fact that a long vacation helps the students to accumulate a fund for their cost of study. Unfortunately, vacation and examination at the universities of our country go hand in hand. And consequently, most of the students who face examination

during the vacation cannot rest and enjoy holiday. Then student life seems somewhat burdensome.

The proposal I would like to put forward is that the universi ties should not hold examination during and after 30 days of a vacation of 30 or more days, so that the students can enjoy vacation without any tension.

Md Rajik Miah 440 SSB Hall Jahangirnagar University Savar, Dhaka

Without commoners!

Sir, The second show of the Prime Minister's TV programme was telecast on 23.6.97. Whether it was better than the first one may be a question. To me, it was a bit better than the first show. This time questions were more direct. But can this programme rightly be called 'Deshbashir Mukhomukhi'? The people saw her on the TV screen only, but questions were hardly of their own. TV authorities arranged this programme, as it appeared, for three classes of people namely journalists, educationists and economists,

who were on the panel. No questions on country's productions, marketing and transporting of goods, exporting of mangoes, and paddy and jute prices, price of fertiliser and deplorable primary education in rural areas.

The people from the countryside were absent in the programme!

Ahmed-uz-Zaman Sahasha Keranipara Po & Dt Rangpur 5400

Songs of yesteryears

Sir, Lately a trend is noticed among the new and young singers that most of them have started singing old days song sung by reputed singers/ artistes. A lot of audio cassettes bearing the title 'Harane Diner Gan' of such signers are now available in the market.

Well, many of these new singers have presented the old songs almost in original tune. The modern electronic musical instruments have also added charm to their presentation. These singers have not stopped their venture only by singing old popular songs and by producing their own audio cassettes and CDs but have also attempted to sing Bangla version of popular Urdu, Hindi and English songs.

Recently, two such singers, Polash and Rezia have made a good attempt in rendering some selected songs/ghazals of Mehdi Hasan in Bangla in their audio cassette - 'Ekbar Firey Esho.' But I am afraid, the translation of Mehdi Hasan's Urdu ghazals into Bangla has not been done accurately. For instance, the Bangla version of — "Mujhe tom nazar se gira to raahe ho, Mujhe

tum kabhi bhi bhula na sekoge has been translated like this -"Tumi je amari, Mon jurey aachho, Shawponey je shudhu, Hridoyer kotha je.

Like Bangla and Hindi old

songs, the old English country songs are also gaining popularity among the music lovers. This is indeed a very good effort towards making the music lovers understand the words and message in the English songs, for example, to feel Vincent's sanity from heart, one must understand the words of the song - Starry Starry Night:

"For they could not love you But still your love was true

And when no hope was left inside On that starry starry night

you took your life As lovers often do But I could have told you incent

This world was never meant

One, as beautiful as you."

M Zahidul Haque BAI, Dhaka-1207

BGMEA

Sir. The BGMEA has considerable lobbying power, for obvious reasons. Now, it is understandable that during the prebudget period they will do lob bying and vent some grievances publicly. The regulating bodies are always under pressure from different sectors, to consider concessions or easing of technicalities.

But BGMEA is playing a onesided game with the public. The internal weaknesses and efficiency inside the garment industry are not being publicised for public information, by releasing a series of articles in the press (it is presumed they have a PR unit, which is busy with PR

strategies). · The following types of press releases/stories are suggested for consideration - the activities of the R&D

- how the management and production efficiencies are being increased - bata and graphics;

 stories on the decreasing use of child labour, schooling and other projects in phased programmes: security and fire hazards:

what's being done. The location of factories in residential type buildings — future programmes. The weaknesses of the coordination with the Fire Brigade; - labour relations and amenities:

- mass media use for projection of the right image about the industry This list is not exhaustive. but the public would like a twosided presentation. At present it

is all gripes, and bashing of the regulatory agency. Be transpar ent, as the Prime Minister says. A Zabar

ouster was Kenneth Clarke.

OPINION

The Age of Satellite TVs

Television is probably the most powerful medium of mass education in both the develop-

ing and developed countries. remember the days not so long ago when BTV used to broadcast programmes only in the evenings, and for a few hours on the weekly holidays. Those days, I used to crave for whatever cartoon features was allotted for each day and the "deshi" programmes for children

evening. Returning home after several years, I am amazed to find that those golden or miserable (depending on your point of view) days are long gone. VCRs. satellite TVs etc., today seem to have brought "the whole world" within our reach. School children and their parents today do not have to eagerly wait for programmes BTV has to offer. Instead, they have a myriad of choices ranging from the Car-toon Network, Zee TV, Zee Cinema, DDI, Channel V, ATN, Star Plus etc. It seems that millions of children and teenagers around the world are listening to the same music and watching the same films and videos. Therefore, one may claim that the marvels of entertainment technology help us experience a feeling of inter connectedness to the cultural waves across the world. But, do these programmes help create a global identification with the "welfare" of the whole human species and the "planet" itself?

don't think so. Children and teenagers around the globe are gradually becoming hooked to the "magic box" in their living room. Parents often wonder whether the pop artists and mega-stars are the newly-emerge global figures? A school-going Bangladeshi child may never have heard the name of the latest UN Secretary-General, but he/she is most likely familiar with the music of Michael Jackson. Even in the remote villages, people gather around TV set and stare at it, mesmerised. Traditional village life (the one we read about in Bangla essay books) included lots of Jari, Shari songs, where people of all ages joined in. Every Bangladeshi village probably had their own singer or story teller who entertained the villagers. Such live pastimes

Sarwat Chowdhury would include active participation from the audience as well These days, people just sit and listen to the "best singer" and "the best performer" - whose performance was probably taped thousands of miles away and whose acts may have

nothing to do with our culture

and traditions. Such trends towards modernisation inevitably leads to a loss of individuality. Our kids shown in early part in the are becoming self-conscious. and feel pressurised to live up to the idealised images of the stars of Channel V or Zee TV show, say, "Tara". The glamorised images of rock stars obviously have an advantage over the parents or school teachers because the former demand little of their fans except they enjoy themselves and keep buying their CDs or posters. One may claim that the satellite TVs and global music markets have brought together images and sounds from around the world. But, how often do the American television network or the cable channels show Bangladeshi shows or performance by Bangladeshis? (The only exception, as the readers are well aware are "Mujibar and Sirajul" in David Letternman's latenight programme on American

station of CBS). One may still support such trends by claiming that the entertainment technology fills in the vacuum left by the disintegration of traditional family life, lack of space for outdoor games, loss of faith in politics etc. The counter-argument is that the growth in "popular culture" is taking over time and energy that could have been spent in nurturing children, participating in religious or community activities, readings etc. While watching the American sitcom "Small Wonders" in its Hindi-dubbed version, our kids today are being exposed to a different culture and a different language (surely not all of these kids will emigrate to the US or converse in Hindi for the rest of their lives) and losing touch with deshi "Rabindra Sangeet", "Nazrul Geeti" and games like "Ludu" etc. Ironically, the more we rush to modernise ourselves, the more we seem to be at risk of throwing away (and in time, forgetting) our age-old original culture and traditions.