The Baily Star

Founder-Editor: Late S. M. Ali Dhaka Wednesday, August 20, 1997

Chastening those CBAs

The government has given an indication that it is bracing up to the chronically unattended task of de-mining tyrannical trade unionism in the nationalised sector. Although the whole of the state sector is writhing under the deadweight of trade union excesses it is the Bangladesh Bank and NCBs that are particularly held ransom to the dictates of CBAs. Their diabolic notoriety in the running of parallel administrations in these organisations has been eating into the vitals of the national economy.

So, it is a good, bold move contemplated by the AL government — with its one foot in the history of trade unionism in the country — to have a 5-member task force ruffle the feathers of CBAs and reform them by means of an action plan. But this is being done under an open-ended academicsounding project - "Commercial Banking Restructuring Project".

Its being constituted and headed by bankers does ensure a flow of information from within the banking sector to help enrich the output of the committee. And it is good thinking to have sought cooperation from not merely bank officers and staff, but also from clients, patrons and general public. Let the focus on essentials be not diffused and compromised by any sneaking weakness for political expediency nor by machinations of cliques in an organisation. There must be a head-long plunge into setting the houses in order, no matter who or what gets axed by it.

Anyway, we would like the September 15 deadline for submission of relevant information extended, given the confidentiality of leads being sought.

Trade unionism has drifted from voicing the rights of workers into virtually running the affairs of the banks themselves. Their interferences in postings, transfers and even sanction of bank loans have reached such a level of absurdity that bank directors and managers pathetically confess to having almost abdicated their decision-making powers to the CBA. Incidentally in Biman no fresh recruitment could be made due to trade union resistance for the last 8 years.

The legitimisation bid of the military or semimilitary rulers had a nice customer in the trade unions. So did the short-sighted political party governments give indulgence to them. Wizened by the mistakes, we expect that the task force would produce an effective action plan at the soonest to bring sanity to trade unionism.

Why Power Shortfall?

Power generation and supply have once again met with a severe setback. Worse, nobody knows when the situation will improve. Both the overhauling of a number of power stations and the lack of maintenance of others along with insufficient gas supply are to blame, according to reports. These are just reports gleaned from various sources, including those at the Dhaka Electric Supply Authority (DESA).

To come across an official explanation, one explicitly meant for public information, is, however, a rare opportunity in this country. The people or consumers are not informed of a developing situation in the power sector beforehand — which in fact ought to be the practice — nor is an apology sought after a mishap has taken place.

Accidents or mechanical failures may be unpredictable but a conscious decision to go for overhauling was really not. If the authority shuts a few power stations or sub-stations, power generation is likely to be hampered. Anyone will understand this. Why don't you tell the public about any emergency repair measure in advance and allow the consumers to be mentally prepared for an untoward loadshedding? Or, has the condition worsened beyond management and predictability? If so, clearly explain it to the people.

Unpredictable power supply and voltage fluctuations are indicative of lack of control over the system. This is the conclusion people are forced to draw in the absence of a clear picture about the power sector. If the situation is unsalvageable, it is obviously not entirely the present government's fault that it is so. But by not sharing information, the authority is unnecessarily taking a blame on its shoulder.

How long are people to suffer and what will be the daily share of loadshedding for a particular area? These are the normal questions to ask. What matters is the attitude of governance. The art is to take people in confidence and seek their cooperation until an alternative and improved system can be put in place. People will be ready to understand

Kamalganj Feels Heat

Fish is dear now. The king of them, hilsha that is, should be dearer still is no wonder. But for Kamalganj it is particularly telling because people there feel the heat both ways. Local produces have hardly any buyers and unsurprisingly a maund of paddy fetches Tk 100-120. At the same time, a hilsha fish of average size sells at Tk 150-200. If a farmer has to savour a Padma treat, he has to part with one and a half maunds of paddy.

Such a price discrepancy is, however, no Sylhet speciality, although nowhere else in the country these two items have similar price tags. It is all because of the accident at the Magurchhara gas field. All essential items are now more costly in the isolated parts of Sylhet in contrast to a sharp fall of prices of the local produces. This gives an idea of the sufferings of the people in Sylhet.

So both the immediate and long-term fall-outs of the gas field accident are being felt by people there. Nothing on this scale has ever happened to have an impact on the bio-diversity of a region in this country.

It is taking a heavy toll on the common people's daily life. This aspect should not get out of sight when the damages are assessed and compensatory provisions sought.

Education Reform in Turkey — Great Debate

The debate is between the secularist and anti-secularist. The Turkish establishment has been deeply dis-

turbed by the rise of fundamentalism under the sponsorship of the RP. Should the programme of RP be

put into effect it would lead to some radical change within the Turkish society

nurtured under the reforms of Mustafa Kamal AtaTurk

Commission of the ▲ Turkish Parliament has commenced debate about the proposed reforms in the education system of Turkey. This is the first legislation of the new Turkish Government led by Prime Minister Mesut Yilmaz's Motherland Party (ANAP). The coalition is composed of Centre Left Democratic Left Party (DSP) and Centrist Democratic Turkish Party (DTP) and is supported by the leftist Republican People's Party (CHP). Ranged against the bill is the outgoing Islamist

THE Planning and Budget

and Tansu Ciller's True Path Party (DYP). In broad outline the new educational reform plan envisages that primary school-going children will receive an eightyear continuous education rather than the present 5+3. The opposition has branded it as the closure of Imam-Hatip schools and gone to the extent of stating that it would mean elimination of religious studies including study of the Holy Koran. The Government in its ar-

▼NDIA and Pakistan — two

Apendence through partition

of the erstwhile British-India in

1947 - have just celebrated

the extent of merriment and

countries that attained inde-

Government led by Necmettin

Erbakan's Welfare Party (RP)

guments has stated that the religious education including study of the Koran will be carried on by the Directorate of religious Education under the supervision of the Education Min-

The debate is between the secularist and anti-secularist. The Turkish establishment has been deeply disturbed by the rise of fundamentalism under the sponsorship of the RP. Should the programme of RP be put into effect it would lead to some radical change within the Turkish society nurtured under the reforms of Mustafa Kamal AtaTurk, Father of modern Turkey. Those reforms are now nearly 70 years old. The heavyweight Turkish Armed Forces consider itself as the guardian of the reforms of AtaTurk.

Indeed in the ouster of the Government of Erbakan the Turkish Armed Forces have played a vital role. There is an

tive boundaries are not un

institution called the Security Council composed of the Heads of the Armed Forces and the civilian side is represented by the Prime Minister, the Minister of Defense, and it is presided by the President Suleyman

Demirel. On 28 February last

has triggered a war of words in the media. The media is heavily tilted towards secularism. This section has launched a strong campaign in favour of swift passage of the bill. There are small circulation pro-Islamic The Horizon This Week

The parliamentary debate

Arshad-uz Zaman

the military establishment presented before the Security Council a package of reforms which was heavily tilted towards secularism. The package was approved by then Prime Minister Erbakan. The current attempt at educational reform is the most important element of that package.

dailies and one TV channel which is carrying on a one channel campaign in favour of the opposition stand. It does not appear to make much headway. On the other hand RP covertly organised recently a countrywide campaign opposing the passage of the bill. Cars tooting horns, passengers carrying

large Turkish flags attempted to converge on capital Ankara. There were scuffles between the security forces and photographers leading to highly publicised beating of photographers by the police. It ended with the public apology by the Prime Minister. The fear of RP led campaign after Friday prayers has failed to materialize. All in all the opposition attempt to mobilize public opinion against the bill has failed to material-

RP has mounted a filibustering campaign to oppose the bill in the parliamentary committee. It presented as many as 70 MPs within the Committee, who all wanted to speak. The ANAP chairman in order to meet the filibuster announced his decision to hold uninterrupted session through the night. He is determined to arrange the passage of the bill through this week. The bill is

expected to come to a vote by the end of this week and latest by next week.

The government appears to have taken all precautions in order to ensure the passage of the bill. There is reasonable ground to believe that the bill will receive a majority vote in favour. The unknown factor is how many defections will take place from the ranks of ANAP. This party of centre right has within itself a hard core of Islamist deputies like Korkut Ozal, the brother of the late President Turgut Ozal. Korkut Ozal has openly stated his opposition to the bill brought by his party. Similarly some defections can be expected from the DYP although its modern former Prime Minister Tansu Ciller has signified opposition to the bill.

The Education Reform Bill has roused enormous interest within Turkey. It is easy to understand why. Through this bill religious education is being separated from secular education. It is no doubt a gleat step in the direction of secular politics of Turkey. The vote will be fascinating to watch.

Fifty Years of India and Pakistan, and the South Asia

by Zaglul Ahmed Chowdhury

Will India and Pakistan embark upon a venture fifty years after their independence that will bring them closer in the mission to work for the welfare of their peoples? Then this will have a sobering impact on other nations in the region and South Asia will definitely look different (for the better) from political point of view.

the silver jubilee of their independence and the festivities centering the occasion are obviously continuing with great fanfare. Fifty years of indepenqualitative alteration in their dence is a glorious event for any nation and the magnitude of fundamental relationship unthe delight and joyous scenes less a sea-change marks the are understandable. We in scenario at the bilateral level. They have fought wars, and Bangladesh have celebrated the 25th anniversary of our naskirmishes between the border tionhood with expected jubilaguards and the soldiers of the tion and one can easily foresee two countries along the sensi-

rapture when the country will common even at a time when two sides speak about peace step into golden jubilee of the and promotion of good neighindependence. bourliness. But, this belligerent Pakistan and India are unstances notwithstanding, one derstandably two key players in can also say that two tradi-South Asia for a variety of reational foes have at times sons. Two nations were born demonstrated remarkable gessimultaneously and they retures to improve their ties even mained hostile to each other though none concealed the fact that no major change in the eversince. Territorial disputes shape of the ties is easily (over Kasmir) remain the main bone of contention and in the achievable unless a drastic process both nations attached change is brought about in the importance to their respective psyche of the two countries defence sectors much more whose foreign policy parameters than what should have been revolve around the other nation. normal for countries of their Predictably, each country seeks economic prowess. Nonetheless, to turn the table on the other they are exuding optimism for on different pretexts and in the better New Delhi-Islamabad ties process the tension which is the in the days ahead and the leadhallmark of the New Delhi-Isers of both countries have reitlamabad ties seldom dies alerated the same when they are though at times comes down to in the midst of their much relatively low when they are in awaited fifty years' celebrations. comparatively good terms. of independence. Relations be-The current phase of their tween the two countries are ties can be called as fairly marked by ups and downs friendly between them given the

though they mentioned their respective compulsions about the defence expenditures. When Indian prime minister Inder Kumar Gujral spoke from the ramparts of the Red Fort in Delhi or the Pakistan prime minister Nawaz Sharif addressed his nation marking the fifty years of the freedom -

tries are concerned. The relationship governing India and Pakistan is certainly a matter of grave importance to other fellow countries in South Asia like Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal... It is because the pious ambitions or turning the densely populated region into

an economically viable one with

raising the standard of the liv-

ing of the vast multitude under

the aegis of the SAARC are in-

extricably linked with the over-

all political climate in the South

certainly both could not escape

reiterating their peace overtures

but both also remain conscious

of the complexities of such

moves as far as their two coun-

- The calls for improvement teeming millions in the region or the enthusiasm for peopleto-people" contacts will fall on the deaf ears unless the priorities in the area are properly fixed — and needless to say that India and Pakistan are the two main characters in this

spectrum to turn South Asia

into a better place. No doubt, the SAARC has come a long way albeit slowly in foreign cooperation in different crucial areas and this can be

called as a reasonably satisfactory progress given the nature of the political scenario that existed in the region before the concept was put to implementation or the political conditions that prevail even now. But dealing with the fate of more than one billion people - almost one fifth of total human beings — is a critical task and for changing their plight something much more dynamic, meaningful and substantial are necessary. If the two nations remain stuck to their priorities like the defence expenditures, the other countries in the region may feel psychologically emboldened to raise their defence expenses as well within their own capacities even if there is no compulsions. And in the process the social sectors will suffer much to the misfortune of the large segment of the people in the region who

There is no gainsaying the fact that both India and Pakistan have made good progress in the industrial and agricultural fields. But this progress could have been much bigger had the social and welfare oriented areas received still more attention. As the media of two countries are highlighting their

are mired in poverty.

achievements while celebrations of the golden jubilee are very much palpable, the world media is also focusing on the sides which reflect the miserable plight of a large number of their people even fifty years after the independence. The free press in both countries under democracies are making no bone of the fact that their father figures had dreamt of a society, in their respective countries free, from hunger, poverty and illiteracy. The essentials like the food. clothes and shelter should have been ensured for all by this time. The prosperity is no mean but that becomes worthwhile when common people can smile. As such, the political and social activists in both India and Pakistan rightly point out to the need for welfare and betterment of condition of the people. And those political parties like the leftists or the welfare-oriented ones seek to attach greater priority to this aspect while making less noises on divisive issues which have undeniably more potentials to

necessities.

minimum facilities for life that

would provide them with basic

ture showing how much of the people are deprived of basic necessities at a time when the rest of the world barring certain areas have reached dizzy heights of progress. South Asia has enough potentials and its people have calibre and wisdom but are still lagging behind. Will India and Pakistan embark upon a venture fifty years after their independence that will bring them closer in the mission to work for the welfare of their peoples. And when these two countries can work in such a fashion by removing tensions as far as possible between them, the South Asia region will definitely look different from political point of view and this will have a sobering impact on other nations in the region.

Democracy is the essential ingredient for the pattern of governance in the region. Pakistan suffered on this count earlier but its leadership and others are demonstrating greater maturity of late in this regard. India has many problems as a big country but democracy works as a catalyst to keep these problems at the minimum.

Not that the two countries have not strived to forge closer ties; in fact, their ties often marked progress in the cultural, sports and other areas of interest for the people while. whip up sentiments at national and international level but less meaning for the overwhelming majority who only care for two important players of South

Asian scene will display greater urge in pursuit of providing more comfort to their common peoples as they observe the

Universities doing "business"

while the basic belligerent pos-

tures by two sides broadly re-

main unchanged. This is also

understandable because it is

really difficult to bring about a

Sir, The letter by Mr Abul M Ahmad under the above caption (DS-Aug 9) has come to our attention. We would like to clarify the matters related to BUET.

BUET provides services in the form of research, testing and consultation to Government, Semi-Government and autonomous agencies and private parties. These services are provided through its Bureau of Research, Testing and Consultation (BRTC). The client is required to pay a fee for the service. The BRTC retains a portion of the fee and the remainder is paid to the Teacher. The University's income earned through the BRTC is utilised for development of academic facilities and institution of research grants. The Teacher's income is taxable. As per government order, part of the tax is deducted at source by the BRTC and the amount is deposited to the Treasury. The cost of services received by the client is also subject to the Value Added Tax

(VAT) as per government order. Some of the objectives behind the creation of the BRTC are to develop close relations between the Industry and the BUET and to assist the local entrepreneurs in the design and development of different engineering aspects. BUET being the home of highly trained manpower, expert services are given

through the BRTC. We hope, this clarification would remove all ambiguities regarding consultation services provided by the teachers of

Dr Jahir Uddin Chowdhury Director BRTC, BUET

Asia Cup and Bangladesh

Sir, The Asia Cup Cricket had turned into a classic oneday tournament in world cricket. It is because the best three sides of cricket are in our subcontinent including the present world champion, Sri Lanka. The other two, India and Pakistan, are also former champions. Although Bangladesh is not in the same status as they are, yet it would not be too much if said Bangladesh is rising up. I had the opportunity to see the matches between Bangladesh and other three teams on BTV. After the matches what I have felt, or better saying, I have come to a conclusion that our team has played quite satisfactorily, and no doubt, the players have tried best against the three class teams.

nature of their relationship.

And the golden jubilee celebra-

tions of both have encouraged

them to speak about peace and

display olive branch even

But what I like to say is, the approach of our team was not positive and good enough in the tournament. No batsman but Atahar Ali Khan and the skipper, Akram Khan, could show his strength of wrists or play class one shots while batting. In fielding side, our boys have not reached yet in world standard; and what about bowling? Better leave talking something about that. We need a lot to improve in this side. We have to make some pacers and specialised spinners through proper training inviting some former world class bowlers to our country. Everybody who likes cricket knows it is a game of uncertainty.

Yes, 'uncertainty', is the word I have something to speak on. As there is uncertainty in cricket, so there is a chance to show something surprising. If the approach and the spirit are together, there should be a fierce battle — battle of bat and

Md Amdad Hossain 76/B, Middle Paikpara. Mirpur, Dhaka-1216

Arsenic poisoning of tubewell water

Sir, My husband and I have worked in Bangladesh for almost four years, and we like the country and its people. At present we are at home in England to attend to family affairs, and will shortly be returning to Bangladesh.

When in Bangladesh we read The Daily Star regularly and know that your newspaper aims to make the public aware of. and take action upon, many important social issues. While we are in the UK we have arranged to maintain our supply of The Daily Star. We have read with concern

your comments on the fight against Arsenic contamination of water supplies, in your editorial column of July 18th. The WHO organised consultation meeting held in New Delhi made valid recommendations for tackling the problem, and your proposal for the setting up of a national reference laboratory for testing the quality of water is just what is needed. We agree with you that the Government needs help from the UN agencies to combat such an enormous problem.

On Sunday, 3rd August, we heard an item on the BBC World Service which stated that a recent survey suggests that up to 50 million people are at risk of

being poisoned by Arsenic in their drinking water. Other disturbing facts given in the report

were as follows:

a. Few doctors know how to diagnose the symptoms of Arsenic poisoning, and they need to be given immediate training

b. There are only two machines in Bangladesh for the testing for Arsenic, and these can only test up to 10 samples a

c. There has been no mass

awareness campaign so far. d. There has been little action so far by the Government. only the sealing up of a few tubewells. In this situation, what are the alternative sources of water?

e. If the water contain a high level of iron, and is left to stand for a day, the iron will sink to the bottom and carry the arsenic with it, thus reducing the risk. (Would it be possible to use a flocculating agent such as ALUM to achieve the same result?

Today we were pleased to read the good news printed in your July 25th issue that a group of NGOs has decided to set up a task force to frame a plan of action to combat this whole problem. We know that other countries such as India, Argentina, Mexico, Taiwan and Thailand have had similar problems. We strongly feel that experts from these countries should be invited to a conference with the NGO team, as a matter of urgency. We are sure that, given time, their combined expertise and efforts will find a way to overcome this enormous problem, with the essential

cooperation of the local people. We look forward to reading the NGO team's policy document next month.

M Ailsa Scarsbrook 62, St James's Road Blackburn, Lancs

BGMEA Has a Lot to Do"

Sir, This is in response to

your editorial of 3 August 1997. "BGMEA Has a Lot to Do". While I agree with you that switching-off devices are essential for safety in any factory, our less sophisticated factories can for now opt for manual means as opposed to the auto-

mated ones which, if not for anything else, will put off prospective users of such necessary equipment because of the expenditure involved.

There is no such thing as "standardized staircase" as the number, width and design of

staircases depend on the number of persons it is meant to serve. Most often, a building made for residential use for say ten persons per floor is transformed overnight into garments factories for well over one hundred workers per floor Needless to say, a stampede sit uation will occur if there is any emergency situation in any of

these factories. Alternative exit routes, as you suggest, are a must although not necessarily as mentioned in the editorial. The primary problem emanates from garments factories not being designed as such. The unfortunate deaths that are occur are due to industrialists taking risks by simply overloading a given situation.

Fire drill should be given top priority as workers are seen to obviously panic because of fear of the unknown. Some of the men/women on every factory floor must be trained to take charge in an emergency.

It is time that management is compelled to take health and safety matters in earnest and discuss related issues with the workers' representatives. Every worker by law should be made aware of safety measure affecting him or her.

Only the vain may argue that

there was "no fire" when 23

workers died recently and so safety measures were not to blame. In truth, even in a real fire, people suffocate or are trampled to death long before they are burnt by the flames. The most unfortunate aspect of deaths in fire-associated ac-

cidents, as is becoming more common in our garments factories over the years, is that the owners of these factories. thanks to their business trips abroad, are well aware of ideal conditions of health and safety. These industrialists who

have endeavoured to create one of the most disciplined work forces in the world, owe it to their conscience to provide their extremely loyal workers a safe place to work. For these entrepreneurs who have succeeded in etching Bangladesh's name on the global business market, improving working conditions in their factories should not amount to a difficult task.

By ignoring their knowledge and wisdom, industrialists are helping repeatedly to enact tragedies; avoiding which are very much within their means. It is indeed their responsibility.

Professor Dr. Nizamuddin Ahmed Dept of Architecture, BUET, Dhaka.

The human development report about the South Asian golden jubilee of nationhood. Dhaka University

Moinul Hasan About a decade back a dictator ruler of this country lameversity ever acknowledges such nted that "Dhaka University non-academic activities for has become a State within a promotion. State, this cannot be tolerated. He was furious over the extent of the autonomy the university had been exercising. He might

have different motives to be furious about the fact, but after a decade or more, I being a tax payer citizen have become a bit worried about the use and abuse of "autonomy" of the Dhaka University.

University hierarchy starts with the position of a lecturer. followed by assistant professor then associate professor and finally ends up with professor. If we now look into the Dhaka University teacher ratio, we will be surprised to see that about 50 per cent of the academic staff, if not more, are professors. In some departments, as a matter of fact, the total number of professors are two times more compared to the number of lecturers, assistant and associate professors Though the sanctioned numbers of post of professor are hardly one or two, some departments have at least 10 to 12 or more professors against the sanctioned post.

Universities are universal by standard and are supposed to be guided by universal academic standards. Nowhere in the world, one can find that the number of professors is greater than the total number of other academic staff in a department. How is it possible? Here

comes the question of "abuse of autonomy". Dhaka University has discovered a new phenomena called "restructuring". This is a process of upgrading a position to a higher level without having a concurrence of the Ministry of Finance - which ultimately pays the bill from the national exchequer interestingly in the process of restructuring a position, a teacher gets extra points for being a house tutor, student's counselor and other administrative jobs like assistant proctor, proctor etc. For all these positions, the teachers get additional allowances and free and or subsidised house (proctor, asst proctor and house tutors). Noone can claim that these activities have any academic component in it which should be weighed in giving a promotion. As a matter of fact, academic excellence is now overweighed by non-academic involvement.

Autonomy—Use or Abuse? Nowhere in the world any uni-

> Lately Dhaka University unilaterally extended the retirement age of professor from 60 to 65. The normal retirement age of civil servants in Bangladesh is 58. I believe, as a tax payer, I have all the rights to humbly question the rationale of such move of the university. Why a university teacher would have to serve up to age of 65 while rest others will retire earlier? Are they indispensable? I have no doubt that there are some outstanding scholars who are known for their academic excellence both locally and in the international arena We definitely require their services for our country as well as for the development of the academic discipline they are involved in. Under the existing rules of Dhaka University, the services of these outstanding scholars can be retained by creating a position of supernumerary professorship. Why should not the university use that provision? We agree or not but one has to accept the fact that age takes its toll on everybody. with exception to very few, most people lose their productivity, academic excellence and scientific acumen with age. If the university claims that age does not tax the productivity of their academic staff, then different professional bodies and civil servants as well can also equally claim that their re-

tended. I am glad that the chancellor of Dhaka University these days has been persistently taking about the anarchic condition and the falling academic standard at the academic institutions particularly the higher

tirement age should be ex-

academic bodies. May I kindly request the president and the chancellor of Dhaka University to look into the above issues. I being a alumni of Dhaka University and being a tax payer of this country feel that I have a right and a moral obligation to draw the attention of all conscious citizens of this country to stop this "academic anarchy" in the name of "academic autonomy".

May I also draw the attention of the education minister and the vice chancellor of Dhaka University to clarify their positions about the points