The Baily Star

Founder-Editor: Late S. M. Ali

Dhaka, Saturday, September 20, 1997 This Act will Cost AL a Lot

What the Awami League government did on Thursday last smacked of what happens in a police state. It is totally unacceptable that police should enter the office of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) — or for that matter any political party — and attack its workers and leaders within its premises. It appears to be a clear case of police being instructed to deliberately act tough, and the liberal way in which it used tear gas bears ample proof of the whole thing being pre-planned.

What is most surprising is that AL government appears to have chosen the confrontational course precisely when it can least afford it. More than anything else the government needs calm in the political sphere so that economic activities can be carried out in a smooth fashion. This it needs to give the economy the much needed momentum and also to attract the necessary foreign investment that it so very badly lacks at the moment.

We cannot say that what we have seen so far of the opposition politics has been either reasonable or logical. From the very outset the decision appeared to be to try and bring down this government in any way it can. But what the AL government did to BNP last Thursday is far more unreasonable and illogical than what BNP had done so far Government's action was in clear violation of all principles of democracy. To say that BNP violated the recent DCC decision not to hold meetings on city streets, and hence the police action was justified is to take the public for fools. There is no way that the DCC decision can be implemented by force. It has to be voluntary. More the government tries otherwise the more it will heat up the political climate, leading to heightened confrontation at the street level.

We warned the BNP government while in power not to take the confrontational line when it began to do so against the then opposition. We warn the AL government now. No political party in power has ever been able to deliver without the cooperation of the opposition. Police attack on BNP office takes our politics one step further towards confrontation, and the AL government has no one but itself to blame for it.

Rethink Two-day Weekend

The decision to keep some of the branches of commercial banks open on Saturday is a good one. It is for the first time that the government is showing some signs of recognition that its unthinking and sudden decision to go for a two-day weekend was a mistake. We think it should be revised without any further delay. Our economy cannot support a two-day weekend. There is too much wastage of labour time.

Government has so far not given any cogent argument as to why it suddenly felt compelled to make this drastic change. The point has been made that by increasing the working hours of the other five days it is compensating for the loss of time caused by the change. But given our work habit, the traditional lack of punctuality and well known indiscipline, the changed working hour schedule is not working. Visits to any office on Thursday afternoon and on Sunday morning will show that there is a tendency to leave early in the first instance and return late in the second. Two-day weekend means we are off for 104 days out of 365 days of the year. Add to it the fact that we have among the highest number of government holidays in the world. Further add the number of casual leave and earned leave and we are talking another 40 days. To it if we add an average of 6 days of yearly medical leave, which is really a low figure, then we have 150 days off from our working days. The government should have also considered that due to natural calamities and political activism a lot of productive time is lost

There was a lot to be said about the old timing which, with the afternoon off, provided people extra time with the family and also the possibility of doing extra work in the evenings - like running small shops or business, doing private tuition, doing handiwork at home, etc. Considering all the above, government should immediately revise its decision about the two-day weekend.

Piracy Made Easy?

Aggrieved engineer Nazmul Huda has made a longish point — one that goes far beyond his personal concern for recognition. Slightly over a decade ago, he made public his invention of the world's first radio operating without a battery or electricity. It worked by winding which he claims rather convincingly has been replicated and marketed by a British company, Baygen, without any reference made to his name as its original inventor. The National Science Museum had duly received a working model from him in 1978. Engineer Huda himself acknowledges though that radio mechanic Mohammad Ali, since deceased, assisted him in accomplishing the feat. He has sought redress through the Bangladesh High Commission in the UK. After all a Scotland Yard hand need hardly be hired to verify his story. So, why the delay?

Huda's tale highlights the plight of many science or technology enthusiasts or buffs in the country. From Jingira to the highest seat of research or learning we have had practical demonstrations of variegated innovations and improvisations. Neither the original researches done by individuals nor their practical demonstrations were as a rule funded or assisted by any agency.

Then when came the stage for them to seek patent rights, a crude combination of meanness, unscientific temper and bureaucratic red-tape threw them by the wayside — crestfallen, while others step on their unborn intellectual property entirely without prior knowledge perhaps.

The Rabbit and the Owl Story

"All too often economists and other development specialists take a partial and misleading view of reality. . . The process of economic development is just too complex to be understood by armchair theorizing"

stranded on a small Island in the middle of a flooded river. As the flood waters were rising, the terrified nomic development is just too rabbit asked the owl: "What am complex to be understood by I to do?" "Very simple," replied armchair theorizing" - argued the owl: "Turn yourself into a the aged but agile economist. bird and fly away." "Terrific!" In his quest for the numeraresponded the rabbit and then tor and denominator of struche added: "But how do I turn tural transformation, Dr Johnmyself into a bird?" "Oh, that's

to a complex problem. "All too

often economists and other de-

velopment specialists take a

partial and misleading view of

reality. I have tried to avoid

that pitfall by paying a great

deal of attention to the lessons

of history. The process of eco-

HE greatest problem now

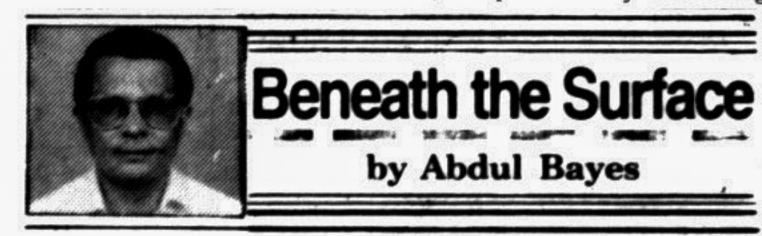
rabbit and an owl were

ston devoted few paras on implementation — I only do Bangladesh in the wake of a policy," said the owl as he flew comparison of demographic transition between Bangladesh This is the starting para of a and the USA. He tends to feel paper: "Persistent and Pervathat the "distracting debate" sive Poverty in Africa: looking about population issue of the at the Numerator and Denomipast decade confined to two sets nator of Structural Transforof "owls": "Population alarmist mation" by Bruce F. Johnston who would have us believe that an ace agricultural economist explosive population growth is of the world. He threw these the development problem and lines, underscoring the need of another set of owls who have a caution to those who are going put forth a "revisionist interto be involved, directly or indipretation" that trivializes the rectly, in implementing develpopulation problem. In effect, opment policies and prothe first group looks only on the grammes aimed at overcoming potential for increasing napersistent and pervasive tional output - the number poverty that Africa is afflicted with. In fact, the moral of his little story seemingly applies to all those involved in other including countries Bangladesh: Beaware of the owls — and simplistic solutions

while ignoring the effect of changes in the denominator." According to the available literature, change in a country's labour productivity might connote two components: change in output per hectare and change in number of hectares cultivated per hectare and change in number of hectares cultivated per hectare. Between 1960 and 1980 output per hectare increased, in both US and Bangladesh, by 40 per cent. But during the same period of time.

male farm workforce in Bangladesh exhibited a rise by 48 per cent (from 12 to 19 million) in contrast to a decline of the same by 68 per cent in US (from 3.8 to 1.7 million). The surge in workforce in agriculture in Bangladesh resulted in a decline in hectares per worker from 0.8 to 0.5 hectare or first under one acre per worker. The decline in workforce in US

tion in US agriculture but "it was structural transformation and a completed demographic transition that made it both feasible and socially and privately profitable for farmers to invest in farm equipment and for manufacturers to make large investments in R&D and plant and equipment required for the production of a vast array of productivity-enhancing



by Abdul Bayes

caused a huge increase from 117 to 247 hectares cultivated per worker "The combined effect was a three-fold increase in agricultural labour productivity (output/worker) in the US (from 94 to 286) and a decline in Bangladesh from 2.0 to 1.8". It can' be argued that notwithstanding the same percentage increase in output per hectare among them, the enormous productivity differential could only be adduced to contrasting changes in the size of their agricultural labour force. No doubt that huge hectares per worker in the US called for mechanizafarm equipment." (Necessity is

the mother of invention!) Why did agricultural labour force increase in Bangladesh between 1960 and 1980? Each year, population of working age group rose by close to 3 per cent and three quarters of the labour force was still in agriculture in 1980. In later years as growth rate of population slowed down, modest acceleration of structural transformation began to pick up. The acceleration of structural transformation in the future is also lurking. It is evident from the projected figures that between 1990 and

2010, agricultural labour force in Bangladesh could increase by 42 per cent as opposed to 57 per cent increase between 1960 and 1980. Bangladesh would compare favourably with Kenya. Tanzania and may other African countries whose agricultural labour force is projected to rise at a much faster rate than that of Bangladesh.

In the realm of demographic

transition, the most destructive (as well as disturbing!) element to take note of is the duration of the rapid population growth phase. For example, Crude Birth Rate (CBR) in Taiwan and South Korea almost halved between 1960 and 1975 (from 40 per thousand to 23 per thousand). In Bangladesh, on the otherhand, CBR displayed a marginal decline from 51 to 46 during the same period of time (significant decline, of course, could be witnessed in the 1980s). In Tanzania same trend holds good. Another important factor to reckon with is the concentration of population under age 15. As of mid-1996, almost half of the populations in countries of tropical Africa were under 15 compared to onefifth in South Korea and Europe or US. "Concentration of population in this under age 15 brackets ensures that the rate of

increase in the number of

women of child-bearing age will

continue to be high for another decade and a half even if birth rates should begin to decline immediately at a rapid rate. That concentration of population in the under 15 age groups also ensures that the rate of growth of labour force will continue to be rapid for atleast the next decade and a half". Dr Johnston frankly admit-

ted that, unlike the "owl" he does not have a simple solution of a complex problem. He also seems to abhor the idea that mere enunciation of policy prescription without due cognizance of their implementation might do harm than good. What he argues for is that instead of drawing up a long list of causal factors inhibiting development, one needs to focus on the long duration of the rapid growth phase of demographic transition. In fact, many of the ills of Tropical Africa could be found to have hided in the duration. And finally, in the attainment of long term goals of development, economic reforms under the aegis of structural adjustment programmes turn out to be a necessary but not a sufficient condition. The sufficient condition hinges on investment in human resources, slowing population growth and creating an infrastructure that is friendly to structural transformation. Let us not be owl, remain owlish and owlishly fly giving prescriptions without paying due attention to implementation.

Power Sector: Whither Improvement?

by Md Asadullah Khan

The menace of load shedding that continues unabated for more than a year now with no apparent explanation by the authority as to when things will show an improvement creates a sense of despondency in public mind and is likely to erode confidence in the administration's ability to set things in order.

facing the country is __ perhaps the insidious web of corruption that has seemingly throttled all developmental activities. So deep is the rot and so all-pervasive is the cynicism that all pious proclamations of intent have apparently reduced to power sector and installing footnote on history book. power plants in the private sec-Precisely told, corruption has tor was in response to a call seeped into the veins of this nafrom the potential foreign intion. From Secretariat, the vestors to set the erratic power nerve-centre of the country's supply position right so that administrative network, to they would feel interested in utility service organisations committing funds to industrial like WASA, DESA, PDB, DCC. projects in Bangladesh. No body BRTA, Banks, Income Tax, would deny that the low output Industries Directorate, PWD. in industrial production, the Roads and Highways and Forest chill in the business activities Department — almost all apex and the uninspiring flow of organisations associated with FD1s (Foreign Direct Invest development of the country ment) in the country could be are woefully riddled with corlargely attributed to this faulty ruption. Most people, however, and disruptive power supply believe that this extra-ordinary position in the country. The level of corruption stems from private sector power plants the overweening state control. with a generation capacity of Most worrisome, the police and 400 MW, due to be ready in customs seem to have almost October this year, as it appears topped the list. This explains now, is a long way off. It is furthe fact that even the most ther learnt that the technical appraisal of the 300-450 MW committed and dedicated crusader now throws up his arms Meghna-ghat Power Plant remains incomplete and that leads one to the conclusion that the process of awarding contracts may be inordinately delayed. As power generation scenario goes from bad to worse. people's patience is wearing thin. So said some exasperated

in despair. People are only wondering as to how this systematic loot of public money by some ill-inspired state officials could be lost sight of by the present government that came to power on people's mandate. People learnt with shock and dismay when the present minister for energy and natural resources told the agitated MPs of his party in ALPP meeting that the restructuring of the power generation units and implementation of the barge mounted power plants could not be taken up with the speed it necessitated for fear of corruption. The country is suffering from serious shortages of power almost since the time the present AL party took the reins of administration. Business activities and industrial productions have simply gone down for load shedding during important working hours. Secondly, the need for rehabilitating the

14 months. But most people believe that the ghosts of the past are again raising their monstrous heads to thwart peace. progress and development. Let not the Prime Minister become

a captive of these hordes. No government either in the past or at the present moment could tackle the problem of system loss" — that devours about 30 per cent of the generated power. The system loss that includes among other forms of thefts, illegal connections that must have been given by field level officials and workers surely in exchange of cash graft, have either gone unnoticed or untackled. Never in the past the government's long arms could reach out to haul up these graft-takers for abuse of authority and malfeasance. There is an apparent feeling that while the personnel working in the plant day in and day out, exposing them to all the rigours, cannot often eke out a comfortable living, those working in the field enjoy the loaves and the fishes. This unfair regulation, tough in the generating plant and loose in the distribution areas, inhibits good work dynamism and seriousness The result: lack of proper maintenance and overhauling of the power stations in time leading to disruption of power genera-

The menace of load shedding that continues unabated for more than a year now with no apparent explanation by the authority as to when things will show an improvement creates a sense of despondency in public mind and is likely to erode confidence in the administration's ability to set things in order. People are already skeptical of the administration's ability to deliver the goods. An exasperated Dhaka University teacher

complained to the control room about too frequent load shedding in the university residential area. The smart control room official told him that too many illegal connections had been taken from his area and it was the policy of the electricity administration to put those areas prone to illegal connections under frequent and longer load shedding. The question is how can this sort of punitive mea sure remedy a situation that calls for other stringent methods. Or should any such measure be at all taken on the sufferance of other law abiding and tax paying consumers? Sadly true, as much as the MPs in the ALPP meeting, held on 31st August last voiced their resentment about the crippling power scenario, people in the streets are so much so sore about the government's initiative and pace of progress in different structural works, power sector topping the list. People in the administration need not have to don the mantle of a crusader, what they need is to set the priorities to put the crum-

As it appears, corruption in the power sector is an insidious enemy set in stages starting from inviting tenders, commissioning of the power plant, generation of electricity up to the last phase of the distribution system. Report carried by the media on 5th September last revealed that the 110 MW power plant at Goalpara, Khulna is likely to face a shutdown any time as the oil companies-cum-tank owners nexus has withheld supply of furnace oil to the plant. The oil companies-tank owners nexus supplying oil to the plant, it was alleged, mixed oil with water much above the permissible level. The contaminated oil

underground water Bangkok

city is slowly sinking, and so is

found in the underground water

of Dhaka like many northern

and southern districts, what

would happen to our 90 million

government to take immediate

effective steps to use our river

and rain waters for drinking as

well as for cultivation purpose

all over the country - stop

sinking tube-wells and deep

tube-wells, save our environ-

6, Hare Street, Wari, Dhaka-

ment and save our people.

We would like to urge our

We wonder if arsenic is

the case with Dhaka.

people of Dhaka?

O H Kabir

bling economy in order.

overdosed with saline contents has already corroded the plant machinery — a serious threat to the plant's life. An enquiry committee comprising Dr S Z Haider, Professor of the Deptt of Chemistry, Dhaka University and Dr Noor Uddin Ahmed, Professor of the Deptt of Chemical Engineering, BUET along with the Plant Manager and representatives of the oil companies after making an onthe-spot enquiry were convinced about the bunglings and suggested some measures to check these corrupt practices. But the said nexus in a bid to show their arrogance, prowess and obstinacy at such recommendations has stopped supplying oil to the plant and the plant, it is learnt, with its present stock of furnace oil can only remain operative for an other ten days at best.

The country's power generation scenario seems to be sufficiently bleak till now. Reports carried by the media on 25th August last revealed that power generation capacity of Kaptai Hydroelectric Project (196 MW) has been reduced by 50 MW due to faults in the unit no 5. Three units of this plant out of 5 are in operation, one remaining shut off due to overhauling. On the

other hand Shikalbaha 60 MW

OPINION

thermo-electric plant now generates only 26 MW. Rawzan thermo-electric plant that had been ailing since its installation was also in doldrums. Despite the fact that the generational capacity of this plant after a long period of shut down has peaked to 150 MW, its 2nd unit still remains inoperative. People are aware that there are allegations of serious bungling in the installation of Rawzan thermo-electric plant. In a bid to cut down the phe-

nomenal system loss through

curbing tyrannical CBA activi-

ties, the government objective of turning DESA into DESCO (Public limited company) comprising one director from FBCCI and one from BUET might yield some desired result. It is a public knowledge that the whole power sector is writhing under the excesses of the trade unionism gone awry in the nationalised sector. True, trade unionism has drifted from voicing the rights of the workers into safeguarding vested interest. Reports have it that in the past even the most guilty could not be apprehended such unfettered CBA interfer ences. However, with commit ment and sincerity it is possible to turn a corrupted system into an agency of self-purification. Since the country's statecraft is susceptible to public opinion. the Prime Minister can very well use the popular disgust and the country's laws to tame the political class. People want her make a start.

The writer is Controller of Examinations, BUET.

The Ultimate Ignominy

Towheed Feroze

We have records in delivering humiliating sporting performances. Failure in the SAF Football, losing to Nepal in the Dhaka stadium, thrashing by Japan by a 8-0 margin, pulverised by UAE - yet, all these results were just not enough, a final disgrace was in store to properly consolidate the label of shame. The recent 11-0 drubbing of Mohammedan Sporting Club at the hands of the South Korean champions was the final touch to our glorious record of miserable defeats.

Even here in London this embarrassing result has been accepted with unmitigated disgust. Needless to say that the expatriate supporters are shattered. However this 11-nil result has revealed the parlous state our football is in at

Unthinkable it may seem, only ten years ago, MSC ranked among the seven top Asian clubs. Under the conscientious coaching of Naser Hejaji (the misunderstood Irani coach) MSC flourished and proved their superiority in South East Asia. With some eye-catching performances MSC deservedly went to the final round of the Asian Club Cup tournament. That brilliant performance by the club against Piruzi of Iran is still vivid in the minds of the supporters. In the final round MSC played superb football displaying class and exceptional teamwork. Defeating the North Korean champions

is not an illogical expectation. Moreover, it is quite natural. But breaking all systems of nature and dashing all hopes our football has gone back-

"April 25" Mohammedans

proved their soccer prowess.

So, imagining that ten years

later, they would go further

ahead, say, among the top five

wards. The reverse gear is very much loved by the Bengalees when the rest of the world is just aspiring to go faster and faster — not backward but forward

In all these years, we have fooled ourselves with hopes. During the last ten years. Asian football has made immense improvement but we, blind and headstrong have kept ourselves busy with trivial club tourneys. Unaware of what is happening out there, we have satisfied ourselves with futile and shallow contentment.

In the FIFA ranking, we are further relegated. India, Thailand and Indonesia are far ahead. But, only eight years back India was below us and Thailand took a 3-1 thrashing at Dhaka Stadium in 1989 World Cup qualifiers. The early nineties was the best period our football has had. Confidence was high, hopes were raised and better results pledged. Now, those promises sound hollow. Is it bad management, is it lack of conviction, is it the myopic vision of the officials or is it just that we have lost the touch to play

the game? I don't believe that we have lost our touch. Football is still the most popular game in Bangladesh, there are consistent players. The problem is not with the supply of players but with something else. SAF 'gold' in football is our elusive deer of glory. Won't we ever be able to catch it? The lackadaisical, half-hearted preparation for the games that is under way does not inspire any positive hopes. A gold in SAF is long overdue.

After so many failures, shouldn't the BFF take strict steps to ensure that this time it does not give us the slip? On the backdrop of a bright cricket future, people are gradually losing interest in football. Cricket matches are witnessing more crowd. Many people are of opinion that all sorts of government subsidies should be lifted from football and be given to the improvement of cricket and hockey. Not a bad idea, I must con-

clude. After the 11-goal ignominious defeat, many people have also forwarded suggestions, steps to save our football from a sad demise. So many suggestions have been made before, nobody bothered to take any concrete steps. So, what is the surety that the suggestions given now will not suffer the same consequences as

their predecessors? The writer is a student of London School of Journalism.

Pensioner's plight

Sir, Plight of pensioners, especially those drawing a small amount, beggars description. Those who have no other source of income are economically most hard-hit. Need of the hour is to provide them with financial help in the form of humanitarian relief to keep their soul and body together. This is, however, pending solution of their problem permanently.

A look into their problem will reveal the following discrepancies:

1) Gross pension of those who retired before 1-7-82 was calculated on the basis of average emoluments drawn during last 12 months while that of those who retired from 1-7-82 was calculated on last pay

2) Gross pension of those who retired before 1-7-89 was calculated from time to time at 60 per cent to 70 per cent of the average emoluments while that of those who retired from 1-7-89 was calculated at 80 per cent

of last pay drawn. 3) Those who retired before 1-6-85 did not get the benefit of higher pay introduced under last two Pay Commissions effective from 1-6-85 and 1-7-91

respectively.

4) There was restriction on amount of gross pension of amount exceeding Tk 600 was cut to half of the amount subject to the maximum of Tk 1000 in all. Subsequently, this restriction was withdrawn, but those whose pension was restricted, the restricted amount was not restored. The maximum of pension is now at Tk 8000 per

5) Benefit of the introduction of new scale of pay by the different Pay Commissions from time to time could not reach all pensioners equally. Some pensioners have not got at all any benefit, some others have been partially benefited while the

third group got all the benefits. Justice and fair play demand that those who did the same work in the same post should get equal remuneration. But that has not been done due to various reasons. All pensioners are a class. But the prevailing circumstances, from time to time, at the time of retirement, divided them into two groups unprivileged and privileged. Those who retired before 1-7-82 are more or less unprivileged and those who retired from 1-7-82 are privileged. The benefit extended to the privileged group has been shown above. Therefore, the solution lies in bringing them on equal footing on the basis of principle. Mere sanctioning them 10 per cent increase in pension under each pay commission is not a real solution to this end.

traders in the Dhaka city mar-

ket, "Let the government give us

power and impose any power

plant tax if it so wants". In ab-

sence of a clear picture about

the functioning of the power

sector, people are forced to draw

a conclusion that government

has little control over the sys-

tem. The administration, for

the sake of true governance

must take people in confidence

and seek their cooperation by

issuing public notices in the

media in advance about their

share of bearing load shedding

on a particular day in any area.

True, as the Prime Minister

said, she does not have a magic

wand to augment the ills accu-

mulated over the years — in just

To find out a way to solve the problem of pensioners, we may look into the other SAARC countries where such problem arose and how they solved it. In India, the problem was solved under a scheme known as Pension Liberalisation of 1979. It was held by the Indian Supreme Court that all pensioners, irrespective of their date of retirement, is a class and their pen-

sion should be fixed anew. In our cases, any solution in the midway will not meet the justice's end.

M A Lashkar Mohammadpur, Dhaka-1207

The limit of public subsidisation

Sir, The recent fuel prices hike is part of the overall desubsidisation exercise the government has to carry out to reduce the annual losses piling up with public sector and bleeding the nation.

In this case, the public is paying more, but the tax-payer, are paying hundreds of crores of

taka for the maintenance of the losing SOEs (state-owned enterprises). Why is the government not firm in that area and bow down to the union agitators? Firmness should be applied impartially. Certain decisions are intentionally made politically sensitive, to remain popular, watching the vote-bank (both AL and BNP).

Quiz for political super leaders: Can you rise above your standard?

A Husnain Dhaka

Poison in drinking water

Sir, On the advice of some of our experts and also on the insistence and encouragement of many foreign NGOs in our country, we have been digging more and more tube-wells and deep tube-wells to meet our requirements of drinking water and also for the purpose of cultivation of rice and vegetables. Thus we have almost overlooked and discarded our vast surface water available in numerous rivers,

rivulets and canals. Due to withdrawal of huge quantities of underground water, arsenic in lethal proportions has been found in underground drinking water causing diseases in many places. Drinking water of about three dozen districts of northern as well as southern Bangladesh have been arsenic contaminated and reportedly the lives of about 50

It may be mentioned here that an estimated number of 500 deep tube-wells have been sunk in the small metropolitan area of Dhaka, but so far, there has been no report of arsenic poisoning in the underground water. It is, however, reported that due to huge withdrawal of

million people are at stake.

Death of Diana

Sir, With the tragic death of Diana, the Princess of Wales, the life of the heroin of fairy tale of romance has come to an end all of a sudden. It was like a bolt from the blue.

We, the students of Jagannath University, philosophy department masters final year, express our condolences and share the sorrow's of the British Royal Family.

lately leading a complex and fast life, yet she became a heartthrob of the millions for her charming personality and humanitarian works. But her noble mission and dreams were marred by the pa-

parazzi who exploited Diana by

publishing events of her private

life which ultimately caused

her death in a car crash in Paris

Although Diana had been

on August 31. Diana will be sadly missed. by her many admirers and well-

Azad Hossain

wishers all over the world.

Jagannath University