The Baily Star

Founder-Editor: Late S. M. Ali

Dhaka, Thursday, September 25, 1997

We Urge Restraint

Today is again a hartal day. The second in four days. Was it unavoidable even from the anti-government point of view? Possibly not. For the hartal of Monday was hailed by the BNP chairperson herself as 'people's verdict against misrule'. If the point has been so adroitly made what can today's hartal add to that?

But today's hartal is a reality. Our commenting on the hartal culture for this umpteenth time is set against new elements emerging in the meantime.

President Shahabuddin Ahmed has involved himself in quest of venues for public meetings. He has not only evinced keen interest in the matter as a call of duty but is actually going round possible sites also to form his own ideas. Given his stature, his intercession in resolving the issue should not only be welcome to both sides but prove effective as well in bringing the impasse to an end.

Secondly, Mayor Hanif has called an all-party meeting for September 27-28 throwing open the venue question. This may be deemed as an offer for a dialogue and at what level it ought to take place should be a matter for the political parties to de-

The AL stalwarts have asked their workers and followers to go out on the streets protesting the hartal. Violent clashes may ensue if restraint is not consciously applied by both parties. Our fervent appeal to both sides — keep to law and shun violence.

Let it be said very clearly that the innumerable hartals that our helpless nation has passed through in the last three or four years were mostly cases of a minority imposing its will on a very large majority never endorsing the shut outs. This cannot go on indefinitely, especially in our state of poverty, under-development and malnourishment where it is impossible to put up with a single day's loss of man hours. Our nation does not simply afford to bear this hartal trauma that eats so viciously into the vitals of our collective existence.

Wading through Slush

The thought uppermost in the minds of most home-bound Dhakaites stranded in knee-to-waist deep water on Tuesday evening must have been whether they would find their houses liveably uninundated. Indeed two hours of 112 mm torrential rains raised the spectre of 1988 floods that had even seen dinghies floating across submerged city roads. So horrifyingly unprecedented was indeed the water-logging in Dhaka city that it brought back the memory of a whole flood with its corollary sympathetic spate in the metropolis a decade

By WASA's own reckoning, if something is not done to overhaul and modernise Dhaka's derelict drainage system in four to five years' time the metropolis will turn into a cesspool. It will be unlivable. To our mind, even by the moderately applied standards of civic life elsewhere, the unlivability of Dhaka city is already a palpable fact of life. All the surface and sewer pollutants of Dhaka city — garbage, animal innards, vegetable wastes, excreta — came afloat as people waded through the putrid water sheets taking on their persons the muckiest of muck imaginable in today's world.

Health hazard apart, the denizens suffered an ordeal in traffic congestion they will have great difficulty sloughing off for many many days. Mechanised vehicles conked out, their engines inoperative with gurgling water. Blobs of such transports forcing the beeline to split away and form into arcs created the worst-ever obstacles to the already slowed down traffic. Public inconvenience soured as their heightened need for mobility on the day after the hartal on Monday prompted many transports to come on the roads yet which dismally failed to ply through water-logging.

Our bottomline suggestions are: let the drainage non-system be a system, modernise it and flush it clean of polythene bags with an effective ban applied on littering them and eventually on their use. We can place specific containers at street corners for these to be recycled into environment friendly products as is done abroad.

Far from Holy

For sheer similarity it looks like an enactment of a page from Syed Walilullah's magnum opus Lal Shalu or Abul Mansur Ahmed's Aina in real life. Murad Hossain, the so-called peer and Jeener Badshah (Emperor of djinns) whom the Gopalganj police nabbed recently at the pursuance and goading of Bangladesh Women Lawyers' Association has indeed unfolded a fascinatingly abominable tale of deception that has the organised monstrosity of crime-based fiction. For almost two decades this man had gratified his lust and lived on pure and simple fraud. From conjuring a highly revered one in dark seances to exorcisement of the 'djinn victims', there is hardly any dummy this man has not sold in the name of religion. Yet no body dared tear this veil of sham off; such was the sway of religious prejudice.

Needless to say rural women were his prime targets. The man is reported to have married nineteen times. He is said to be a trafficker in women and children also. Women Lawyers' Association's investigative efforts have unearthed this other identity of this 'holy man' and the route he and his accomplices used for human smuggling.

We congratulate Women Lawyers' Association for bringing to light an agent of darkness and saving the lives of many of his probable victims. We hope other organisations involved in championing human rights will come forward to replicate this act. They should play a more active role in creating awareness against not only the fake faith healers and holy men but also the criminal motive that lurks behind this culture.

Indo-Pakistan Arms Race Triggered Again

T is ironic that while Indian Prakash Chandra writes from New Delhi Pakistani prime ▲ ministers are talking peace

The key word is deterrence. The question is how to deter the neighbour against launching a surprise and asking their foreign secretaries to work out attack. Both India and Pakistan are engaged in this futile exercise. This has taken a dangerous turn. modalities of improving rela-

tions, the arms purchase pitch have improved on the legacy left by the British raj. The colo-It is difficult to see how the nial administrators repre-Gujaral doctrine fits in with sented by the Indian administhis campaign But Gujaral is trative service and Pakistan's no free agent. He is under prescentral services are in no way sure from his coalition partbetter than the rulers of the

> British raj. Nehru saw great merit in maintaining the framework of the administrative set up left by the raj. There were some committees appointed for administrative reforms. But nothing happened.

An American expert, Professor Appleby reported extensively on the administrative reforms in Uttar Pradesh. He had urged decentralization of the government, but the regime in state capitals and also in New Delhi, wanted the old frame-

work to continue. The political elite in both countries were insisting on the old classification of the rulers and the ruled.

Today, the gulf between the two classes has been widened.

As one western diplomat comments, "Wherever the British went they left their foot prints behind. Whether in Sri Lanka, Pakistan or African countries they successfully divided the people into two conflicting classes — the rulers and the ignorant ruled. The latter were always discriminated against. They could not go the same schools, attend the same universities for specialized courses or go out for overseas education. For it all costs money. And the lower middle

classes had no cash "Today the situation is much worse in most south Asian countries. Some sociologists believe that this will lead to a clash between the political elite and the rest. This is already evidenced by the insurgency in India's north-east, Jammu and Kashmir, the southern state. Andhra Pradesh and elsewhere. India is sitting on a social and

political volcano. Adding to this terrible situation is the great zeal shown by New Delhi and Islamabad in buying arms of the most sophisticated kinds.

According to latest reports. India has spent or is in the process of spending some 2 billion dollars on buying the most sophisticated aircraft SU-30 from Moscow. It is also buying tanks of a very superior kind from the Czechs.

Indian purchase missions are searching for arms markets

in central Europe. The key word is deterrence. The question is how to deter the neighbour against launching a surprise attack. Both India and Pakistan are engaged in this futile exercise. This has taken a dangerous turn.

Experts point out that there is growing pressure in India to go in for nuclear weapons, because Pakistan is developing missile systems, which have reportedly nuclear war heads.

Adding fuel to the fire are the Chinese who are selling nuclear reactors to Pakistan. Opposi-

tion MPs have accused China of supplying highly sophisticated missile system to Pakistan.

Both countries are engaged in the missile race. The danger of course is that you cannot stop at the stage of manufacturing or deploying one type of missiles. You have to go on spending more and more money to develop ground to ground missile. ground to air missile and air to air weapon system. This will easily cost New Delhi millions of dollars.

The defense research and development organization (DRDO) has advised the prime minister that it must continue to develop and later deploy the Prithvi missiles and the more advanced family of guided weapons.

Nobody is questioning the costs. The reason is that no politician can be seen holding up such ambitious defense projects which will push India into a vastly superior position. The government's defense planners are dreaming of making this country a military super-power. They realize that they cannot match the strength of the Chinese. For China has a strong economic muscle to back up its defense effort which India lacks.

Besides, Beijing has a controlled society and not an open democratic institution so that its decisions are implemented with speed and efficiency. The same is not true of India.

Although China has been accused of high degree of corruption, India enjoys the same

kind of reputation. The former military policymaker says, "No one talks about it but the armed forces have a higher level of corruption than the civilian sector. Hundreds of millions of rupees are wasted in government contracts. There are even rumours that bribes are freely given and taken. And Mr Gujaral's recent call for an attack on

corruption will not affect the army. For the armed forces are in a closet. Nothing will be done by parliament or the cabinet to lower the morale of the military. This is the excuse given by politicians who assert that no

forces on the scale that we have in the central services or elsewhere in the private sector. Many south Asians observers are disturbed by reports that Indian scientists are developing the much feared STEALTH bomber which moves

corruption exists in the armed

It is another matter that such a bomber aircraft will cost the government billions of dol-

about very quietly and can

bomb any target without being

noticed by radar.

If New Delhi ever goes ahead with this project it will disturb the security environment of the SAARC region according to some experts.

It would have been a better idea for the SAARC countries, if India and Pakistan were to sit down and draw up a gradual disarmament plan and devote the

money to development projects. But politicians want their vote banks. They want to tell the voters that they are spending more and more money to de-

fend their country against surprise attacks. This includes nuclear deterrence. Nuclear hawks are pushing the cabinet and the prime minister into weaponising its nuclear industry. In other words India should be declared a nuclear weapon country even if

more than 300 million people

are living below the poverty

The doctrine of deterrence has been pushed to its most illogical limits. For the politicians are not interested in the social costs of nuclear weapon programme for India.

As a leading newspaper points out, "Mr Gujaral should first build an economically strong India. The nuclear scientists and the power elite should not be allowed to decide the fate of this power country. The bottomline of the deterrence debate is the inherent conflict of interest between the urban power elite on the one hand and rural power on the other.

"Finally, who prevented India from going nuclear in the past? If it was a considered policy decision to remain a threshold nuclear state keeping our option open, then why blame the United States or China, or any other country for that matter? If we fall prey to the strategies of the US and the urgings of the bomb lobby to compete, and commit the folly of starting an all out nuclear arms race with China and Pakistan, we are likely to end up as a bankrupt nation."

OPINION

is in high drive.

on defense.

ners. The opposition Bharatiya

Janata party and the former

ruling party Congress, are both

demanding that the govern-

ment should open its purse

strings and spend more money

says. "If India and Pakistan are

armed to the teeth what would

happen to small countries in

South Asia. The SAARC coun-

tries have a right to know if

their territorial integrity is

threatened by such powerful

neighbours. The mistake both

countries are making is that in-

stead of concentrating on build-

ing their economic muscle they

are going in for highly expen-

that this is the equivalent of

snatching bread from the poor

In its recent Human Develop-

ment report, the UNDP, has

placed India in the company of

some least developed African

countries. India ranks 148th in

terms of quality of life, educa

tion, employment, poverty and

cians in both countries are

never tired of eradicating

poverty and giving better stan-

dard of living to the common

But in actual practice they

It is significant that politi-

lack of medical facilities.

Some economists believe

sive modern weapon systems."

As one diplomatic observer

Bad News for the Pessimists

visitor from an overseas university, Dr Kudrat-I ▲ Elahi, had tried to raise some perplexing arguments in his article titled "Good News for the NGOs and Business People" published on September 9 in of confusion. The Daily Star. He was highly critical on some specific issues regarding poverty alleviation programme (PAP) and its practitioners and patrons. But

articulation. I became surprised to have gone through the article and even been puzzled by observing the writer's unnecessary apprehension on poverty scenario that seems to loom large as a bugaboo on his mind. With due respect to the writer, I would like to highlight on some lacunas of his criticisms.

as a development worker. I am

of opinion that his arguments

were simulacrums in true

sense. Criticism is laudable, but

it should have some valued

Firstly, it is a matter of great regret for us that we have yet to develop an acceptable method for calculating different statistical simulations mainly for the development indicators. Giving a very recent example from the comment of our Finance Minister that he differs with some statistics prepared and given by different government organisations. What does it mean? Does it not mean that even the highest policy-making level is confused with the methodically incorrect statistical figures? So, what would have to be our plinth of reliance? Given the circumstances. I think either the writer has purposively

taken into account the agriculture census report or he has been confused with it. However it is obvious that the reliability of the statistical derivatives of agriculture census are not out

Nevertheless the dubious nature of data if we analyse the given statistics what we see? Involvement in non-farm activities and number of landless households (HHs) in the rural areas has been increased between the gap of two decades. But my point is that how this two indicators alone have been responsible to make the poverty situation worsen? Do the two indicators have any direct relationship with the intensity of poverty? I don't think so. It really has not. Because when the man-land ratio is highly skewed, distribution of income is highly unequal, basic needs of the people are still unfulfilled and above all in macro sense "growth with equity" and "social justice" are still beyond our reach, then a pair of indicators should not be the tool to measure the intensity of poverty. Poverty itself has many dimensions to define and of measurement. Any single or a pair of indicators are not suffice either to define or to measure it.

Secondly, the writer has raised some questions on the roles of the NGOs, its leaders, politicians and bureaucrats whom he has called business people. What are the basis of such impulsive nomenclature that have intended to degrade them in general. The role of Bangladeshi NGOs are well ac-

COUNTY. W D. V WAS D. A.S.

by Md Shaikhul Islam claimed around world through

their works and innovative ideas. Some of the big NGOs have already got acceptance as reputed institutions. From operational point of view, the NGOs have different modus operandi. There might have some glitches in programme implementation processes. So, naturally the performance barometers of the NGOs have had its own ups and downs due to some host of internal and external factors. Despite all limitations, the success of the NGOs are lying on their lowcost service delivery system, accessibility to the remotest target people and structured working strategies with a blend of visions, missions, goals and in-

Arguably, in the question of NGOs' dependency on foreign donations, I would not fully disagree with the writer. Rather, I am of opinion that the NGOs did have considerable dependence on foreign donations and in parallel, I should say it was an "until-recently" phenomenon. But my point is that the writer has overlooked the financial, programme-oriented and holistic institutional sustainablility concept. In quest of sustainability, presently, the NGOs are intended to reduce their dependence on foreign donations. They are firmly interested in tapping resource with huge dormant potentials and subsequent deliveries in a cost-effective way.

Moreover, it is now an open

secret that due to the changing aid policy of bilateral and multilateral donors, the volumes of donations for NGOs have been continuously dwindling. So, don't understand how the NGO leaders will be encouraged to see the increasing number of landless households and hence would be looking for to have more foreign donations at the time when they are of viewed to make prosper to the poor people by their own resources. In this regard, the writer's arguments are really confusing.

Again, Bangladesh has a long history of deprivation due to the British colonisation. The politics and bureaucracy of Bangladesh have inherited all the bad elements of the British rule. Moreover, since the independence of Bangladesh the democratic processes had been highly barred by the military rulers. They always had tried to grab the state power in undemocratic ways and always overlooked people's aspirations. Consequence to this crippling situation, a scarcity of honest enlightened and farsighted politicians have always been felt and basically it is in behind the emergence of harmful bureaucracy. But it does not mean in general that the present politicians and bureaucrats in position after seeing the census will be encouraged and deliberately will be pursuing the donors to collect more funds with ill intentions. It is not that much easy, as the writer has opined. In this connection, I would not

go for details. Just look on the "Lalu Prasad and Livestock Fodder" case in Bihar, India. However, if we can ensure regular fair elections with people's participation, credible and competent candidature, strong parliamentary system and can prevent laissez-faire attitude in every sector, then within a very shortest possible time we would be in the position of taking off. Thirdly, let me say some-

thing about the writer's wrong philosophical thoughts on microcredit. The concept microcredit, or in more advance, micro-finance has brought a revolutionary change in the poverty alleviation programmes vis-a-vis to the fate of the poor people throughout the world. It is being treated as a powerful tool to combat poverty. Microcredit has manifold effects. It has not only shown a path to the poor to have access to credit rather the inherent philosophy of microcredit is to help the poor in building there self-confidence and to make them enable to take care of themselves involving in income-generating activities. The strategy is that indige nous small investments mainly in non-farm activities (might have agricultural activities) would have to pull the poor out from below the poverty line by creating surplus income. The writer can see numerous research findings on the impact of microcredit in this regard.

Moreover, micro-finance institutions (MFIs) or credit-operating NGOs have been able to create alternative employment

through microcredit programme. For example, most of the big microcredit-operating NGOs like BRAC. ASA. PROSHIKA, RDRS etc., have employed several thousands of educated people. It is a great achievement indeed. So, I don't understand why the writer has treated microcredit programme as "painkiller" in nature. Rather, reality tells us that it is a curative therapy for poverty diseases and successful replications of microcredit programme throughout the world is a burning example against the

generation opportunities for the

unemployed educated persons

from the service charge earned

Fourthly, I would like to say that could have bowed down on the microcredit gurus. But it would have to be a fruitless work, I think, microcredit gurus are not only acclaimed and honoured by their concepts but also by dint of their successful works and devotion to the welfare of human beings.

writer's philosophy.

Finally, I should say that we have just started our journey towards a prosperous future. The path is undulating. It is the responsibility of the critics to indicate the right path. However, despite all criticisms, I am sure that the destination is not far away to reach if we all together put our efforts sincerely and correctly.

The writer is Manager (operations). Palli Karmasahayak Foundation Dhaka.

Letters for publication in these columns should be addressed to the Editor and legibly written or typed with double space. For reasons of space, short letters are preferred, and all are subject to editing and cuts. Pseudonyms are accepted. However, all communications must bear the writer's real name, signature and address.

Water-logging in DND

Sir. To understand the water-logging in DND a brief history of the project is, perhaps, needed. Dhaka Narayanganj Demra Irrigation Project (DND) was originally created as a model project for irrigation. It has two parts, namely commanded and non-commanded areas. On the way to Derma the non-commanded area lies on the left and the commanded area on the right of the Dhaka-Demra road. In the non-commanded area, natural flood water is allowed but in the commanded area no flood water is allowed, except that pours down from occasional rain.

Although three crops were designed to grow annually, no more than one crop a year is grown. In the commanded area, presently hardly any crops are grown. The area has largely been inhabited and a number of homesteads have sprung up to make it locally unsuitable for agriculture. Besides, RAJUK is trying to acquire a vast area in the commanded area for housing. With the time passing more and more houses are built practically making agricultural activities non-existent. The commanded area has virtually turned to be a housing area. Before the project, natural flood water used to inundate the commanded area like the noncommanded area old homesteads of the village were in the raised hands. After commissioning of the project, locals as well as non-locals started building houses in the lower plain. Roads were also built in the lower plain without proper

drainage system. Moreover, there is a canal popularly known as 'Paglar Khal' which connects the Burig-

anga and the Sitalakkha rivers. Of late, this canal was used for drainage. With commissioning of the project, both sides of the canal were blocked. An arrangement was made to drain out the rain water by a pump at Siddhirganj Pump Houses. Due to encroachment by the people, the 'Paglar Khal' nowadays, has become so narrow that it cannot carry much water to be pumped out. Therefore, almost all the inhabited and uninhabited parts in the commanded area go under water even during normal rain, not to speak of heavy rain. As a result, immense loss to properties is caused and difficulties for the people know no bounds.

Local efforts by people and the local union councils in the area could not make any headway to get rid of the problem. To remove water-logging, concerted efforts by four agencies namely, local union councils, Dhaka City Corporation, Water Resources Ministry and LGRD Ministry are needed. It has to be tackled under a master plan and all the aforementioned agencies have to be involved in preparing of the plan and that has to be done immediately so that during the next rainy season the inhabitants of the area under DND are saved of the loss of properties and miseries they

Abdul Matin Mirdha Matuail, Dhaka

are subjected to.

Price of essentials

Sir, If that is our government policy to keep the price of goods in balance with our neighbour, so that smuggling is easily controlled without the help of border police, then it is a good news for the people of Bangladesh. They should not

get upset or disheartened because of the price-hike of only one commodity i.e. petrol to balance with the price in India. Because if the price of petrol is increased for only that reason then the government must balance the price of all other commodities with that of India!

That will be a boon for us. because the price of all other commodities is so low in India that it really surprises one who crosses over to the other side of the border from here. Food of all kinds cost less than half of Bangladesh price, so do clothings, cosmetics, shoes etc. Even the taxi fare is surprisingly low. though the price of fuel was higher than in BD before. It is so, because they charge the passenger according to the meter and not orally as is done in our country.

Now the government is dutybond to reduce the price of all the essentials to the level of India's price. Otherwise it will lead to smuggling of all other items from India to Bangladesh. But nothing will smuggle out from here as the only essential that was cheap here is no more so. This will lead to imbalance in this ageold trade of smuggling!

Our poor people will get poorer as they have nothing to smuggle from here to India, but a lot of things to smuggle from there to here - the 'import' and 'export' in smuggling is very much imbalanced now, leading to 'trade deficit'! It may even harm the economy if this imbalance in 'trade' continues!!

Dr Sabrina Rashid Dhaka

Accommodation problem at RU

Sir. About 25,000 students are there in Rajshahi University but it has only 14 residential halls that accommodate 8,000 students. Rest of them either stay in the messes or in their respective houses. A few days back, a decision was en forced by the hall authorities that only the resident students will be allowed to stay in the

It was also announced that no "guest card" would be allowed. As a result, a large number of students left the halls and took shelter in messes. But due to heavy rain, many places go under water and some messes become the victim of this natural calamity. They have been living with very unhygienic and

filthy surroundings. My ardent request to the authority concerned to take some fruitful measures to mitigate their sufferings.

E/34, Sher-e-Bangla Hall Rajshahi University, Rajshahi

Who is benefited by the border check posts?

Sir, What a vexing situation! What a range of harassment! Well, I am talking about the Bangladesh-India border check posts. When seeing is believing, anyone can also see it visiting the places without giving any special identification i.e., as a general public, and practically feel it.

Even bank personnel charge Taka 10 per person extra as 'bakshis' when someone goes to deposit his/her travel tax not to speak of the police who believably charge Taka 50 per head in Bangladesh and Rs 40 in India. Then what about the customs? Well, in the victims' language, they harass the public and also charge Taka 50 and Rs 50 respectively on either side. Also the medical department men in Bangladesh side charge Tk 5 to 10 per head for issuing a medical certificate.

At Hilli check post, if you are not a passport holder but have paid Tk 250, a slip will be issued to you and nobody will 'check' your illegal border crossing. Rather it is convenient than holding a legal passport!

The existence of check posts at the border between India and Bangladesh, seems to benefit the border police, customs, border security personnel and perhaps illegal trespassers (smugglers included) and surely not

the legal visitors. I **visited** about 189 km of the border area on my friend's motorcycle from Bongaon to Berhampore (Indian side of the border). At most of the places smuggling is not virtually checked. The situation is worse at Jalanghi in Murshidabad.

This writer has documents of verbatim remarks in voice recorder and experience of personal observation during five times visit to India by air and by road. Like in Bangladesh, many touts are there too looking out for 'preys'.

There must be some understanding between the authorities on either side of the border on one point, just one point morality. This will save their respective countries and the innocent visitors.

Dhanmondi.

diseases.

Environment pollution

Sir, In the world map, Dhaka has been earmarked as the worst-polluted city. In the recent times such news was published both in the national and international media with live TV pictures. There is a legislation on 'environmental pollution' in the country. But with the passing of time, pollution has been taking a serious turn and possessing a serious health hazards with appearance of various types of new chronic

It is observed that government and semi-government organisations are the main culprits for violation of Environment Act. Recently, MoEF reported that the river Buriganga has become uninhabitable for fish and other species due to water pollution, but the ministry didn't take any action.

We the inhabitants of Khilgaon B zone and its adjacent areas have been facing with serious health hazards and pollution problems due to indiscriminate dumping of hundreds tons of city garbage everyday in the

surrounding lakes. Obnoxious smell from rotten garbage has polluted the air of the entire area. Last year when DCC's contractor started dumping garbage in this area, we approached the Mayor who was kind enough to pass an immediate order to stop it.

But this time we are not getting any support from the local law-maker whom we voted to the power. It is a naked violation of country's Environment Act and I urge the authorities concerned to intervene. I also appeal to the environmentalists to come forward to respond to our SOS.

M A Jalil 372/B. Khilgaon, Dhaka

Begum Daulatunnessa

Sir. On the opening session of the 6th session of the Parliament on 30th August 1997 condolence was observed in memory of a number of recently departed political leaders and intellectuals. Unfortunately, in the list of departed personalities, the name of former member of the parliament Begum Daulatunnessa, who died recently (which was published in your esteemed daily) was not included. Begum Daulatunnessa was elected as a member of the then Provincial Assembly of the United Front in 1954.

She was the first to propose a bill in the then Provincial Assembly against the dowry system. She was a reputed a letterateur and a novelist and wrote a number of novels. Manuscripts of a number of her unpublished novels and drama are lying in her residence at Gaibandha with her ailing and disabled

This is unfortunate that

there are five MPs from

Gaibandha, but none of them could bring the condolence proposal for Begum Daulatunnessa in the Parliament.

son who was a physician.

Rowshan A Rahman 148. East Raza Bazar Farmgate, Dhaka-1215