Founder-Editor: Late S. M. Ali

Dhaka Sunday, March 1, 1998

## The Home-coming Saga

Far too quietly and imperceptibly for the great significance of what happened Bangladesh has been host to successful completion of one of the major refugee repatriation processes of the contemporary world. With the last batch of our tribals trekking back to their ancestral home in the CHT from the Tripura camp in India the total number of returnees since 1994 stands at 63,861 to-date. Any tortuous, protracted and gigantic repatriation operation of this scale practically brought to an end during the last one year would have triggered media hype and blazing laminations elsewhere. But in a country with a far greater share of negative, depressive tidings than positive ones, and somewhat unaccustomed to big-news-events of international topicality right in our midst we might make a detour of sorts in realising the true import of what has happened.

The sole point we are driving at is this: in a positive spurt of beneficial bilateralism the Indian central government and Tripura state government have shown an exemplary will to persuade the refugees encamped there to bury their hatchet and go right back to Bangladesh. Ethnic refugee problems have had a way of vitiating relations between neighbouring countries in a couple of continents but with a hands-off policy of India we have today come on top of that nightmarish scenario. We thank the tribal refugee leadership for their constructive role in securing the return of refugees to the CHT. At the same time the negotiators from our side have an ample share of the nation's appreciation for what they have achieved so assiduously.

The end of the repatriation operation marks the beginning of a massive rehabilitation process. Just as international assistance is round the corner and the news of possible good life reaching out to the surrounding belt some refugees from Mijoram and Arakan are reportedly trekking into Bandarban. All of this assumes critical importance in view of the historic CHT peace accord signed with the PCJSS and the voluntary handing over of weapons by the Shantibahini cadres to the government. The tasks of peace, progress and prosperity in the hills are all interwoven into a holistic set of agenda and must be addressed accordingly without a chink in the integrated approach. Their sentimental home-coming is worth making the most

## Why is it in Limbo?

What is so unbearably hot about Public Administration Reform Commission? No one seems to last at its helm and replacement looks so difficult when some body calls quits. Three months have gone since Mr. Kazi Fazlur Rahman resigned as the Commission's chairman but the government is yet to find anyone to succeed him. Notwithstanding the challenges this job entails, this nonavailability syndrome makes one form a rather unfavourable opinion about authorities' sincerity over such an important issue.

Time and again in the past, it was observed by the donors and thinktanks both in the government and its outside that public administration system in this country is archaic; it has to be modernised and streamlined to facilitate not only the implementation of political agenda but also to carry out its economic policy which is essentially based on the concept of free market. With the idea of a durable local government system gelling in a refreshing drift from the loathsome over-centralisation, a complete overhauling of the whole juggernaut seems proper than ever before.

There was enough room for optimism in the manner in which the government got a move on in this respect by a reform commission. But one year down the line its approach seems to have betrayed that optimism. The chairman's office is lying vacant for months on end. In fact the dismal reality about the commission dates back to the present headless state. The logistical inadequacy was appalling even when the commission had a chairman. It was not properly placed in the rules of business. The commission, it was learnt, did not have a proper site for its office. Then authority over financial matters was not delegated properly. How did the government expect the commission to function? As an appurtenance of the same bureaucracy was is to 'diagnose'? With such a long list of vital signs of attitudinal adversity small wonder it is that the commission is gasping breath. Is the government serious about public administration reform?

### Onions Look So Red

Onions are selling at Tk 40 a kg. One onion a taka or thereabout. And this is deshi or native onion not the big salad variety from India. Late arrival in the market of this winter crop, due to rain at the fag-end of the season, has been cited as a reason. But the going rumour accounting for the unusual spurt is that onions are being smuggled out to India for a better price — 52 rupees a kg in West Bengal markets. That, according to some, has been acting as a suction pump for the indigenous variety from the big onion-growing centres. The fattening wallet, say still others, is being used to buy and smuggle in cow and diesel. These explanations can be true or false or a mixture of both. What intrigued one is the manner of the spurt — jumping from Tk 16 the price more than doubled in less than a week's time. Some traders particularly in Khulna as also elsewhere spread early this week a scare of salt getting scarce overnight. And that made salt price to soar to stratospheric levels, at around Taka 30. But that didn't quite work and price came down to saner perches soon enough.

Spurt in a stray item price and in the manner manifested in the cases of onion and salt, has rarely been experienced before. Each time that happened, a trading scandal was found to be at its root. The government must appreciate that a manipulative food market will ruin the nation. But long before that comes about, this government will have been done in. It must, for its very existence, ensure a prevention of such unhealthy price spurts and uncover the roots of these - for effective stoppage and also for saving its own good name.

# The State of the Stock Market

Investors, who were once bitten, have become twice shy with the stock market. It is this high sense of risk that has been driving the investors to sell off their newly purchased shares as soon as prices go up a little bit without waiting for higher prices.

last 15 months has been showing a persistently declining trend. The Dhaka Stock Exchange's (DSE's) All Share Price Index (ASPI) has gone below 700 from its peak of 3627 in the month of November 1996., a decline of over 80 per cent now. It was only in the second week of May 1997, that the ASPI crossed 1200 mark for a few days but it went down again. In the middle of September, 1997, it went up to 1100.

HE stock market over the

Since then it has been on a persistent downward slide with occasional rises which never lasted for more than a day or two. Having seen this deepseated malaise, a major effort was orchestrated by the government with Bangladesh Bank, nationalised commercial banks, state owned merchants bank, stock brokers and the DSE officials to revive the market. The government announced a bold package, or one can say a "recovery package", on January 21, 1998, after a meeting in the finance ministry with all the financial wizards, as it were, of the country. The important measures included (a) the raising of bank loans to the stock brokers to 60 per cent from its previous level of 50 per cent of the average market value of their shares ( the average value to be calculated on the basis of prices of shares over the previous six months), (b) permitting the four Nationalised Commercial Banks (NCBs), two Development Financial Institutions (DFIs) and the lone government merchant bank, the Investment Corporation of Bangladesh (ICB), and (c) giving permission

to ten private merchant banks six of them merchant banks and four issue managers) to operate in the market (14 more were said to be in the process of getting government permis-

Further, it was also reported to have been said by the Banking Secretary that the two DFIs and members of the DSE would now be active as brokers to create additional demand' while a DSE source said that "the NCBs will work out ways to channel more funds into the market". The Finance Minister was quoted as saying that "the government was also thinking of allowing the companies to buy back if the share prices go below what fundamentals say they should be". (All these reports and quotations are from The Daily Star, Thursday, January 22, 1998, page-1). Let there be no doubt that all these were good measures with good intentions of the policy makers in their desperate effort to resuscitate the stock market, the dying patient, as it were. The question now is what has been happening in the stock market since then? Or has the market responded positively to these stimuli as was expected? It is important to find the right answers to these questions.

#### **Stock Market Prices Since** January

The above measures were adopted on January 21, 1998,

INSIGHT **Kabir U Ahmad** 

Date	DSE's Index	Market Capitalisation	Issues Traded
Jan 20.	98 705	6226 Crores	144
Jan 21.	" 702	6269 "	127
Jan 22 "	715	6387 "	144
Jan 24 "	737	6584	140
Jan 25 "	733	6547	137
Jan 26 "	729	6516	141
Jan 28 "	741	6624	115
Feb 1, "	758	6771	117
Feb 2, "	760	6791	132
Feb 3, "	756	6754	139
Feb 4, "	751	6707	140
Feb 22, "	705	6317	141
Feb 23 "	698	6246	140
Feb 24 "	698	6255	137
Feb 26, "	696	6231	146

responses since then it would be of price change. appropriate to look at the table

Some data in the middle of the series are left out because the price trend of those days was continuously declining which doesn't add any special

and to understand the market information about the pattern

However, the table of data shows that immediately after the simulative measures were announced, the Index went up for a couple of days reaching 737 on January 24th and then started declining. After the Eid

vacation, it went up again hitting the highest peak of 760 on Feb. 2nd and then started its systematic decline through the entire month reaching the bottom level of 696 on Feb. 26, which is much lower than the price prevailing well before the new government took office.

The market capitalisation varied over the entire period from a level of 6226 crore on Jan. 20th to the highest level of 6791 crore on Feb 2, 1998, when the Index also peaked.

But, by and large, it fluctuated all along. The total number of Issues traded, on the other hand, varied from 115 on January 28th to 146 on February 26th. Some observations are in

First of all, there is some positive correlation between the increase in Price Index and Market Capitalisations but there seems to be a negative correlation between changes in the price index and Issues traded.

This raises some interesting questions which need further investigation. Second and the most important observation is the fact that the market has not responded vigorously to the stimulative measures that the government had introduced on January 21,1998. This is the biggest surprise that the data of the table has revealed. This raises the most interesting question as to why haven't these measures worked?

Reasons for the Poor Market Response

In the first place, the market confidence has not been restored by these measures because, as I explained before in this column, ordinary investors who have been "slaughtered" in 1996 crash cannot see that the manipulators who brought about that crash have been punished. Until that is done, ordinary investors will not return to the market. In the second place, the legal loopholes that existed before have not been plugged as yet satisfactorily and hence confidence will not return. In the third place, the DSE has been playing a cat-and-mouse game with the automation scheme. This should have been completed months ago. Only yesterday the news has come out that the DSE has finally agreed to go ahead with the automation contract with TANDEM. Automation will certainly make the system more transparent and less sus-

ceptible to manipulations. Finally, government is paying substantially higher rate of interest in their Savings Certificates which are risk-free while investments in the secondary market appears highly risky. Investors, who were once bitten, have become twice shy with the stock market. It is this high sense of risk that has been driving the investors to sell off their newly purchased shares as soon as prices go up a little bit without waiting for higher prices. In waiting for very high prices, they see the danger of capital loss. Government has to take some drastic steps is restoring confidence in the market.

# Who Will be the Next Premier of India?

There is every likelihood that majority of congressmen will want Sonia to become prime minister if the party appears to be in a position to form government.

HE four-phase national elections in India are in L the final phase and the results will start trickling down as soon as the last installment of the voting is over on March 7. A new lower house of the parliament (Lokshaba) will be constituted by March 15 and a new government under a new prime minister will take over in quick time. However, since a "hung" parliament is widely expected and no clear winner in the much-talked about midterm polls is predicted, the formation of the government may take some time in the midst of claims and counter claims by the main contenders for power.

Normally, the single largest parliamentary party or group will stake claim for forming the new government even if none secures an absolute majority necessary to govern the country. But if that party or group appears to be in doubt to garner a majority support which is 273 in the 545-member Lokshaba, other key players of the political spectrum are also expected to come up with the demands to give a new government. In such a situation, the ceremonial president of the country holds the key and decides who should be the first to be invited to form

When there is a clear victory for a party, or its majority is not in doubt in any way, the president has no difficulty in asking the party concerned or group to take over the helm. But the decision for the head of the state does become somewhat cumbersome in the absence of such condition and when there are conflicting claims for setting up the government as it was experienced following the verdict of the people in the last polls. None secured the absolute majority and the then president Dr. Shankar Dayal Sharma finally asked the single largest party of 163 members - the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) to form the government event

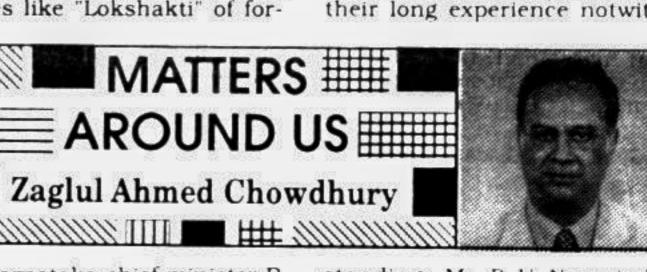
though supports of 273 members were required. The BJP was given the first chance to come up with a government and then prove its majority in the floor by next fifteen days time. The party did form the government under the prime ministership of its parliamentary party leader Atal Bihari Vaypayee but it had to relinquish power after a very brief 13 days as the party failed to muster the additional supports necessary to remain in government. The BJP had some supporters in the form of the Samata Party in Bihar or the Akali Dal in the Punjab but they had only a few members in the Lokshaba and the Vajpayee government resigned before facing a majority challenge in the house as it was far short of securing the support of 273 members. None of the two other claimants for power - the Congress and the 13-party United Front — had the strength close to absolute majority but the UF twice formed the government with the support from the Congress, which, however, called off the crucial support leading to the fall of the gov-

When the Congress withdrew the support from the first UF government headed by H D Deve Gowda, it mainly stemmed from a personal desire of Congress president Sitaram Kesri to explore possibilities of his party forming the government which would have given Mr Kesri a chance to become the prime minister — an ambition he is known to be nurturing as party chief. But the move backfired and the Congress had to support again an UF government and this time led by Inder Kumar Gujral. Here again the Congress called off the support but this time on a principled position like on the findings of a report by the Jain commis-

sion that looked into the killing of former prime minister and Congress president Rajiv Gandhi. The problem on the issue with the ruling UF sparked off such controversy that the government and its ally Congress had to fall apart

necessitating snap polls. Obviously, this time too they are three main contenders in the race for power in the New Delhi and all are exuding optimism that they can form the government. The BJP is certainly the forerunner as it hopes to improve its tally considerably and its allies have also increased this time since parties like "Lokshakti" of fordire strait after it lost power in the last elections and problem was compounded by weak leadership and squabbles in the organisation. It got 140 seats in the last Lokshaba but it was earlier thought to come down further even much less than 100 seats in the coming elections. But its electoral fortunes suddenly started showing for remarkable improvement with the appearance of its leader and tormer prime minister Rajiv Gandhi's widow Italian-born Sonia Gandhi in the active politics and becoming the star campaigner for the organisation.

Two lacklustre politicians, their long experience notwith-



mer Karnataka chief minister R K Hegde and AIDMK led by former chief minister of Tamil Nadu are supporting the BJP despite their different approach on issues like secularism as the two regional parties abhore communalism which the BJP is known to espouse. The party feels that it would get more than 200 seats and with the support from parties which are supporting the BJP under a broad based understanding, it will be able to get the support of 273 members. And there is no confusion about who would become the prime minister since, for the party, Mr Vajpayee is the declared candidate. The BJP lays emphasis on an "able prime minister" which Mr Vajpayee symbolises as an efficient leader of the

The Congress was rather in a

standing, Mr P V Narasimha Rao and Mr Sitamram Kesri could offer little to the party after the charismatic leadership of Rajiv Gandhi, Rajiv, his mother late prime minister Indira Gandhi and her father Jawaharlal Nehru were not without criticisms and controversy but they had attraction in their leadership. Sonia is the inheritor of the Nehru family despite her being a foreigner and becoming Indian through marriage. The Congress, mired in frustration and leadership crisis, found a glimmer of hope and her whirlwind campaign has placed the party in the realm of discussions as a possible contender to form a government with supports from others. If the party succeeds in forming a government, and evidently this may be possible

through a support from the secular UF in the post-election scenario, Sonia may figure as a prime minister although she has not contested the polls. One can always seek an election within six months for membership in parliament after becoming prime minister. However, Sonia Gandhi, in

such an event, is not the auto-

matic choice for the premier-

ship. She lacks the experience in politics not to talk about running the government and there may be other figures like Mr Manmohan Singh, who is seen as the architect of economic reforms in the country as minister for finance. Besides, he is respected in the organisation and not involved in the factional fighting in Congress. Sonia herself may

> opt out not to take up responsibility at the moment and may wait for some time and Mr Singh or anyone of high image in the party may be considered for the position of head of government. However, there is every likelihood that majority of congressmen will want Sonia to become prime minister if the

party appears to be in a position

it is the Congress or the UF.

What about the UF? Whether

to form government.

they are unlikely to be able to form government alone and may support the other to prevent the common foe BJP from coming to power. If these two parties or groups have to form the government when the BJP fails to do that, who will stake claim to form the government -Congress or the UF? Earlier, the UF formed governments and Congress extended support. This time, the Congress may ask for similar support with it being at the helm. Furthermore, the strength of the UF is likely

to come down from 190 in the

last house by a good margin and

in the process the UF may weaken its bargaining position. However, conditions may be such that it may again get a chance to form the government although chances appear less. In such a possibility, who will be the prime minister from UF? There is no person so far projected by the Front which says the leader will be chosen later if the UF comes to set up the government.

Two UF prime ministers Mr Gowda and Mr Gujral were from the Janata Dal and as such a different party like the CPM within the front may ask for the premiership since it has a veteran and able administrator in the shape of West Bengal chief minister Jyoti Basu. He is the head of the West Bengal government for an uninterrupted 20 years and was also about to become the prime minister of India from the UF but his party did not approve sharing power at the centre although it supported the UF government from outside. This time, the CPM may change its approach and Mr Basu, who was earlier willing to head the central government, will likely be happy to take up such an assignment.

The UF has several prominent leaders including Inderjit Gupta in the CPI who is the home minister at the centre, in addition to some leaders in the regional parties which are the components of the UF. All notable leaders may be considered in the context of their reputation and strength of the respective party if the UF comes nearer to form a government. Finally, there may always be a "dark horse" to become the prime minister under unpredictable circumstances like Mr Deve Gowda, who was little known at the national level but the Karnataka chief minister did become prime minister after the fall of Vajpayee government in 1996. He did not earlier figure in speculations among the probables for the Premier-

## Io the Editor...

#### Admission to BUET **Architecture Deptt**

Sir, With regard to the Admission Test of the Deptt of Architecture, BUET, I would like to clarify the following:

As being reported in different dailies, all the teachers of the Dept of Architecture were never on strike from Feb. 2. In fact, about half of them are performing their duties now.

Appreciating the need for increased weightage of Drawing/Architectural Aptitude for students of Architecture, many Academic Council Members were in favour of increasing the marks as well as time for Drawing Test and reducing that for Physics (for the Architecture Admission Test). A proposal to this effect was even made by the Chair at a Council session in the second week of January, before finalisation of distribution of grades of all Admission Test subjects. But, in that crucial Academic Council meeting, none of the teachers of the Department of Architecture came forward to support the motion and hence it was not carried on. In the new system of BUET Admission Test, all students intending to get admitted to Ar-

chitecture MUST pass the Drawing part (i.e. get 40% or more) irrespective of whether he/she passes or fails in Physics, Maths and English. In other words, the best students from among ONLY those who have qualified in Drawing will be eligible for admission to Architecture. Drawing aptitude is therefore still the deciding basis for selection of architecture students.

Admission Test matters is not final and it is reviewed every year. Indeed, it can be amended next year.

Is the inclusion of Physics, instead of General Knowledge,

and reduction in the weight of Drawing marks that important that the Architecture teachers should go on strike? Is the matter that vital that they should tarnish the image of the reputed university by arranging a Press Conference at the Press Club?

In the spirit of democratic/academic norms, the Architecture teachers should try to get what they desire by lobbying the Academic Council, not by resorting to trade union con-

In the end, given the opportunity and when normalcy returns, non-Architecture teachers of BUET should also try their utmost to win back the confidence of Architecture

We have to save BUET, for it is a major component of our national pride. The Chancellor, Vice Chancellor, the Syndicate and the Academic Council must prevail as per the Ordinance,

Mizanur Rahman Badda, Dhaka

## Shameful incidence

Sir, For a nation or society to flourish, there are certain norms and values which must be followed. Respect, tollerance and minimum sensitivity for each other are a few of the least requirements. No matter what is our political, religious, social or economical differences are, we have to learn to live together. For our individual and political gain if we compromise on all that, ultimately it will have a snowball effect. In our country, presently, our social

fabric has totally broken down. Our youths have lost track, with no vision, as our leadership has failed to provide them with any goal or hope to look forward. Instead the young people have been being used for the individual gains of certain

coterie. It is sad and painful. The youths of this nation who fought for the language and then again fought for their motherland - but today's youths don't even blink their eyes when they dissecrate a holy place like the 'Shaheed Minar'. It was a very shameful event of our time. Our leadership should take note of what happened at the Shaheed Minar in the afternoon of the Shaheed Day and reflect upon the future of this nation.

It is always easy to blame others but sometimes we must look within ourselves to see where did we fail.

The behaviour of some at the Shaheed Minar and within the periphery on the day cannot be tolerated and should never ever be repeated. To be social animals, we must follow certain decorum and moral codes. There are certain places which must be held above individual politics or ideology.

Shaheed Minar is one such place. It is a symbol of our freedom, our struggle and our existence as a nation. As a citizen of an independent country it is the duty for all of us to protect, respect and behave in such places. Akku Chowdhury Banani, Dhaka

### Rustic phones?

Sir, Many subscribers are publicizing the 'Grameen' phones. These are cellular, the. state-of-the-art, and certainly not rustic as the term 'Grameen' might allude. It is strange, and, ironical, to note this type of unusual communication gap between GB and BTTB when public interest is very much involved. The very purpose of having a telephone connection is to establish better and faster communication system. Short of interface mechanism, technically, and from the human as-

Paradoxically, it has been officially announced that the BTTB would be permitted to operate cellphones, to compete with the other operators in the private sector (also criticizing two of them). No interface

problem in own yard? Officially, in regard to the rapid expansion of telephone facility in the country, the government is repeating and nauseam the paltry expansion phase of 60,000 line phones in the near future. The critical figure is how rapidly the waiting period is coming down from years to weeks. There is blackout on this vital data.

Can we hope for some clarification?

A Waiting Subscriber Dhaka.

#### Beautifying our city Sir, Isn't it high time that we

should pay attention to beautify our capital city historic. Since we are inviting foreigners to invest here and for tourism, since we are opening up our economy and our markets, the need to beautify the city has enhanced further.

It isn't a very tough job, once there is a will on the part of everybody especially the government Say, e.g. the round-abouts are so ill kept. Labour here is so cheap that a full time gardener can easily be hired for each round-about. There are dozens of beautiful seasonal flowers as well as those which bloom round the year and need minimum care. Why not plant these on the islands of round-abouts. Most of the big ones are so badly kept that they look like a jungle in the middle of the road! The broken railings should be quickly replaced and painted. There should be a guard too, to look after it so that people don't bend or steal the iron railings.

Then the buildings which line the roads, especially the main roads, should all be given a face-lift. The multi-storied buildings hired by the garment units give a dismal look. Though they can easily afford to plaster and paint their buildings, but they haven't done so in the last decade. The government must step in and order a facelift of all buildings facing the roads. This alone will give the city a fresh look.

Lately, we are aware of a strange thing in our city somebody is constantly watching our movements from the roof tops — they are the police! It looks like we are back to the 'cowboy age', when the cowboys used to climb up on the roof tops and shoot down people on the streets. What is our police force doing on private roof tops, by the side of the main roads? Is it to watch for the muggers? But there are hardly any, on the VIP. roads. Muggers loom around in the nooks and corners of narrow lanes, where there are hardly any policeman to apprehend them. Innumerous tree saplings have been planted in the road dividers. But the dividers are so narrow that there is hardly any earth in there to support a tree. Have these trees been planted to quickly die out and then give another contract of a big amount to replant! Good business for the contractors, no doubt. That's how things go on in my country! Roads are built in such a way by the contractors that they should have pot-holes in not more than a few months time and so they will get another contract to repair them!

of tax-payers money. For lack of coordination between WASA, T&T, and PWD the roads are most of the time broken, giving a poor look to

Good profit for some but waste

the city, added to the sufferings caused to the road users. Then it takes them months and years to repair the channels dug on the

Something must be done quickly as it is soon to become an 'International city'!

roads by them.

Dr.Sabrina Q.Rashid Dhaka Cantonment, Dhaka

## Bangla, or English?

Sir, I refer to the photocopy of the letter issued from the office of the Attorney General for Bangladesh, typed in English, addressed to BTV, published in Star on Ekushey February 1998, wherein the standard of

English was pointed out. A supplementary question which arises: is why the letter was not written in Bangla, as per official procedure?

A Husnain

### The punching police

Sir, Mr. Quadri's letter printed on the 18th of February reminded me of yet another fond memory. I was travelling from Gulshan 1 to 2 in a baby taxi. I was pulled over by a truck filled with police near the Gulshan Thana - 3 or 4 police constables jumped off the truck and started blaming the driver for reckless driving

Then all of a sudden two of them started punching the man on the face and stomach. This bleeding 50-year-old driver burst into tears. Only then was he let loose.

It is our tax money that goes

to feed our boys in blue. Yet we get harassed by them more often than criminals.

Masroor Ahmed Deepak