The Baily Star

Founder-Editor: Late S. M. Ali Dhaka Saturday, March 14, 1998

CNG Exacerbation

It has been about a month since we last dwelt on this issue in this particular column. The suffering of the CNG users which of course dates back to a much longer time, has not been alleviated since then. Neither their complaints nor our exhortations have been able to pierce through government's absolutely shameful insensitivity in this matter. Things, as a national daily informs us, are still stuck at the level of assurance from the Energy Minister.

This is difficult to understand. Exasperated as we are like the CNG users, we ask the government why it is dragging foot over something that has such strong incentives on economic and environmental grounds. There is absolutely no reason why it should take this long to get ready filling stations as few as four in number. Sincerity or efficiency, something is definitely missing in Energy Ministry's attitude regarding this problem.

We had hinted earlier that the possibility of some foul play within the establishment cannot be ruled out. This sensible attempt for a switch to environmental consciousness in our fuel culture should not be music to many ears simply because a massive vested interest group has formed around petroleum fuel. If the government has any sincerity to carry forward a truly commendable plan, we counsel it to keep vigil against this sabotaging possibility and go for some short and long measures immediately. Do whatever is necessary to get the filling stations and CNG workshop humming again. It is encouraging that the government is planning to hand it over to the private sector. We welcome the idea but add that it cannot be done in the gingerly fashion that we have witnessed in the power generation sector.

Mr. Khan should make it a point of personal pride and efficiency to make sure that this CNG problem is solved sooner than later. There is no way the CNG users can be allowed to regress on their laudable habitual shift. Doing that will be tantamount to betraying everything the government has said in the name of environmental care, let alone citizen's economic interest in the individual capacity.

Competition at Doorstep

A national telecommunications policy is round the corner. Its draft has been already finalised and is likely to be placed before the next cabinet meeting. The broad outlines of it, as revealed in a Daily Star front-page report on Thursday, speak of increasing the number of telephone lines from 5 to 13 lakhs in two years, expanded privatisation of the network and creation of competitive environment within the private sector for better services. These targets, though a little ambitious, are perfectly in line with the requirements of the situation marked by a very poor ratio of .04 telephone line to 100 persons.

As many as seven private companies have been already licensed to operate in this massively modernising sector world wide.

This is understandably a precursor for a total involvement of the private sector in all spheres of infrastructure development after the year 2010. Till then the government will remain as the major player in the telecommunications sector. The policy which is on the anvil vows to create a competitive environment in the telecommunications field. But with so much left of government's operational control over this sector - right up to 2010 AD - it would be in the fitness of things if the T&T Board finds a competitor in the private sector. And feels jolted enough into improving its services rather than playing a patronising role towards the private sector. This is not to suggest any way that the government will abdicate its authority in matters of tariff control or regulation of technical standards but to remind the T&T Board of the variegated telephonic woes that cannot wait to be set right.

Now it is Kosovo

The initial reaction of the international community to Yugoslavian President Slobodan Milosevic's massacre of ethnic Albanians in the Serbian province of Kosovo has not left much to be desired. In terms of expression of outrage and contemplation of actions against the gory violation of human rights both the contact group on former Yugoslavia comprising Britain, the USA, Russia, France, Germany and Italy and the UN Security Council have proved strikingly pro-active. One only wishes all these do not end in a whimper through open-ended, semantic exercises missing out on the essence of ethnic grievances in Kosovo. The Serbian authorities have shown an uncanny genius — since the Croatian and Bosnian wars — to dub ethnic self-defence and articulation of demands as acts of terrorism provoking the most brutal action conceivable in the self-written military dictionary. The Albanians in the Serbian province of Kosovo are only the latest victim.

Subject to a deadline for good behaviour, we are all for a re-imposition of the arms embargo and sanctions on Serbia which had courted all of these earlier on after its diabolic role in the Croation and Bosnian wars. Thousands were killed or otherwise brutalised in those racial annihilations which remain a blot on world's conscience. The call for an arms embargo on Yugoslavia and the threat of a freeze of its assets have apparently drummed sense into their ears to open unconditional talks with the Albanians. But who is going to account for the ethnic deaths?

Telecommunication is the Answer

To the poor or the rich, telephone is no more a luxury item. In fact, it's a necessity to grapple with socio economic problems.

ognized that a key compo-A nent in the infrastructure of economic development is telecommunication. Yet, surprisingly, the sector remains as the most neglected infrastructure component in many of the developing countries, including Bangladesh. Of course, recent interests in the development of telecommunication that have been displayed by the government should pave ways for furthering the frontier of this vital input to development. The present note attempts to highlight some of the benefits of telecommunication that can easily be quantified. The examples are drawn from various aged 80 to 90 per cent of the empirical studies so far carried Colombo prices. out is various parts of the world - and compiled in a book : Telecommunication and Economic Development by R J Saunders et. al. (The John Hopkins University Press 1994). Let

us pick up few of the examples, plagiarized on occasions. A distributor of industrial spare parts and machinery in Nairobi got additional lines installed to his office. Immediately after, his business shot up by 35 per cent and thus allowed him to hire six new employees and add three light trucks to his

T is being increasingly rec-

company's fleet. After a rural automatic digital exchange was installed in a town, a bank manager in a small town of India could easily contact a potential depositor living 60 kilometres away. Had the manger failed to rapidly contact the depositor, the deposit would be sent to another

• In Sri Lanka, introduction of telephone service to several towns and villages enabled

the Spanish empire but also

struck at the very roots of

Spanishness or the Spanish

culture and gave birth to a

movement loosely known as

the movement of "the

Generation of 98". The objective

was to start an intense process

of national self-examination

and soul-searching with a view

to finding a set of authentic

values to reinstil confidence as

pride in the Spanish nation and

prepare it for its post-colonial

to this movement criticized the

contemporary social, political

and economic conditions of the

country and called for funda-

mental changes in the society.

Although, not entirely ho-

mogenous in outlook, not only

it was basically European and

existentialist in character, but

also inquisitive and restless in

spirit. While "the Generation of

98" and its intellectual succes-

sor "the Generation of 27" in-

sisted on diversity, creativity

and liberalism, Franco's regime

was based on the atavistic sen-

timents of order, uniformity,

hierarchy, Catholicism and ha-

the Spanish-American war in

1898 up to the beginning of the

civil war in 1936 was indeed, an

era of great creativity for Span-

ish culture. The philosophers

Angel Ganivet and Miguel de

Unamuno, the essayists Grego-

rio Maranon, Ramon Perez de

Ayala and José Ortega y Gasset

the writers Pio Baroja and

Ramón de Valle Inclan, the sci-

entist and Nobel prize winner

Santigo Ramón y Cajal, the his-

torian Marcelino Menéndez y

Pelayo, the socialist thinker

Pablo Iglesias, to name only a

few, formed what was consid-

ered as the pre-Franco main-

stream cultural group. Three of

the greatest painters of the

world at that time - Picasso.

Dali and Miró - were of Span-

ish origin. Manuel de Falla and

The period from the end of

tred for all things foreign.

The intellectuals belonging

role in the twentieth century.

small farmers to obtain, among other things, current and direct information about wholesale and retail prices of fruits, coconuts and other produce in Colombo, the capital city. As a result Farmgate prices went up to reward the producers with a better deal and saved then from the "mercy" of the middlemen. Before the telephone system was available, the selling prices averaged 50 to 60 per cent of the Colombo prices. After the teledrivers got new lease of life folphone service got into the villages, the selling prices aver-

 A small grocer in Rosario, Uruguay, was able to serve a large clientele beyond his immediate neighbourhood mainly because residential telephones were available locally.

· A ministry of communication survey showed that public call office in rural areas of Korea averaged 85 local and 160 long-distance calls per month and that the calls helped remove feelings in isolation. They improved villagers' income by allowing access to market information. The local government administration was also able to disseminate information to the villagers quickly - and thus save time and funds by reducing the personal visits to the areas con-

In a similar vein, the authors documented a number of cases in respect of transport efficiency adducible principally to the availability of telephone service. Take the following example. Brazil has a national

fleet of over 180,000 trucks that usually have to cover long distances often through rural remote areas with no telephone service. The drivers found several days passed before they could contact a mechanic in the event of a breakdown. This posed major security risk in addition to slowing down deliveries. With the availability of a very high frequency, manually switched radio-telephone system, the trucks and their

its in rural areas for extension services due to the availability of rural telephone system. In Uganda, an estimated 2,000 local government officials and senior staff make about 40,000 extra trips a year. These trips could be slashed down by a respectable margin through the availability of telephones to contact in time and in need.

Another finding shows that newly installed direct dialing service in a small town in India makes it possible to summon



Beneath the Surface

by Abdul Bayes

lowing quick contact with company headquarters. In Sri Lanka, "a survey of 176 new telephone subscribers (77 business and 99 residential) in the country found that almost 70 per cent increased the number of contacts they had with other people after getting their phones and nearly half increased their volume of sales. Moreover, 40 per cent increased their profits or incomes, about 33 per cent increased the regional extent of their business and a little over 10 per cent increased the variety of their business." In Tanzania, the ministry of agriculture, responsible for project implementa-

tion, saves a lot of time and vis-

medical care, rapidly. "Before this service was available, snakebite victims often died before help could arrive. Recently, a man bitten by a cobra was saved because the doctor was quickly contacted by phones." In Peru, health workers in a small village now easily consult their doctors for advice and transmit the message to their patients. Telecommunication boosted the morale and confidence of isolated heath workers.

The above mentioned benefits of a developed telecommunication system are just tip of iceberg. The book, as mentioned earlier, contains a panoply of case studies to establish the need and urgency of the availability of telephone network through nook and corner of a country.

We strongly feel that in Bangladesh, with one of the lowest telephone density in the would, such benefits could be generated via establishment of a sound mechanism of telephone communication. Mentionably, in a recent article is this column, the author mentioned few of the benefits that the Grameen Telephone system in some villages has embarked upon to bestow. The recent policy of the government is to leberalize the communication network with an invitation to the private sector to participate. No doubt that the minister for telecommunication M Nasim has appreciatively been pursuing his efforts to correct the rots bedeviling the sector, and putting his best to widen the network. Unfortunately, there seems to be psychological problem on the part of the state to come into competition with private sector. There is also allegedly, no playing level field. More biting efforts are needed on this score.

Despite participation by the private sector, the fact remains that the government needs to invest much more heavily in the telecommunication sector. Growing investment from government side is premised an the notion that the basic fixed lines should lie with the government. Government should do well by corporating BTTB, issuing bonds so that resources could be generated from within rather than hunting for outside. There

is no reason as to why the government should own a company that hinders rather than helps our development. Malaysia has already done that and we can borrow their experience to suit our needs. One needs to remember that more telephones means more revenues, more VAT to the government.

Let us take one example. Suppose 5 million or 50 lakh Bangladeshis work abroad. Once in a month, suppose, each calls home for three minutes to total 150 million minutes. If the charge is fixed at \$1/minute, the total bill from 150 million minutes comes to about \$150 million per month or \$1.8 billion (150/12) a year. If the government collects VAT@ 0.15%, then a total of \$270m could easily be generated per year.

When the Finance Ministry is allegedly groaning under the threat of revenue shortfalls, the above mentioned "quick and dirty" arithmetic might give them some points to ponder with. But to make the project successful, we need to invest more than we have been doing hitherto. Realizing that the future economic development of Bangladesh would substantially hinge on the growth and development of a healthy telecommunication system, we urge upon the government to move ahead with faster pace in the direction. One of the most productive sectors relate to this and to get sufficient milk from the cow, let us feed it well too. To the poor or the rich, telephone is no more a luxury item. In fact, it's a necessity to grapple with socio economic prob-

LETTER FROM EUROPE

T HE Spanish-American war of 1898, not only destroyed what was left of Cultural Developments in Modern Spain

by Chaklader Mahboob-ul Alam

It would be unfair to assume that Spanish culture took a long "siesta" during these thirty-nine years (from the beginning of the civil war in 1936 to the death of Franco in 1975). It was kept awake and vigorous by the activities of the artists, philosophers and musicians who had left Spain during the civil war and refused to come back until Franco was dead.

tuals, writers, composers and artists sided with the democratically elected government (the Republicans). As Franco's forces started getting the upperhand in the war, fearing retribution, they fled the country and went into exile. Some (the poets Lorca and Hernandez) who could not do so in time were killed or imprisoned. With the collapse of the Republic and the beginning of Franco's dictatorship (1939) Spanish culture within Spain came under the spell of diehard Catholicism.

It is well-known that during the dictatorship, cultural activities in general, were not encouraged. Activities with leftist tendencies were definitely discouraged and in many cases repressed. The Government spent very little money on creative works of art, literature and music. Yet, it would be unfair to assume that Spanish culture took a long "siesta" during these thirty-nine years (from the beginning of the civil war in 1936 to the death of Franco in 1975). It was kept awake and vigorous by the activities of the artists. philosophers and musicians who had left Spain during the civil war and refused to come back until Franco was dead. The world famous artist Pablo Picasso (remember El Guernica), the movie-maker Luis Bunuel, the cellist Pablo Casals, the guitarist Andres Segovia and the Nobel laureate Juan Ramon Jimenez (who together with his wife translated Rabindranath Tagore in Spanish) were some of the foremost exponents of the Spanish culture.

There were others like the poets Luis Cernuda and Jorge Guillen, the composer Rodrigo (concierto de Aranjuez), the artists Joan Miró Tapies. Gordillo and Millares, the

sculptor Chillida, the moviemakers Berlanga, Bardem and Saura, the poet Damaso Alonso and the novelist Camilo Jose Cela (Nobel prize winner), who played a kind of cultural hideand-seek game with the Franco establishment, worked relentlessly and produced great works of art, literature and music. They tried their best to avoid direct confrontation with the establishment. Some of them even worked from within the power structure.

As we have mentioned before. Franco, died on November, 20th, 1975. For the first time after the civil war, in April 1976, a regional newspaper (Awi) was published in the Catalan language. The wind of change had started blowing. In May 1976 something of enormous significance, both from political and cultural points of view took place in Spain, that was the publication of the left-leaning daily newspaper called El Pais. In 1977, democracy was formally reintroduced in Spain and the stage was set for a cultural resurgence. And, it was, as if to celebrate the beginning of this new era that in October 1977, the Swedish Academy awarded the Nobel Prize for literature to the Spanish poet Vicente Aleixandre.

Looking back, I now realize that the immediate post-Franco era was a period of considerable confusion, disorientation and excesses. The people were jubilant about their new-found freedom. There was a tremendous explosion of cultural activities, albeit some of them were perhaps too daring and provocative. Yet there was a pervasive sense of insecurity everywhere. The people were not sure of the future of democ

racy. There were demonstrations, strikes and political assassinations. This period of confusion, fears, excesses and doubts ended in 1981, when Colonel Tajero's coup failed to drum up any effective support among the people. All doubts about the future of democracy disappeared and there was a confident mood everywhere about the political stability in the country.

One of the first signs of this new confident mood was the Movida Madrileña. Soon there were movidas in all the major towns and cities of Spain. Now, what is la Movida? What does it mean? Well, it is very difficult to translate the word 'la movida". The literal translation of the movida Madrileña is the "Madrid scene' or the 'Madrid activity'. Actually, it is an attitude, a feeling, a spirit which arose among the young and which denoted freedom and like the swinging London of the '60s was congenial to a burst of artistic activity. The Spaniards, after more than four decades, could taste, feel, look, read, hear, and experiment new things without any fear. The two great taboos of sex and politics had disappeared.

Movie-maker Almodover is a product of this movement. Although he has earned international fame, his movies are popular with only an elitist group in Spain. This is also true of Jose Luis Garci, who won an Oscar (the only Spanish motion-picture director ever to win an Oscar) in 1983, for his movie, Volver A Empezar. Both Garci and Almodover are still very active and are producing films of great depth and vision. The names of Carlos Saura. Manuel Gutierrez Aragon, Fer-

We are well aware of the fac

that the core problem of illegal

rickshaw is its hundreds of

thousands of rickshaw-pullers.

Say, there are three lakhs of il-

legal rickshaws in the city. As if

son, he plies it half-day. As

such there are six lakh of rick-

shaw-pullers who are involved

with illegal rickshaws for

maintaining their families.

Here we have to keep it in mind

that these rickshaw-pullers'

nando Trueba, Mario Camus and Pilar Miró (who died only a few days ago of a heart attack) must be mentioned as the great movie-makers of the post-Franco era.

Playwrights Antonio Buero Vallejo, Jose Sanchis Siniestra and novelists Antonio Gala, Manuel Vazquez Montalban and Pedro Reverte have become enormously successful. Almudena Grandes, Javier Marias and Antonio Muñoz Molina belong to the more recent literary movement called "la nueva narrativa Española." There are many more narrators, novelists, essayists, playwrights and poets who have come to the fore in the post-Franco period. What is even more important is that there has been a fundamental change in the society in general I remember, when I came to Madrid from Karachi in 1970, I found that except the intellectual elite of the right and the left, ordinary people did not read newspapers, books or serious periodicals. At most, they read sports magazines and tabloids. There were few public libraries. As you know, in England and the US, even small communities have public libraries. Under the Franco regime, reading was not encouraged. The dictatorship feared that if the masses were allowed to read, write and listen to foreign broadcasts, the pillars of the establishment would be shaken.

That attitude has changed completely. Reading is no

longer considered as a suspicious exercise. People read books, periodicals, gossip mag-azines — all sorts of printed materials, on the beach, in the park, and while travelling to work in public transport. Public libraries are being inaugurated all over Spain. Books are having print-runs of hundreds of thousands of copies instead of five or ten thousand as it used to happen before. The Socialist Government before and the Conservative Government now have adopted the policy of allocating greater proportion of public resources to education and culture.

New art galleries have been added (the Reina Sofia Centre, the Thyssen Collection at the Vallehermoso Palace) to the already famous Prado Museum to make Madrid as one of the most important centres of art in the world. In this connection, I should mention that the Guggenheim Museum has just been opened in Bilbao. In 1984, a new and prupose-built concert-hall and only a few days ago, the Teatro Real (an operahouse) were inaugurated.

This short piece does not allow me to write in detail on the developments in the Regional cultures (Catalan, Basque or Andalusian) except perhaps to mention that in the post-Franco era, there has been a great resurgence in all sorts of cultural activities (vernacular, popular and elitist) in these regions because under the strong central government of the Franco regime, the very idea of having autonomous regions or regional cultures was considered subversive.

In conclusion, we may say that men and women of post-Franco Spain are eagerly experimenting with cultural activities of all nature - some serious others probably somewhat frivolous - from which the new cultural patterns for the twenty-first century will evolve.

Meeting the Press

preciate the policy of the Prime Minister meeting the editors at periodical intervals. I also agree with the comment of Mr Mahfuz Anam (DS, Feb 26) that the editors did not bother to do their homework before going for the meet. Both the parties meet in public interest, but it

I wanted to read about some of the 'hot', topical national issues, some of which are noted below. The government is dilly dallying in announcing firm, practical campaigns to combat the daily huge traffic jams in the major cities, and the avoidable deaths and maiming of persons due to serious highway accidents as a result of rash driving (first human factor, then technical, followed by monitoring and prosecution). Head-on clashes are errors of judgement. Highway monitoring by the traffic police is practically absent. How is it that the drivers rarely die or suffer serious injuries is a mystery which even the government can not

Now we hear that several thousand double decker buses would be released in Dhaka city. Where is the road space? And how the traffic congestion would be eliminated and controlled? The administration and the DCC are shy talking about the problem created by thousands of rickshaws and unauthorised drivers and unlicensed vehicles. Why the issue is being kept pending, when the Farakka and CHT deals could be rushed through without consensus? With such behaviour pattern, the authority cannot

before the last general election).

There are many other hot is-

educational campuses. Silence speaks louder than words. sues which need not be enu-

possibly get the benefit of the doubt.

OPINION

A Husnain

As a newspaper reader I apis not possible physically to ply rickshaw whole day for a perwas in short supply!

solve or speak about!

The other mystery is that

these buses would be rented out on daily or other basis to the operators. Why employ a middle agency to collect the commission? BRTC is not talking about the import of fare meters for the auto-rickshaws, and announcing a time limit for fit ting the meters. No government expense is involved as the owners would be paying for the meters and the services.

The same non-transparency is observed in the negotiations going on in the gas and power sectors. The latest is the shooting incident in Feni, alleged to be masterminded by a prominent political leader.

The editors did not ask any question on the opposition staying away from the JS. The usual routine politicised replies are not satisfying to the public. The problems remain, in spite of all the excuses and mud-slinging from different sides. The leadership is there to provide workable solutions; otherwise we do not need leaders (the alternative is free for all, which we see with increasing frequency!). The public, being lay persons, cannot point out how to solve the problems. Let the leaders act as leaders. The regime has been displaying more passivity than action (except for the period two years

The regime is silent on the politicisation of many institutions, including the civil service, the banking sector, the trade unions or CBAs, and the

merated here. It is hoped the next meeting with the PM would be more informative and interactive.

one-year course. All of them are from traffic jam and for this two-years and MIT does not purpose he seeks help and coopeven recommend that! eration of all concerned. Gazipur

Joaquin Costa had already established themselves as worldclass composers. At the beginning of the civil war (1936), most of the intelleclothe buttor...

> Education vs job market

Sir, In Bangladesh, education is very far from job market. The courses that are taught in the academic life of a student do not give any benefit for getting a job. For example, a student of

commerce discipline will have to learn in his/her Honours Banking, Taxation, Company Law, Cost Accounting, Management and Accounting, which are directly related with the activities of banking sector. But for getting a job here a student will have to face examinations in respect of General Knowledge, Bengali, English Language and Literature, General Maths

Why?

Sheikh Shajahan Dhaka University

A wake-up call for

BUET Sir, As an alumnus I am saddened by the recent developments in BUET campus. I can not understand how an authority of BUET stature becomes so resolute to carry out something that is not even recommended, let alone be required, by schools like MIT. What are we trying to realize by making Physics as a background requirement in Department of Architecture when emphasis is required in revising the entire curriculum of more technology oriented De-partment of EEE?

Architects require a sensitivity to beauty. They also need

to understand the complex relationship between people and their surroundings. Architects learn their required basic and advanced scientific and technical frameworks while in school for 'five' undergraduate years! Architects visualize a design, and Structural Engineers materialize that. It defeats the very purpose of the establishment of Department of Architecture if we want them to be

Structural Engineers! Here is what MIT recommends for the High School (Class 11 and 12) preparations for its undergraduate admission (taken from their public domain internet site athttp:// web.mit.edu/ admissions/www/gen/answers.html

recommended high school programme is as fol-

One year of high school One year of high school chemistry

One year of high school bi-Math through calculus A foreign language Four years of English Two years of humanities,

social sciences

If you do not match this in every detail, you may still ap-Please note that the recommendations are not only for

Architecture but for all the departments of MIT. In this context, it's noteworthy that Bangladesh does not offer a Physics, Chemistry or Biology

What is of utmost urgency is BUET's complete overhauling of it's BSEE programme to make it on a par with the modern high tech world. BSEE graduates of BUET usually experience difficulties in Quantum Mechanics, Semiconductor Process and Device Fundamentals, VLSI Circuits and Design, Digital Signal Processing, etc. not because of their inadequate Mathematics preparation, but because of their unfamiliarity with the fundamentals and/or on-hand experiences. Instead of those required basics they learn Fluid Mechanics. Strength of Materials, etc. which does not help any BSEE graduate to excel further in their education or in their carrier. BUET should concentrate more on this aspect rather than introducing undue emphasis on something that is

not absolutely necessary. It really hurts to see how time, energy and money are being spent on an unnecessary move when a move is long overdue elsewhere! My beloved BUET, please wake up and act.

Mohammad Bari, Arlington, Texas. e-mail: mbari@lsem.com

Removing rickshaws Sir. My attention has been

drawn to a news item under the caption 'Hanif seeks help to stop movement of illegal rickshaws,' published on Mar 3, 1998. We understand that Mayor Hanif anxiously wants the illegal rickshaws to stop plying for freeing the city roads

families are extremely poor, living below poverty line. They cannot be pushed back to their rural abodes where from they have come in the city as destitute for the reasons beyond their reach and control. To my mind, a safety net should be created for them before the withdrawal of illegal rickshaws from the city. Otherwise, a lot of serious problems including law and order situation will arise in the civic life.

Mahbub Ali 41, Abdul Hadi Lane, Dhaka

Where is neutral government?

Sir, After liberation, every government has done some good and bad activities. But what we see is that a government voted to power, it blames to the previous government for everything. This is exactly what is going

on now. Its this a sign of neutrality? Md Nurul Islam Lecturer in Kaliakoir College,