Founder-Editor: Late S. M. Ali Dhaka Sunday, April 5, 1998

Unfortunate Children

Seventeen children and five women are in the shelter of Bangladesh Jatiya Mahila Ainjibi Samity (BJMAS). These women and children have recently been rescued in India while being smuggled to Dubai to be used as prostitutes and camel jockeys. According to a Star report parents have been visiting the shelter over the last several days in search of their missing children and relatives. The same day's issue published a picture of 78 Bangladeshi nationals, including 38 children, at the railway station in Calcutta, awaiting their return home. They have been rescued in India as they were being illegally sent to the Gulf States. While we thank the Indian police for their excellent job in rescuing our children and women from a sure life of hell, we cannot help but wonder how many more might have slipped through the police and have already swelled the rank of thousands of destitute Bangladeshis spread throughout the region.

This paper including many others have re peatedly highlighted the trafficking in women and children that is going on in our region. And yet we have seen very little action by the government in this regard. So much so that even when foreign gove rnments rescue our children and women from the smuggling gangs it has to be non-governmental bodies such as the BJMAS who have to raise private resources to bring them back. Earlier, these unfortunate people had to rot in foreign jails for months and even years before they could be rescued. Though the legal tangle appears to have somewhat slackened, the effort remains in the private rather than in government hands.

Why has there been so little action? In the last SAARC Summit a special resolution was adopted to bring about urgent cooperation between our countries to put a stop to this shameful reality. We urge our government to immediately establish a special coordinating network between all the relevant government bodies in Bangladesh, Nepal, India and Pakistan specially geared towards stopping trafficking of women and children and seek the assistance of the government of the Gulf states in this matter. Our government should also give special resources and assistance to bodies such as BJMAS and help them to establish working partnership with similar bodies in the other three countries. These organisations in turn should link up with their counterparts in the Gulf. It is through this close cooperation both at the governmental and non-governmental level, supported by the media in all these countries that we can launch an effective campaign to stop our children and women from being enslaved aboard. We need to do the above most urgently.

The Yearly Ordeal

Eid is here. So is the rush to get back home. And as in the past, this year too the transport owners have anted up fare causing considerable distress to those for whom it is either a tradition or a necessity to travel out of the city to celebrate the occasion. A Daily Star report yesterday gave us an idea about the exorbitant price tickets are being sold at at the Gabtoli bus terminal. Brokers who bought tickets off the counter well in advance are holding people hostage to their greed. For instance a Dhaka-Chuadanga ticket which costs Taka 140 normally is reportedly being sold at Taka 200-210. In some cases the margin of profit is as high as three hundred per cent, depending on the desperation of the travellers.

Same picture prevails at launch terminals and railway stations. Tickets are out of market there too, thanks to the blackmarketeers who in league with a section of corrupt employees have hoarded the tickets leaving ticket seekers at their mercy.

We think this is extortion pure and simple. There is no way this can be justified. Service providers cannot hold people hostage to their crude profiteering intention like this. For all the logic of empty buses on return trips, one can only say this is a cruel and criminal game these people have indulged in and we are agonised that the authorities are least bothered about the chronic suffering of people on account of this. What amazes one is that it is not an one-off phenomenon which has happened even before the authorities could react. Scalping tickets or raising their prices just before Eid has become an annual feature.

Eid is basically a city affair for the more financially privileged section of the society. It is the people of the fixed and smaller income group who form the bulk of the huge mass that leave the city twice a year for this purpose. And it is this vast population which bears the brunt of the ordeal every year due to its dependence on mass transit system. It is a shame if a government has to stick to a tradition of insensitivity to a problem of so

many over such a long time. A Contribution to Culture

It is good, indeed great, to see a recording of 'Nabojibaner Gaan' being published from Dhaka. And we are lucky that we get it in Kalim Sharafi's golden voice and inimitable style. Who but Kalim knows this extraordinary musical crop in its purity. He was there and very intimately when the incomparable Batuk-da, Jyotirindra Maitra to all, was writing and setting to tune the numbers he bunched as Nabojiboner Gaan — songs of a new life.

These are songs of hope for humanity and specially for the victims of the Bengal Famine, 1943 that took away five million lives in one big fell sweep. Spurred by Benoy Roy of Rangpur Jyotirindra, already a first in physics and the scion of Shetlai, a Pabna dukedom, and now apprentice to the Agra Gharana together with soulmate, the legendary Vishamadev, came out to the streets to sing of hope. The Calcutta streets were then littered with corpses of whole families, in their thousands. Who can sing there of hope of a new life? Jy-

otirindra did, Benoy did. And immortally too. The blossoms on the Nabojiboner Gaan garland are strangely haunting. Powerful in their Dhrupad structure, winning in their high poetry and close to the heart in their invocation of the folk melodic form. Nobody but Tagore could create songs of such immaculate beauty and deep significance. But Tagore did not stumble on these, Jyotirindra Maitra did. These were none in the rut called Ganosangeet. The difference lies in their sublimity and their unremediable distance from the sloganeering Gano-sangeet. That explains their way to near-extinction.

Kalim Sharafi binds us to a burden of gratitude by bringing to life Batuk-da's phenomenally rich songs. It is definitely a contribution to culture which the general run of our songs is decidedly not.

Impasse in Middle East Peace Process

After hopeful developments of several years, a bleak situation has descended on the Middle East. It appears

HE latest round of US diplomacy involving the Palestinians and the Israelis has ended in abysmal failure. This was very much

expected. Dennis Ross, the envoy of President Clinton has been travelling in the Middle Eastern region almost on a semi-permanent basis and in his latest effort he has not even tried to put a brave face. In fact, on his return to Washington, he has raised the possibility of the US pulling out of the peace process. That this is no more than a bluff is transparent to everybody. What is certain is that the US for the time-being has no new ideas and has virtually come to the end of the road.

Since the Ramadan War of

1973, when for the first time Israel faced a debacle on the battlefield and had to run for her life from the Sinai desert of Egypt. It was the direct military intervention of the US that Israel was spared of a humiliating defeat. It was then that for the first time the US took seriously in hand the peace-making efforts. And thanks to the nearcollapse of the Israeli army on the battle field that she for the first time came to the negotiating table. The result was the camp David accord of 1979, through which for the first time, the most important Arab country, namely Egypt signed a peace agreement with Israel. The deal was return of Sinai to Egypt in exchange for estab- lations was so remarkable that Islamic organisation, 55-na- been making noises of wanting to have reached a dead end, the

that we shall have to wait for the end of the Clinton presidency and disappearance of Netanyahu from the political scene to see the resumption of the peace process. tion organisation of Islamic full diplomatic relations were lishment of diplomatic relations between Egypt and Israel.

If establishment of diplomatic relations between Egypt and Israel was an important breakthrough, the major breakthrough came early in the presidency of Bill Clinton when Arab state — Syria. President Clinton appearing on the terrasse of the White House

with Yasser Arafat and Yitzhak Rabin, announced in front of the whole world the deal between Palestine and Israel. It is common knowledge that a settlement between the Palestinians and the Israelis is the foundation stone on which peace in the Middle East must be built. In the 1948 war it was the Palestinians, who had to leave their hearth and home and in place of the wandering Jew, they became the wandering Palestini-

The Oslo Accord, which laid the foundation for the Peace Accord between Palestine and Israel continued to progress reasonably well. The deal was as in the case of Egypt and Israel, land for peace. True there are forces in the region, who would like to derail the peace porches. Nevertheless, relations were improving steadily between Palestine and Israel. Indeed the improvement of re-

established between Jordan and Israel. In North Africa, Morocco and Tunisia, established relations with Israel. Meanwhile Israel engaged in serious negotiations with the last important

The advent of Binyamin Netanyhau as the newly elected

Conference. For Israel, Jerusalem is the eternal capital. a fact recognised by few states. For Christianity it is intimately connected with the birth of Christ. The Christian world has not staked its claim in the same manner as Islam and Judaism have done. This may be,

Prime Minster of Israel

Arshad-uz Zaman

changed the picture totally. He started building settlements in West Jerusalem. The Oslo Accord, while drawing up a comprehensive plan for the settlement of the Middle East conflict, had very wisely left out Jerusalem for future negotiations. Jerusalem raises passions in the Middle East, like no other issue does. It is the holy place for the three great monotheistic faiths. Jerusalem houses the Dome of the Rock and the Al-Aqsa mosque, desecration of which in 1969, led to the establishment of the largest cally moved away West from the

because Christianity has physi-

sandy desert of the Middle East. Netanyahu's headlong rush for virtual annexation of Jerusalem, upset the arrangements carefully crafted in Oslo and on which basis the peace process was progressing. For more than a year now the peace process has not moved an inch forward, it has rather taken some hard knocks. In order to make peace noises Netanyahu has been toying with negotiations with Lebanon. Israel is well entrenched in South Lebanon and Netanyahu has

believe. The majority of the

Congress in the house then was

more than two thirds and this

came mainly from the realisa-

to pull out of that area in exchange for full security. That it is no more than a hoax is evident from the fact that Lebanon is strongly tied with Syria and in order to break the logiam, serious negotiations with Syria, have to be undertaken first. From time to time, Netanyahu puts out a feeler towards Syria and the result is 'Immobilism'. And of course the war of words continue between the Palestinians and the Israelis. From all this it is evident that Netanyahu is satisfied to sit tight and has no interest in engaging in serious negotiations.

The US has been the driving force behind the peace process and if it has travelled this distance, it is thanks to the singlehanded effort of the US. It may be recalled that the Middle East question used to be a UN baby and the two supper-powers of those years US and the Soviet Union used to co-chair the talks. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, US has been the sole super-power to take the peace process forward. The European Union (EU) has made some brave, but fruitless, attempts to supplement the US effort but to no avail.

If the peace process appears

answer must be sought in the activities of the super-power US who alone has brought it to near success. The US has often literally dragged a recalcitrant Israel to the negotiating table and disgorge some of its ill-gotten gains at the expense of the Arabs. To put a total brake on the peace process Netanyahu banks heavily and rightly so, on the US Congress, where he has very sympathetic ears and lot of funds. Israel has yielded, faced with heavy pressure from the White House.

When President Clinton was reelected convincingly for a second term, it was speculated that unburdened by the guestion of reelection, he would have a free hand to deal forcefully with many issues and in the foreign affairs field with the

Palestinian-Israeli question. Yet it appears that President Clinton is bogged down with petty personal matters and gives the impression of unable to take any initiative in this matter. There used to be a lobby in Israel in favour of a settlement with the Arabs. That lobby has remained strangely dormant during Netanyahu's premiership.

After hopeful developments of several years, a bleak situation has descended on the Middle East. It appears that we shall have to wait the end of the Clinton presidency and disappearance of Netanyahu from the political scene to see the re-

The Culture of Coalition Government and India

The BJP may face problems from within, because the hardliners will not be too willing to jettison its own programmes for the sake of coalition partners..... The moderates would certainly maintain that in such efforts the coalition may break up.... And a failure by the present government may render the coalition culture totally vulnerable in India.

TTH the installation of yet another coalition ▼ V government in India, questions are naturally asked whether such a pattern of governance with different parties within it can effectively work as a sound administration which the people obviously want after a prolonged period of political instability that has seen four prime ministers in last less than three years' time. Evidently, there are both merits and disadvantages of coalition governments and many people of late are veering towards the view that probably India — the largest democracy in the world — is set to witness the governments in the centre that would combine more than one party if not several parties in view of the growing tendencies that a single party or group is failing to win the mandate of the people in the elections.

It is possible that the lack of ability for a single party or group to take the electorate along with it for a decisive victory will continue to result in the emergence of "hung" parliament and in the process the governments have to be coalition in nature because support of more than half of the total members of parliament is a prerequisite for ruling the country. Since, for quite some time, India is experiencing a political scenario in the aftermath of the elections where a party fails to produce a government of its own, it is plausible to think that this trend is likely to continue given the strength of the major political parties. However, it is also possible to conclude that the electorate may be totally disenchanted with the turn of events that are followed in the absence of any decisive verdict and in the future may go for one single party or group to rid the nation of political instability.

Coalition governments not necessarily have to be unstable but the record in India would show that no such government could complete its full term and that necessitated midterm polls. However, some multiparty government despite its short tenure functioned unexpectedly well and people felt it would have been really good if that government could continue but failed mainly because of rivalries among the different component parties in the government and for some other

One can argue that Morarji Desai government which was in effect the first coalition government in the sense that the ruling Janata Party itself was a combine of several parties to fight the elections, did fairly well but had to bow down because the leaders could not maintain their unity that was demonstrated during the prepoll alignment. Today's prime minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee was the external affairs minister in that government while present home minister Lal Krishna Advani the information minister. A senior minister of the government — health minister Raj Narain — who shot into prominence as "giantkiller" by defeating Indira Gandhi in the elections — had caused much of the discomfort for the ruling circles. Since several parties including Mr Desai's Congress (O) that was made up by the senior leaders of once united Congress and known as "old-guards" and Mr Vajpayee and Mr Advani's "Jansangh" came together, the rivalries

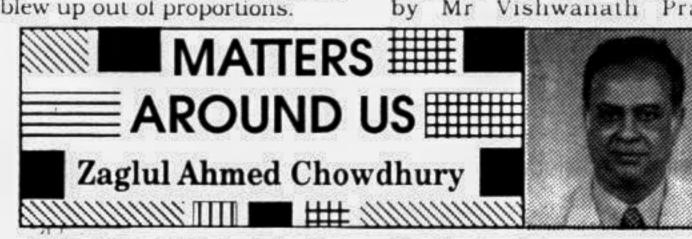
reasons — not for inefficiency

or inexperience.

over the authority came to the fore even though the performance of the government as such was not disappointing. At one stage, among other divisive matters, the controversy of "dual membership" in the Janata Party — whether someone would be allowed to retain the membership of erstwhile organisation despite their being integrated in one apparently monolithic organisation came to the fore in such a manner that the contradictions

tion that the experiment of such a government was not a happy one. Mrs Gandhi was a vitriolic critic of the coalition government which she called "khichti" administration. But her son Rajiv Gandhi could not hold on to that majority despite his charisma and dynamism

and the National Front government that came late headed by Mr Vishwanath Pratap



This was what led to the emergence of today's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) by breaking away from the Janata Party as their leaders favoured dual membership which Mr Desai and others objected to. The BJP began with a mere two seats in the house and its strength following the recent elections has risen to amazingly 179 in the 573-member lower house of the parliament (Loksabha). For last two consecutive elections, the BJP stood out as the single largest party in parliament albeit it failed to secure the strength to rule by itself.

The disillusionment about the coalition government of Mr Desai was such that people gave a decisive verdict in the 1979-80 elections to Mrs Gandhi to an extent that she herself could not

Singh also left a fair image as far as the performance of the administration was concerned. Mr Singh himself proved an honest and respected prime minister but his was a coalition government that did not last too long.

Then, there was the United Front (UF) government in recent days when there was not too much problems for the coalition as such but it collapsed twice because it had to rely on a critical support from the Congress from outside. The Congress was certainly expected to pull the rug from under the feet of the UF government and it did when the Congress thought it was appropriate. Here again. on the first occasion that led to the resignation of the H D Deve Gowda government, it was more

a personal kind of decision by Congress president Sitaram Kesri who was known to have nurtured the desire of his party coming to power and in the process he himself becoming the prime minister. On the second case, the cut-off of the Congress support was more a principled one as it involved the issue pertaining to the report on the assassination of Congress president Rajiv Gandhi. But the performances of both Deve Gowda and, more particularly Inder Kumar Gujral governments were not pathetic to warrant a collapse. It is also possible that the present coalition government will succeed to continue to an extent. Just before the recent elec-

tions, two major political par-ties — the BJP and the Congress were asserting that they would be able to form "stable" government by their own right and strength. The UF that has secular centrist and leftist parties, however, did not suffer from the illusion that it could form a government by itself. In the final outcome, none really came up nearer to form a government with absolute majority as even the single largest party BJP fell short of nearly one hundred seats. However, with allies it attained the required strength and survived a confidence vote.

What is the future of the coalition culture in India? Arguably, India may be set to this milieu since no party can command an absolute verdict but the country has to run under some government. The coalition partners, conscious that their unity or at least a sem-

blance of unanimity is a must for being at the helm, will certainly make every effort to check any divisive tendencies despite conflicting ideas on many matters. It is for this reason the BJP has abandoned its party manifesto while running the government and has gone for the "national agenda" to accommodate the views of some other partners who are avowedly secular on certain sensitive matters relating to communalism.

Nevertheless, the differences do come to the fore. The trouble may come more from the party which supports the government from outside without taking part in it like the Trinamul Congress of Ms Mamata Banerjee of West Bengal or Telegu Desam of Mr Chandrababu Naidu from Andhra Pradesh. Clearly, they have supported the government despite controversy that surrounds their own parties on the issue of supporting the government and as such they want to maintain a distance from the seat of rule while extending the support. It is possible that they would join the government but they are now very careful on the matter whether to join the government

The BJP — the dominant force in the coalition - may face problems from within, because the hardliners will not be too willing to jettison its own programmes totally for the sake of coalition partners as they feel their party has won so many seats for being on its own ideological lines. The moderates would certainly maintain that in such efforts, the coalition may break up and the chance to rule will diminish. And a failure by the present government may render the coalition culture totally vulnerable in India.

entire nation of people, from

one end to another. It is compli-

cated, complex, fraught with po-

happens and everyone thinks

They don't think it's the end of

the world. Far from it, they

think it's a birthday party or

something," my friend says

loudly, surprising me some-

I have a lot of respect for our

leaders, really I do. That is why

I don't like her tone of voice. In

case you are not aware of this,

she is talking about what hap-

pened when the power failed in-

side the Jatiya Sangsad on

Thursday and soon afterwards,

apparently, the generator also

failed. Our National Parlia-

ment had no power. Our MPs

could be heard, but apparently,

disrespectful way about them, I

mean do you know what hap-

dark, another lot accused the

lot that lit the candles of know-

ing the lights were going to go

out, otherwise how come they

had candles handy, and the lot

that lit the candles said they

found the candles in the store or

something and the other lot

said this wasn't possible and

anyway no one had ever

brought fire into the House be-

fore and this was quite unac-

ceptable but then so is a na-

You shouldn't talk in that

"Why not, they deserve it. I

"One lot lit candles in the

not clearly seen.

admonish her.

pened ...?" she guffaws.

Once in a while, something

"Not the candle brigade. Ha!

tentially difficult situations.

it's the end of the world.

Leaders Have a Lot on their Minds HE problem is, everyone

One lot lit candles in the dark, another lot accused the lot that lit the candles of knowing the lights were going to go out, otherwise how come they had candles handy, and the lot that lit the candles said they found the candles in the store or something and the other lot said this wasn't possible.

our leaders, well, what can I say. They have a lot on their minds. Like where to find candles for the House. Don't get me wrong. I am not

blames our leaders. And

saying that our leaders have nothing to do with it. I accept that they are the people who are officially responsible for providing electricity to this coun-

Indeed, they are the people who will be able to explain to us, leventually, once they have found out what exactly went wrong, in the fullness of time, in the very near future) exactly what caused the breakdown of our national power grid and the loss of power to the entire country for about 30 minutes, and most of the capital, Dhaka, for ten to 12 hours, on Thurs-

You see, you admit that it is their fault. It is their job. That's why we blame them! exclaims a friend of mine, a highly excitable kind of person, I might add, with a tendency to jump to conclusions.

I have to correct her. I never said that it's their fault, I tell

Everything

Bangabandhu

miles from the country I feel

quite distressed that the Prime

Minister is naming everything

in her daddy's (Bangabandhu)

name. While Sheikh Mujibur

Rahman has his place in our

history, it is highly inappro-

priate for her daughter to be

naming things in his name. We

need to have a bipartisan pro-

posal that bans the ruling party

from naming structures as they

please. Just like Sheikh Hasina

should not be allowed to name

IPGMR into 'Daddy University',

Khaleda Zia must not name

anything "My-Hubby-Airport",

or Ershad, My Mistress Sta-

or Jamuna Bridge?

What about us? Can we not

dium.

Sir, Living thousands of

THE ALL PARTY

her firmly. Yes, the authorities are responsible, technically. But there are a number of factors, a complex set of issues that play a part in determining developments.

ments? Cheez. You sound pathetic," she says, rolling her eyes at me. "Okay, name one determining development. Come on, tell me!" she demands. I will. The authorities have to cope with a number of complex challenges. They have to

"Determining develop-

limited skills. They are human, too. They have problems too. "Oh yeah. So what. So what if they have to face challenges. They don't have to face the kind of challenges we do. We're ordinary people. We have to sur-

work with scarce resources and

"Oh yeah. What can we do.

Coming Home . . .



retorts, loudly. I don't say anything. (You know something, now that I think about it, I am at a loss. I know we can do something, it is just that I am not sure what it is

"Ha. You don't have a clue! You know why? Because we can't do anything - we aren't supposed to," my friend declares, throwing her hands all over the place. It's their responsibility, and their responsibility alone, to make sure these

that we can dol.

Pass the buck, I snap at her. angrily. All you ever do is pass the buck. Why do people in Bangladesh always pass the buck. Here we are, a nation of over a hundred and twenty million people and all we can say is that a handful of people ought to take the responsibility for

"They're supposed to look after us! That's why they are there, that's why we elected them!" she cries out.

providing the basics to us.

Oh don't be so naive, I tell her with a shrug. You ought to know better. If you think that people come to power, take high office, sit in parliament, become ministers, chase after

floor, wherein settlement has to

be made the same day with in-

government jobs just because they want to serve the people. you're out of your mind.

"The whole country went on the blink, right? Someone says it was sabotage. Someone says machines break down because we just don't maintain them. But why don't we? Is that why the national grid had a nervous breakdown? Who is to blame?"

Listen, you're far too demanding. If you want to live peacefully in Bangladesh, don't be so aggressive. These things happen. We are a developing country. We are doing our best. They solved the problem didn't they - and they are working on making everything much better.

"Yeah. For instance. What are they doing," my friend asks. belligerently. "Give me an example".

And so I read out the entire

list to her. First and foremost, the matter is being handled at the highest possible level. Everyone has

been told to get a move on. The army is lending a hand. The whole issue is being given top priority.

People are scampering all over the place, making field trips, holding emergency meetings, sending out directives, sacking and appointing experts. making sure that everyone knows that no matter what may have happened in the past, this time the authorities mean

"Why?" What do you mean, why. "Why do they have to call in

business.

the army? Like we're at war or something?" Oh, don't be melodramatic.

It's not like that "What is it like. What is the problem. Can someone explain to me exactly what is the prob-

show the daily quoted price of I don't know, I'm not a mechanic or an engineer. There must be a reason — indeed, there must be loads of reasons. I mean, this is a country-wide grid we are talking about. This is a network that supplies an

tional grid failure which blacks out the nation's Parliament, isn't it, so who are they to talk, right?" These are the representatives of the people, the members

of the highest democratic forum in the land, the final and ultimate repository of the people's will, the august house from whence great legal precedents are made. Don't talk like this about them. Please. "Yeah. Yeah.

That's the problem, you see. Everyone blames our leaders. And our leaders have a lot on their mind. Like who gets to light the next round of candles in the House. Amen.

Exactly. That's my point. why can't ordinary people do things don't happen. something.

Give me an example," my friend

Named after a river that is synonymous with our exis-

tence? Please do not let history repeat itself. Be a hero, Madame Prime Minister, introduce the bill yourself. This is how you establish yourself in history. There is no other way, like it or

Dr P B Roy Austin, Texas, USA

"Oh, so rude!"

Sir, I went through the letter (dated 1/4/98) under the above caption written by Shahab Uddin Mahtab. In the last paragraph of his letter he stated that, "we are one of the rudest and unhelpful nation in the world and these start off as soon as we land at Zia Interna-

have simply "Janata Bridge"? tional Airport." In my opinion these start off

as soon as we aboard a Bangladesh Biman aircraft at an international airport. The stone-faced air hostesses and stewards and their indifferent behaviour towards the passengers give one the infallible feeling of the rudeness of Bengali character.

Faruque Hasan 4, Sobhanbag, Dhaka-1207

Pricing of odd lots

Sir, Odd lot shares are defined as those other than market lots. These maybe in big lots mainly of foreign or institutional holdings i.e. 500, 1000 scrips or fractional numbers arising out of the rights/bonus issues, or allotments made in IPO other than the market lots. Trading in odd lots is allowed

timation to the exchange authorities. A problem arises when odd lots are traded in a bulk at a

price which is unusually below or above the ruling market price. Because the price of the odd lot is averaged with the prices of the other market lots. the resulting quoted price is unexpectedly lower or higher than what it should be. This creates a high degree of volatility in the market. To overcome this problem,

the exchange authorities may

market lot and odd lot separately, instead of averaging both together. Khurrum Malik

Chittagong.

First Capital Securities Ltd. under spot transaction in the