

Utter Cruelty

To say we are shocked would be an understatement. No word seems strong enough to condemn the act of gross cruelty which accounted for the life of Duli, the teenage maid who died from serious burn injuries in a city hospital Wednesday last. No beast of prey is capable of doing what Rahmans — the employers — did to the young girl. She was suffering from gangrene. Although the nabbed housewife has told police the tale of Duli slipping on the bathroom floor with a bucketful of steaming hot water as an explanation for the fatal burn injuries on her person, it is clear Duli died of inhuman torture and neglect. Truth is too palpable to escape anyone's common sense and Mrs. Rahman confessed to the police that she used to scald the girl with red hot stirrer whenever she felt Duli was not doing enough. God bless whoever thought man has left Alex Haley's Roots days behind.

Like rape, fatal or debilitating injury to domestic aids is gaining currency in Dhaka. It could very well be the other way round. May be they have been happening quietly and pervasively all this while. Only now they are coming through — thanks to activism of the human rights organizations and fourth estate's sharpened nose for sniffing at them. Not long ago we heard a similar story where a teenage domestic aid was brutally tortured almost to death. Sohag could have met with Duli's fate had a human rights organization not reached him in the nick of time.

Government is never short of words when it comes to protection of women's and children's rights. It talks in favour of stricter laws glibly. We would like to know how sincere it is about enforcement of laws. How many criminals have been prosecuted to their deserts. What happened to the family that tortured Sohag cruelly? Is law on the right course? What will happen to Duli's killers? We want the government to speak on issues like these concretely and menacingly. Certainly not in the manner of our Home Minister who shortly after Sohag's rescue went on record with the statement that steps would be taken to inspect the state of domestic aids in the city houses. It has to come up with social programmes — something credible and feasible in association with the NGOs and the press.

Despicable Tendency

It was not a snipe shot whizzing past a journalist's ear at the front-line of a battle nor a burst of bullets from a hidden corner of ethnically troubled city. Even for such extraordinary circumstances correspondents wear a badge of immunity as a protective shield against lurking dangers. But even instances of such precautions taken under heavy odds going awry seem now to pale into insignificance before what is now happening during hartals in Dhaka city.

According to the standard practice, a prior notice was duly served on pickets by the organisers of Thursday's hartal that they be deferential to journalist who along with medicare and utility personnel should not face any obstruction in the discharge of their duties. But this time-honoured convention of a granted professional immunity was thrown to the four winds during hartal hours day before yesterday.

Indeed we find no words strong enough to condemn the smashing and setting ablaze of at least nine press vehicles on that day, which, being fledgling three wheelers as they were, turned into mangled metallic coils standing vivid testimony to uncontrolled, even indulged political gangsterism. This must now begin to be stemmed at the roots of political organisation. Reference to such aberrant behaviour when Awami League was in the opposition hardly makes light of the offense now. We do not see why the instructions given to party workers at the ward or grassroots level, prior to a hartal, should not include precautions against such excesses as harming press vehicles or uprooting railway lines. Those who fan out to create public opinion against any impending hartal need also to exercise a caution of their own.

We find the tendency towards ignoring a journalist's identity and smashing press vehicles extremely ominous. For this could stray into a pattern of extracting vendetta against a scribe working for a newspaper or news agency perceived to be on the other side of the political divide.

Century's Last Aricha Jam

Only four or five more days and there would not hopefully be a jam at Aricha. The commissioning of the Bangabandhu Jamuna Multipurpose Bridge on Tuesday next is expected to take off most of Aricha's traffic load to and from the northern districts. A beastly traffic jam at Aricha — blocking six kilometres of highway up to Uthuli — was the least expected of things to herald the BJMB. A national daily headline on Thursday, trying to console its readers, said — century's last jam at Aricha. We hope this comes true. But who knows?

It is true that Padma-Jamuna never had in decades such a swelling rise as at present. And there is unprecedented current there now throwing the ferry schedules into the winds. Upstream the ferries to Natakholia are taking close to four hours, instead of the normal two. Likewise from Daulatdia it is taking exactly double time to reach Aricha. The obvious result, clogging of all three ends — Aricha, Natakholia and Daulatdia with miles and miles of stuck up vehicles.

This wouldn't perhaps have been so bad if all the ferries were available. But reports say about 7 or 8 of them are undergoing repairs and no one is rushing the mending job. Why would they? The jams are a boon to many. Specially at the booking counters. So, the queues lengthen, the jam festers and tens of thousands run knowing not what to do with their children and luggage. And other thousands try just to sit it out in the buses for, hopefully, half a day.

The last chance to make some quick and extra money is slipping away. In four or five days it will be gone. So, they are up to their last morsel. It may be true that traffic jam will cease to be a regular fare at Aricha after BJMB has been commissioned. But then there is no end to human ingenuity. They can cook up traffic jams out of nothing if they are hard pressed for such.

In the meantime let us turn our apprehensions to jams that will dog all the way to Bhuapur. Other than the approach roads to the BJMB, nothing is in a shape to take the new hugely increased load. The Bhuapur-Jaydebpur road is as bad and incommodious as can be. May be jams will continue, it is the venue that will change.

Budget '97-'98: Some Selective Remarks

A government can create hopes through investments in education, training, health care etc. The landless poor can gain immensely from the access to such investments and thus pin some hopes there upon to gain from the market.

FINANCE Minister S A M S Kibria presented the national budget for 1998-99 the other day. Along with it, the supplementary budget was also submitted. It may be mentioned here that this year's supplementary budget claimed no additional funds — an unexpected event in the history of our fiscal management and a rare sign of fiscal prudence. However, the budget posits a revenue surplus and it is a surplus budget. But in aggregate — taking both revenue and development budget into consideration — the budget emerges as a deficit budget.

There are some positive shots in the budget which need to be reckoned with to dispel dismaying impressions about the performance of the economy. First, the economic growth question. The actual growth rate of GDP achieved during 1996-97 is estimated to be 5.9 per cent. The preliminary estimate for 1997-98 puts the figure at comparable 5.6 per cent. So, on average, a growth rate of about 5.7 per cent has been achieved during the last two consecutive fiscal years. This rate is complimentary although hardly should it make us complacent. Sustainability of such a growth rate for few years more can save us from economic catastrophes.

Secondly, while economic growth during 1996-97 was mainly bolstered by the impressive growth rate in agriculture (6 per cent), the dismal performance of the industrial sector — growing at a feeble 3.5 per cent — seemingly warned us about our dependence on nature. Critics came to the conclusion, perhaps rightly, that a nature driven high growth rate is welcome but not sustainable. The sources of growth in 1997-98 tell a quite opposite tale. The agricultural sector suffered a setback principally from *Amon* failure and thus failed to inject the previous year's lustre. On the other hand, the industrial sector — that languished during 1996-97, seems to have sparked during 1997-98 to rebound with a growth rate of 8 per cent and over. With an unfavourable nature that cut back *Amon* production and bracing a most frequent power failure and load shedding, the performance of the industrial sector as well as that of overall growth of the economy speaks of its resilience. Thirdly, the growth

performance during the last two fiscal years suggests that it would not be that tough to attain a growth rate of 6 per cent plus provided few more biting steps are taken in the realm of economic reforms and governance. The Finance Minister should by now realise that to

powerful than a modern defence base. It is, therefore, in the interest of the country that it promotes the former even if at the constraint of the latter.

member that these are mostly safety net programmes. But to strike at the root of poverty, we need to go beyond safety nets and enhance the access of the poor to the available opportunities.

It is now being widely recognised that Bangladesh witnessed some reductions in poverty levels over the years, albeit marginally. But at the same time, income inequality also increased. It implies that given a market economy, the access to the market would, to an extent, determine the level of inequality in the society. Any government that espouses the philosophy of a market economy should see that the poor have access to these market based incentives and opportunities, so that they can hope to enrich themselves through the market. Remember what Rabinranath Tagore said (and I translate): "In a country where the poor hope to become rich, that hope is the most important asset. It is not enough to say that we are short of money. Actually, we are short of hopes." A government can create



Beneath the Surface

by Abdul Bayes

achieve a growth rate of 7 per cent plus for a period of time — hence to make a dent to the pervasive poverty syndrome — something more needs to be done and that mostly relates to non-economic factors.

The budget placed highest allocation to education sector and thus fulfilled a long felt need. But to campaign for the cause of more allocation to defence does not appear tenable. In fact, as critics rightly argued, the additional emphasis on defence sec-

tor runs contrary to the postulated objective, for which CHT peace treaty has been signed and to the avowed policy of making available to the nation more butter than guns. The current wisdom on national security tells us that a modernised human resource base is more

powerful than a modern defence base. It is, therefore, in the interest of the country that it promotes the former even if at the constraint of the latter.

Towards Self-Reliance

A Tank Factory for All Seasons

Under the current political and economic scenario the attainment of national self-reliance has taken on serious connotations, it is a must for the survival for a nation and people with honour.

Pakistan's economy is largely based on agriculture and understandably a major section of its industry is agri-based. While entrepreneurs are increasingly looking to other areas the potential of expanding the industrial base remains largely untapped for a number of reasons but mainly because of a heavy reliance on our traditional export items. An encouraging sign recently has been the emergence of various industries other than the agri-based ones. In order for such industrial units to operate efficiently and profitably there is a desperate need to adopt certain measures otherwise the end result could well be disastrous. As it is, thanks to the aversion of highly unpatriotic and corrupt individuals who have thrived on commissions, the country is being forced to carry a high percentage of sick industries because of huge loans taken by these individuals from banks on pretext of revival of their units and then being grossly misused. Pakistan has a good number of industrial and manufacturing units controlled by dynamic individuals with sound management skills which can be termed as true Centers of Excellence. These are rightly a source of great pride for all. Among these is a unit which is a cut above the rest, Heavy Industries, Taxila (HIT), a dynamic and progressive organisation where cooperation and cohesion between various sectors has been harnessed to maximise the results.

The birth of HIT took place in 1971 when Project-71 was established in Taxila with Chinese assistance mainly to rebuild the T-59 Tank fleet of the Pakistan Army. With the passage of time it came to be known as Heavy Rebuild Factory (HRB) which was instrumental in imparting invaluable know-how and experience due to which further expansion became possible. Not only the rebuild but gradually the manufacture of all tracked vehicles of the Army commenced in this facility. In the month of September, 1992 reorganisation took place in this industrial complex and it was renamed as Heavy Industries Taxila. The main activities of HIT are (1) re-build and upgradation of armoured vehicles of eastern origin; (2) progressive manufacture of tanks and armoured personnel carriers (APCs) and (3) progressive manufacture of tank guns. In order to accomplish its assigned tasks, HIT employs a highly trained and skilled work force of around 6000 factory workers of which a high 70 per cent comprises of civilians while 30 per cent workers are uniformed soldiers. The large civilian population in HIT demonstrates not only the calibre and skill of these workers but it also indicates the trust and confidence that is reposed in them by the Armed Forces.

Activities at HIT are controlled, supervised and directed by the Chairman who oversees the various factories and facilities such as Heavy Rebuild Factory T-Series and Heavy Rebuild Factory M-Series (rebuild facilities), APC Factory, Tank Factory and Gun Factory (manufacturing facilities). Development Engineering Support components, Manufacture (DESCOM) and Evaluation, Training and Research Organisation (ETRO) (engineering support facilities) and Project MBT-2000, Al-Khalid (tank production facility).

The Heavy Rebuild Factory T-Series is the well from which the spring flows, in essence the technical base from which the knowledge and expertise to raise all the other facilities at HIT has arisen. This factory has the distinct honour of re-building the first T-59 tanks in 1980 and at present it also up-

grades T-59 tanks to the T-59M version. All tanks are usually called in for rebuild after 10 years of active life, after which the tank is taken apart, every nut and bolt included, and the tank is rebuilt with numerous upgraded features being added. Project MBT 2000 which is dedicated to the development of the Al-Khalid Tank is a significant step in the direction of self-attainment.

The development of a tank is a complex task, this is initiated by paper design and ends in a long series of test and trials and it is a time consuming process. Countries like the USA, France

155mm calibre, in addition a very significant achievement has been its success in manufacturing of 105 mm tank guns which are now being used by various makes of tanks in the country. In addition the factory is also in the process of acquiring technology which will enable it to produce 125 mm gun barrels for its Al-Khalid Tanks. The extensive scope of HIT activities (or that of any other industrial manufacturing unit for that matter) cannot even begin to achieve it's goals unless the back-up of an efficient general engineering support to all it's manufacturing and rebuild

considerable amount of foreign exchange, today more than 7500 components of differing types are manufactured locally by HIT while another 7500 components of various categories are being produced by numerous vendors associated with HIT. The vendor industry is particularly encouraged in the production of local equipment and DESCOM continues to provide them with technical assistance and guidance at all stages of production and manufacture. These combined dedicated efforts have now resulted in HIT achieving 81 per cent deletion by variety in the components of T-59 Tanks, 56 per cent in T-69 Tanks and 40 per cent in APCs. The manufacture and rebuild of tanks and APCs would not have been possible without the incorporation of a proper system of coordination, control and quality management, and this has been done at HIT. It's Quality Assurance Department adopts a comprehensive testing system which includes road testing, water fording, ditch crossing and obstacle negotiation on the test tracks. A well maintained firing range is used for firing of the main gun and auxiliary weapons while an elaborate quality assurance laboratory adequately supports the quality management system and is actively engaged in carrying out testing for physical as well as chemical properties of production materials.

It goes without saying that a large industrial complex such as HIT cannot progress without an efficient system of training and it is to this end that HIT is deeply committed to an on-going process of training of all its technical and administrative cadre of employees. The services of Margalla Training Institute (MTI), an extremely ef-

fective and efficient institute are utilised by HIT for the training of its workers in various disciplines. HIT is deeply cognizant of the contribution made by all its workers and it is therefore committed to the development of all-round skills of its manpower. This is a continuous process which offers individuals to learn, adopt and utilise the latest techniques and advances in their respective areas of speciality. One of the lessons is learnt from the saga of HIT. From a single factory conceived in 1971 it has now progressed to become a multi-factory reality. Their growth from rebuild of T-59 Chinese origin tanks to the progressive manufacture of APCs and tanks has been remarkable. Without HIT Pakistan today would not have an armour component in their order of battle. Their dependence on foreign sources for manufacturing and rebuilt activities has been greatly curtailed, this is one of their most notable achievements and they are moving towards greater indigenisation in collaboration with the local industry. HIT has become a very important industrial base and is playing a definite and potent role in national self-reliance.

Under the current political and economic scenario the attainment of national self-reliance has taken on serious connotations, it is a must for the survival for a nation and people with honour. The HIT example can be effectively utilised as role model by the various industrial units in Pakistan whereby they can absorb and incorporate their inherent methodology and culture for their own expansion and growth. In order to achieve growth and to prosper it is essential that one is willing to learn from others who have excelled in their fields. HIT is a shining model for others for achieving self-reliance.

(Research carried out by M. Aslam Quadri, Vice President, Research & Collection Services (Pvt) Limited, Karachi.)

AS I SEE IT

Ikrar Sehgal writes from Karachi

and UK which are advanced tank producing nations took more than a decade to field their tanks Abrams M1, Leclerc and Challenger respectively. India took 23 long years to take a decision to equip only two regiments with Arjun tanks but even then they are producing only a limited number of Arjun because even after its development the prototypes have not been successful. In contrast, the progress made by HIT in the development of Al-Khalid has been very encouraging, this is a true reflection of the dedication of its planners, engineers and technicians.

One of HIT's most impressive units is its Gun Factory which was set up in collaboration with China and went into production in 1992. The factory has the capacity of producing gun barrels ranging from 105 mm to

factories is put in place. Their responsibility falls under the expertise of DESCOM which has been specifically structured to take up this very vital task and it's activities include the in-house manufacture of components and assemblies, designing and manufacturing of tools and gauges, repair and maintenance of machinery and services installed in factories and the development and subsequent production of components and assemblies through vendor industries.

Indigenisation is high on the list of priorities at HIT and in order to implement HIT's deletion programme, DESCOM has successfully produced a number of components indigenously. This is a major step towards self-reliance. This process has helped HIT to absorb technologies for the future and save con-

them the question, the smarter one replied, "The bridge is built for the vendors". Okay I thought well at least I am collecting valuable information on the alternative uses for underutilised bridges of the world. The World Bank could use this information for one of their studies. Finally I asked a woman as to why the bridge was built and she thought for a while and said, "Because the Govt. wants to beautify the city, perhaps?" As she stepped forward to make the crossing, I said to her, "Won't you use the bridge to cross this busy junction and perhaps not take the risk of getting run over or hamper traffic flow and not to mention breaking the law?" She waved her hand saying, "Oh no, this is much easier and quicker, why bother!"

The R&H department have done a good job building these bridges, but it is up to the media, the law-enforcing agencies and the general public to educate the masses and urge them to use these bridges and follow traffic rules.

*Farhan Quddus
ABC House, Banani, Dhaka*

And what's more — as the temperature went up, so did the frequency of loadshedding.

On resuming power in 1996, the present government blamed the then frequent loadshedding on the inefficiency of the past government and on sabotage and promised literally (through TV ads) to set things right within a few months.

Two years have passed. What has happened to our fearless government's golden promises? All gone down the drain, no doubt?

*Salma Binte Anam
A-level student,
Dhaka*

Built for other purposes, not crossing

Sir, I have recently started walking home from work in the hope that I lose a pound after every walk. I start from ABC Tower on Kemal Ataturk Avenue every evening to my house in Old DOHS, walking up to the crossing on Airport Road. Now let me tell you frankly, I have been seriously tempted to cross the busy road instead of the overbridge but somehow, my conscience does not allow it and therefore I am forced to climb the steps everyday and cross the bridge making life miserable for walking that extra 50 yards.

But you know what really irritating is that hundreds of pedestrians and passengers disembarking from the buses cross that busy cross section right in front of the traffic constables and honking cars without a care in the world. Whereas I have to use the bridge! So I decided one day to collect some data by asking the masses as to why they think the bridge was built?

I stood at the bottom of the bridge and asked an old man as he prepared himself to make that dash to the other side, "I thought you thought this bridge built this bridge?" The old man smiled and said, "To put up neon signs and hoardings." He dashed off and made it to the other side. Right, quite rightly put, I thought. A few minutes later, I caught two men preparing the crossover and asked

Drawing attention!

Sir, On 12 April '98 I was going to Zakiganj from Sylhet by bus and rickshaw in midst of heavy rain and thunder shower, and I reached at my residence at 11.00 pm. Two terrorists entered my bedroom and requested for a 'private call' (?). I politely told about my high fever and motor-cycle accident for which I had been under treatment of a neuro surgeon. As I was unable to go outside I refused politely. Moreover, my whole body was wet including my clothes. But they did what they wanted at knife-point. I complained it to Deputy Commissioner. He sent for investigating the incidents. But the terrorists' gang members are trying to divert the matter in other way. Therefore, I would like to draw attention of the authority concerned.

*Dr Md M R Khan
MO (FW)
Sultanpur FWC
Zakiganj, Sylhet*

To the Editor...

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

The gap between plan and action

Sir, Before me is a clipping elaborately detailing since 1995 the master plans under the auspices of the august body known as NRSC or the National Road Safety Council, for checking wheeled traffic and control of the same, including prosecution against unlicensed vehicles and drivers, smoke emission, mechanical road-worthiness, BRTC hobnobbing, and what not, to bring about some order in this mad world on our roads and highways.

Nothing works; and even the orders are held at long intervals. All talk, no action — this is the local style of governance before and after independence. The phlegmatic temperament is unique in this hot, humid, deltaic region. No individual can be blamed.

These air-conditioned deliberations read rosy sitting indoors with the day's newspaper. The proof of the pudding lies in the eating. The most scientifically planned infrastructure or systems, without the political will behind it (and led by the politicians in power as they showed in the case of CHT). In this case the basic approach leaves out the spice from the ingredients — the vote machine might also jam!

It needs moral and political courage to be tough and unpopular through good governance from the administrative point of view. As an example, here is a test case: why unlicensed vehicles and drivers are allowed to operate year after year; why traffic violations are not punished in a deterrent manner? Parallel unauthorised licence issuing 'authorities' are set up impudently under the very nose of the government. When the Mayor points it out, golden silence prevails!

Why meterless autorickshaws?

Sir, The budget mentioned autorickshaws, but did not go for banning the import of new 2-stroke engines. It also kept quiet about fitting fare metres in the 3-wheeled 'taxis' (surcharge on non-metered vehicles after a grace period). The latter is a standard practice and

has been working in many developing capitals. This mandatory device can be implemented in phases, first in Dhaka, then in Chittagong, followed by the third phase in the divisional headquarters. It is not high-tech, and not costly.

Now how the 3-wheelers will compete with the 500 4-wheeler taxicabs which are going to flood the Dhaka roads this month (?). There should be no discrimination in the installation of metres. Decisions need to be user-oriented. Lastly, it is all quiet on the new taxicab service. The vested interests of apex bodies appear to be quite busy in providing better services to the public!

*Abul M Ahmed
Dhaka*

World Cup Vacation

Sir, The Daily Star editorial on "World Cup Vacation" published on 17th June last was outrageous and appeared to be an attempt to demean the teachers of BUET for no fault of theirs. The Daily Star as well as the people in the country know about the commitment of the BUET teachers and it is because of the rectitude and committing of the teachers in the tradition of late Dr Rashid's ideals (the founder vice-chancellor of BUET) that BUET now has earned a lofty position at home and abroad. Reading your editorial I couldn't help noticing how much it diverged from the truth. Neither the university authorities nor the teachers deserved such bashing.

The editorial comment comparing the teachers with the politicians stooping low in placating their constituencies, here the students, sounds quite improper and indecent. I am very disappointed that The Daily Star did this. Let others do it — but The Daily Star, we believed should stick to serious journalism and ethical responsibility as it usually did and can't issue editorial comments simply based on press reports.

Not only we denied the semblance of dignity as teachers, but the batteries of sarcastic comments humiliated us. The editorial comments did not

*Shamim Ahmad
A concerned teacher of BUET
Dhaka*

Riding back to the dark ages?

Sir, To a resident of Bangladesh loadshedding is nothing out of the ordinary. But patience too has its limits. Recently the frequency of loadshedding has gone up so much that it is at the point of paralysing the whole economy.