The Baily Star

Founder-Editor: Late S. M. Ali

Dhaka, Tuesday, September 15, 1998

Strapped for Cash

Experts have spoken. We need an investment of 3.4 billion US dollars over a period of two years to repair the damage wrought by the floods. We may have to reconcile ourselves with a reduction in GDP growth by one to two per cent at the year-end with our incremental poverty alleviation strategy coming under clouds there. Lessened production would affect export-earning, and import, barring that of foodgrains, is bound to register a decline with an attendant shortfall in government's revenue collection.

Foreign exchange reserve has dwindled from the already low level of 1.9 billion US dollars to 1.8 billion, the depletion caused by emergency foodgrains import which has just about begun with more to come. Government is seized of the balance of payment problem, and our Foreign Secretary is on a visit to the USA to seek more food aid which promises to ease the pressure on our forex reserve. IMF doors will be knocked in time. Noticeably, at the moment the government is showing a dynamism to help export, especially garments export, through an emergency lifting of the merchandise from the affected areas on to the air-and sea-ports. A clarion call, we believe, has gone out to non-resident Bangladeshis working abroad to step up their remittances beyond the normal notches they annually account for. India and Pakistan have done this on being bedevilled by the economic sanctions that followed their nuclear tests in May. We are in a natural disaster scenario far worse than their ordeal. --

It seems the government has got focused on the priorities of the moment. For instance, distribution of Vulnerable Group Feeding (VGF)cards, Open Market Sale of rice, regular consultation with traders to ascertain and declare stock positions and thereby stem panic-buying el all are well-conceived steps. Food-for-work programme is a crucial necessity.

It is in this overall framework that we welcome the government's decision to trim non-essential expenditure, a chaff which one need not take much pain to separate from the grain. Much of the costs on fuel, furniture entertainment, events, seminars, meetings, foreign travel, elaborate fan-fare at the top, etc. can be avoided with the added benefit of an increase in the efficiency levels which are now a casualty of a rather ostentatious and unfocused official culture. All we want is genuine top-down austerity which is no-nonsense, publicity-shy, conviction-rich and self-evident.

Step in the Right Direction

The government has decided to place cargo handling operations at the two major seaports of the country under services personnel. While army, assisted by navy, will run the loading and unloading operations at Chittagong, the premier entrepot, it will be a reversal of roles at Mongla, the other major quay in Khulna with navy in control and army assisting them. This is a very reassuring piece of news under the circumstances. At the moment our ports, specially the one in Chittagong is grovelling under tremendous pressure of goods coming in and going out of the country. The recent spate in congestion has been caused partly by the chronic dysfunctional nature of the ports induced from time to time by trade union tyranny and partly due to the rush of emergency relief materials now being directed to Bangladesh from all corners of the world in aid of the flood victims. Lest the purpose behind emergency relief assistance is lost it is imperative that the ports function smoothly, in fact with double the efficiency they are required to demonstrate in normal times. Delay in releasing essential arrivals like foodgrains can open the veritable Pandora's box. Not only there is the grave prospect of not having enough to provide emergency assistance to sustain the flood-stricken people but also the huge financial loss on account of overstay of the ships at the port. There is little doubt that with their trained background and discipline the services men will galvanise the harbours. We hope the authorities will make sure that the decision to bring the army and navy into operation does not get stuck in some bureaucratic ambages for one reason or the other. Our flood rehabilitation programme will go awry if the ports do not work on emergency basis at least for the next six months.

Potable Water Supply

The inordinately long duration of this year's flood has played havoc with the drinking water distribution system. In most of the inundated areas stagnant and filthy flood water has entered the WASA supply mains. Besides, underground reservoirs in most of the houses in places like Rampura, Khilgaon and Sabujbagh have long gone under water making the water unfit for human use, let alone consumption. Water supplying authorities have also acknowledged the problem and it seems it will be sometime before they can go about repairing the damages because the flood water has to recede for any work to begin.

Until the mains are fixed, an alternate supply system has to be maintained to meet the requirement of these affected people. It is a tall but not an impossible task. We suggest WASA step up its mobile supply system to meet the challenge. It should use boats where necessary. Working in harness with various non governmental and voluntary organisations might give its service the edge people are looking for. From the way things have shaped so far it seems WASA's alternate water supply is suffering from a certain directionlessness. The potable water supply campaign will gain immensely from impressing the need of proper use of purifying tablets upon the people. People can suffer as much from the want of quality in water as they can from the want of its quantity. Already waterborne diseases have made huge inroads into public health.

Let this Devastating Flood Unite Politicians

by Muslehuddin Ahmad

It is neither necessary nor possible without appropriate consultations to suggest any format for the kind of united action. It can be done in any form that might suit the government and the other political parties. They should sit together and chalk out the plan. But for the benefit of understanding one may suggest a National Relief and Rehabilitation Committee. . .

specifically emphasised on "working relationship" between the top leaders of two major political parties - Awami League and BNP — for taking the counparties have been speaking in try forward. He added, "we also terms of joint efforts to deal with this crisis. Specifically suffered tremendously but we decided to work together even Sheikh Hasina, on several occasions, appealed for united acwith our enemies for the sake of our people and the country." tions thereby meaning, as we understand, that let every one What he probably wanted to income forward and join hands to dicate is that in Bangladesh face the abnormal situation these are political parties and not enemies. Therefore the task arising out of the devastating flood. Addressing the Parliaof working together should not be difficult at all. What is ment Prime Minister Hasina said, "Let us forget all our politneeded is a genuine desire to ical differences, let us unitedly work for the good of the people stand beside the flood victims and the country and for that to and pray to Almighty Allah to rise above the party politics. The devastating flood appears save the people and the country from the wrath of the nature." to have given the opportunity to She also asked everyone to join wash away the petty political bickering and bring the leaders hands at "this hour of nationaltogether on one platform - a crisis." Prime Minister's call political embankment - like got quick response from the Leader of the Opposition in the the DND which, however, might Parliament Begum Khaleda Zia. need sand bags to repair from time to time will not allow po-She said, 'We are ready to cooperate with the government belitical flood to cross over and cause people and the country submerge the country politiare more important to us than cally and destroy people's hope party and politics." on democracy for which they

Both the leaders have apparently expressed their genuine desire for a united action to face the calamity and its aftereffects. What is left for them is to

sit together and find out the best way to do this. The leader who will take the first opportunity (protocol to be ignored) to invite the leader to sit together will certainly receive people's acclamation and reap the political PLUS. The people would like to see actions and not just statements on the floor of the house. If the who leaders can join hands to give effect to their own noble statements made in the solemn place like the Parliament, the rest of 120 million will certainly follow them truthfully and join hands in a united action to save the country. There is absolutely no other

Combined efforts are absolutely needed. Prime Minister herself very correctly assessed the situation by saying that this flood is abnormal and unprecedented. Therefore it has to be faced in that way. This needs support of all people. As the Leader of the Opposition is already committed to cooperating with the government, the initiative should come from the government side. The party in power needs this support to deal

with calamity of such magni-

Though the government is

the major player it may not possibly deal with everything alone — the task is too gigantic and risks are enormous. After all the life and livelihood of the people are involved: 120 million is too many and the demand will be too big and diverse for the government to handle alone. Flood water has been standing on the soil for nearly two months. This has brought the country and its agriculture and economy to a standstill. The water has just started receding but along with this devastation will continue. The people have been facing limitless sufferings. Millions may face starvation and disease unless quick actions are taken. Of course, the government is fully aware and making preparations but knowing full well the magnitude of the problems, one would ask for an all out efforts on the part of the government to ensure full participation of all people in the relief and rehabilitation process.

It would be worthwhile for

the government to consider declaring "state of natural disaster emergency" as suggested by Mr Mahfuz Anam, the editor of The Daily Star. He has given several reasons and the most important one seems to be "to mobilse national efforts and bring a sense of urgency to the situation." Generally some political issues crop up in declaring any kind of emergency but as this would be for tackling natural disaster, those issues could safely be avoided. In any case even the opposition has been talking in those terms. Now it is up to the government

suggestion. It is neither necessary nor possible without appropriate consultations to suggest any format for the kind of united action as suggested earlier. It can be done in any form that might suit the government and the other political parties. They should sit together and chalk out the plan. But for the benefit of understanding one may suggest a National Relief and Rehabilitation Committee. Both the leaders should, as far as

to give due consideration to this

possible, depending on their load of official work, be present in the meetings of the Committee. Similar Committees should be appropriately established in the districts, thanas, unions etc where members of all political parties should be appropriately represented. This will give more confidence to the people and to the international community. The response so far from the international community appears satisfactory but the need will be so huge that further help will be required. This will be easier to get when they will see the commitment of our leaders and their genuine desire to work together for the good of the people.

Because of the gravity of the country's situation the people would ask for another very firm commitment from our political leaders and that is - NO MORE HARTALS. The country cannot afford to have any form of HARTALS any more. Other ways must be evolved to press for normal political demands.

In a united action the chances of failure would be minimal and even if there is any due to unforeseen situation. no particular party will be blamed. The government being the major player will reap the most benefit for proper handling of the crisis. The opposition parties benefit because of their wilful participation to help the people and the country. Good for all and loss for none.

Why is Pakistan's Unity Always Under Threat?

irrespective of his/her background.

What is needed is widespread education, welfare measures for all members of the society irrespective of history that symbolizes L unity equal to or more colour, creed, religion, strata in the society and people's participation in local government at the than Aug 14, 1947 is Sep 6, grassroots level with the basic premise that deserving persons must get what he or she deserves, 1965. On that day the whole nation, rose as one person when threatened by Indian attack. determined to preserve the any odds, size and bearing country's independence. And having no influence on soyet, little more than six years called "martial qualities". later, the finest experiment in nationhood in its time was torn apart. Today we are acutely aware that no lessons were learnt from this catastrophe. that anyone who tried to reason was vilified as a prophet of

w had the unique honour of

Mandela some time ago in

Johannesburg. While discussing

the political situation of

Bangladesh and its future he

sacrificed so much.

Both the leaders - Prime

Minister Sheikh Hasina and

Begum Khaleda Zia and indeed

leaders of all other political

HE one day in Pakistan's

doom and worse, a traitor, no

account being taken of the fac-

tors (or the people) who de-

stroyed a beautiful country. In

the context of Pakistan, chau-

vinism can be described in one

form "as exaggerated or aggres-

sive patriotism" or "prejudicial

support" or "loyalty for some-

tion rampant among a section

of the populace about being a

"superior race" when in fact Is-

lam, the raison d'itre for our ex-

istence, enjoins us that all men

and women are created equal.

However group behaviour or in-

dividual attitude sidelines ob-

also directly related to a con-

cept of manhood and martial

races, in this day and age a to-

tally false premise. Except for a

proforma "battle" for a few

hours given by Porus to

Alexander the Great on the

banks of river Jhelum, history

does not record even a mild

protest, what to talk about giv-

ing resistance to any invader

before the fields of Panipat. Im-

perial adventurers from

Alexander onwards entering

India usually found their ranks

swell 3-4 times by mercenaries

who joined them enroute from

regions they passed through,

their driving urge being a crav-

ing for booty and plunder, their

motivation having no bearing

with any ideology or belief. In

today's modern world, anyone

who can bear weapons, from the

smallest Vietnamese to the

tallest Pathan can overcome

jectivity totally. Chauvinism is

There is a very false percep-

meeting President Nelson

Racial superiority is therefore a divisive myth that should be buried for the good of the nation. Pathans, Punjabis, Sindhis. Baloch and Mohajir are all equal under the sun, they should not only be listened to but heard. Similarly while male chauvinism is rather more marked in certain regions, Islam teaches us that all beings are equal. It is upto us to forcefully ensure that females have equal opportunities as men without discrimination and that they are treated thing it continues to cause us equally under the law so that they become useful members of the body politic and economic. Until the female of the species contributes positively, the nation's growth will be stunted. From chauvinism comes class considerations and divisions as per racial communities which by itself creates an unfair environment for existence for the smaller communities, whether ethnic or religious. Because of chauvinism, nepotism is deeply embedded in the soul of the na-

> deeply, mainly for economic reasons. Each community started to look after its own, within these parameters individuals started looking after their friends and families with merit given no consideration whatsoever. Nepotism became very pronounced along ethnic and sectarian lines, merit has become of hardly any consequence. Entrenched individuals and communities kept on strengthening their hold by inducting their own kith and kin on the basis of anything but merit, the

tion. This was somewhat con-

tained in the 60s and 70s but the

advent of martial law and non-

party democracy ushered in by

late Zia polarised society

smaller communities as well as individuals hoping for job opportunities (and advancement) on merit have become immersed in deep frustration, the qualitative edge fading away

because of mediocrity. With merit compromised the end result will be non-effective and less productive. In many cases merit has become a disqualifier, those having

corruption as the only means for catching up. The pervasive spreading of unabated corruption became

endemic in the social fabric so that every strata of society is deeply affected, remedial measures being confined to theory only. Those who initiate contra-measures are themselves so corrupt that with malafide in-

holes, firstly that the accused

cannot be brought to justice and

if they are the legal aspects are

made non-convincing and

friendly in the name of justice

and fairplay, leaving enough

reason for the corrupt to retali-

ate against his (their) accuser,

swiftly and violently enough to

act as a deterrent and warning

to others not to cross their path

life, preventing any logical assessment of universal goodness, and positively because the mind is shut and sealed to any other religion (most of the time it is unfair to give it the religious connotation). Any other idea is repelled violently and firmly.

ecclesiastical approaches to

tention they leave many loop-

Whatever hope there is in democracy is lost in electoral fraud. It has achieved the status of "industry" and has entered

the realm of "high tech". The catalyst for this trait are intolerance, chauvinism. bigotry, corruption and other failures described earlier. It is practiced to achieve: (a) ill deserved position in political arena, (b) amassing of wealth and other material gains, (c) denying deserving people their rightful share, thus nursing in society hate and frustration, (d) ing at the standard of the interwasteful expenditures which locutors (the religious preachleads to national bankruptcy ers) they could well be wrong. and by seeing the poor and the One can only comment that exdeprived the feeling of further tremism in any form is bad. frustration, leading to upheaval History is replete with the efin the society to attain a reafects which could engulf our sosonable share for self betterciety so strongly that the perment through violent means. petuators will suffer. There is Frustrated and virtually helpless at the deterioration the quality of morals and institutions around them, bitter at the widening gap separating the rich from the poor and looking for solace in their search for all-encompassing solutions, a vast majority of Pakistani citizens are turning to religion as the refuge of last resort. Increasingly the most glib and be-

jority still live virtually in the dark ages, their impartation of knowledge suspect and sometimes unbelievable. The lack of educated religious teachers is compounded by the different viewpoints that have complicated what is basically a simple religion. Instead of uniting the populace which was the essence of Islam, many of the modern versions are divisive on ridiculous issues.

However the less affluent are turning to Islam because the modern judicial process is beyond the reach of the common man, with both a yearning and a need for the availability of inexpensive justice. The Qazi courts provide just*that, however there is a requirement to compromise the modern aspirations to that need. Those who can afford the judicial process not only have an advantage but are comfortable with the arrangement as compared to the less privileged. The only antidote to the nation's ill is a return to basic Islam - they could well be right - but again look-

also a lesson from history about those who took violent means and overthrew above traits, ultimately themselves joined the "evil empire". What is needed is widespread education, welfare measures for all members of the society irrespective of colour. creed, religion, strata in the society and people's participation in local government at the grassroots level with the basic

premise that deserving persons

must get what he or she de-

serves, irrespective of his/her

background.

ASISEEIT

Ikram Sehgal writes from Karachi

merit being subject to virtual witch-hunting of the worst kind, particularly if they belong to the smaller races and have beliefs not in keeping with those held by the majority. The fact of the "quota system" is a slur on the name of both Islam and democracy. When any individual from any community has merit, why should that person be denied his/her place under the Pakistani sun? A sense of insecurity among the privileged ruling class who are threatened by the hardworking poor and middle class is responsible for creating this untair environment. White and blue collar workers in the Middle East in the 70s sending in remittances and arriving laden with electronic goods, etc. started a new polarisation in society, many times pitting brother against brother as one entity became awash with the symbols of luxury and the other remained mired in abject poverty. Materialism, became the order of the day, a crude display of it a social necessity. Stumped by attempts at obtain ing luxury by honest means, af-

fected individuals turned to

ten that dead body was found

inside the under carriage of the

wheel compartment and all of

are very well kept under wraps.

Shagor

Dhaka

ever again. That which cannot be endured is called intoler-Thinking and contemplation is an end product of experience in life, or one's thinking is so affected by unreasonable and illogical behaviour so steered by prejudicial logic. Intolerance in this country plays havoc with individual behaviour escalating to irrational behaviour and responses. Since the level of education is at the lowest ebb. intolerance grows fast, encompassing the broad spectrum of

society. The worst effect is on

Chittagong Port: Facing the Situation

lievable Muslim preachers have

become the interpreters for God

and his last Prophet (PBUH).

with modern society, a vast ma-

Educated only sometimes at par

by Md Shah Jahan

Unrest at the port would hamper smooth clearance of massive food and other lifesaving consignments from the donors who have promptly responded to the call for assistance. Slightest unrest causing any disruption at this situation of the country cannot be tolerated.

you were trying to cover it up? Maybe that fire in the cargo TT TE have nowadays becompartment was not entirely VV come numbed to innutrue, but you have to admit that merable social menaces most of the hiccups Biman faces and crimes e.g., rape, murder, kidnapping, bribery, mugging, burglary, thuggery, women trafficking, custodial deaths and so on. Recent unrest at the Chittagong port is not an isolated incident, rather this is another link in the chain of these menaces. Our society has been dragged to such a state of indiscipline and indifference by the nefarious activities of political and vested quarters to perpetuate their interest even by steady installation of vices. They have blunted our condan, a pertinent question science and plundered our morality thereby rendering us

> devoid of honour and dignity. We remember poignantly how the lifeline of the nation. the Chittagong port, has been used as a means to bow the governments down. The seeds of flagrant violence among workers, in a bid to make Chittagong port inoperative, have been sowed deliberately without taking into account its national

consequence. In the midst of the unprece-

dented flood in the country when we hear that the rival groups clashed with each other injuring 50 people including policemen to the further detriment of situation, we are at a loss as to the sense of proportion of the trade union activists at a time of national calamity. In view of the failure of the union leaders to realise the grave consequence of pursuing such action disrupting normalcy, and the foreboding announcement by 22 trade union bodies of an indefinite strike in the Chittagong port, and subsequent persuasion of the union leaders by the authority in order to pacify them to keep the port going and yet the volatility hanging as a sword of Damo-

cles, have awaken us to a crude reality — machination of vested

interests. In the face of the grim situation, the Government should not play the role of a mere spectator. It should explore possibilities to deal with the prevailing but unwarranted situation in a lawful manner to protect the vital interests of the vast suffering multitudes whose very existence has been threatened by the devastating flood. The laws in the statue books are to be applied for the amelioration of the suffering of the peo-

Government can explore a two-pronged strategy to face the situation: by exercising powers under Essential Services (Second) ordinance, 1958 which provides, under Section 3, as follows: "3(1) This Ordinance shall apply to all employments under the Government, and to such other employment or class of employment as the government, being of the opinion that such employment or class of employment is essential for the maintenance of public order or for maintaining services necessary to the life of the community, may, by notification in the Official Gazette, declare to be an employment or class of employment to which this or-

dinance applies.' The law has given overriding power to this Ordinance under Clause 5A, which provides: "the provisions of this Ordinance shall have effect, notwithstanding anything to the contrary contained in the Industrial Relations Ordinance, 1969 or any other law for the time being in force" so that the authority under this law could be exercised without any hindrance at ap-

propriate time. Alternatively, the Government can consider putting a

moratorium upon the activities

of the trade unions at the port. Though in line with the international laws and sentiments provisions for protecting fundamental rights of the workers have been guaranteed in our Constitution under Article 38 which provides as follows: "Every citizen shall have the right to form associations or unions. subject to any reasonable restrictions imposed by law in the interests of morality or public order", the framers of the Constitution have struck here a balance between the "rights of the workers" and the "national interests" but the Article in effect gave precedence to the national interests conferring upon the executive authority to put "reasonable restrictions" upon the freedom of association in accordance with law.

This is a clear direction to curtail the rights of the workers to the extent which causes harm to the national interests.

When the Government is ordering speedy unloading of foodgrains at the seaports and requesting the donors to expedite shipments of foodgrains such unrest at the port would hamper smooth clearance of massive food and other lifesaving consignments from the donors who have promptly responded to the call for assistance. Slightest unrest causing any disruption at this situation of the country cannot be tolerated. It would trustrate the Government's effort to reach assistance to the affected people. It will also frustrate prompt response of the donors as the materials would not reach the suffering people in time. The Government must be prepared to deal with all kinds of situations and eventuality. It the Government fails to take appropriate steps, amelioration of the suffering of the people will not be

To the Editor...

The picture says it all

Sir. The front page picture in the DS on August 25 says it all. Saving the DND embankment threatened by flood water is a unique and correct portrayal of what's happening around us. There workers carrying sand bags on their head are seen on the execution phase while scores of onlookers smartly dressed and even with smiling faces possibly are present to see the "tamasha". One can even notice the authoritative gesture of a person directing the operation with hand signal.

Unfortunately flood also hit other countries like China, South Korea and the collective effort of all concerned as seen in news media are quite different from ours.

Shall we ever learn? Tanzia Choudhury

Comilla

Hillary's support

Sir, We feel sorry for Hillary Clinton, without whose help and support it would have been impossible for Bill Clinton to become President of the United States and be in the White

House. But what an irony of fate! Clinton did not hesitate to betray Hillary in the premises of

What a folly to succumb to temptations which has resulted in hurting a devoted wife and bared a streak of nature which is not praiseworthy.

Nur Jahan East Nasirabad Chittagong

GB's new paradigm

Sir. A news item on the above subject in the DS of 23 August '98 attracted my notice. In reply to the Grameen Bank's new paradigm, I would like to add a few lines.

In short the Grameen Bank model has outlived its usefulness. It would no longer be useful for us on the following

(a) Because of the fast changing patterns of human life the market position would never remain neutral on account of the uncertainties of money markets in the stock exchange all over the world.

(b) According to the young experts, the operational cost of the Grameen Bank in the urban and rural areas of Bangladesh has been increasing day by day As a result, the rate of interest against loans under the microcredit system is getting higher for the poor who are easily trapped into by some dishonest people managing such banks in

the rural areas of the country. (c) The concept of new Economics as defined by Prof Mohammad Yunus is not an acceptable proposition for the good of the common people. It might evolve a new pattern of banking ethics under the framework of neo-classical exploitation of the poor masses

globally. (d) Microcredit system has an element of dependence on others for which positive results could never be obtained in the years ahead.

Abul Ashraf Noor Uttara, Dhaka-1230

"Narrow Squeak..."

Sir, I thank Mr Anowar Hussain Khan for enlightening us with the information provided in the DS of 14th August under the heading "Narrow Squeak..." Mr Khan, with due respect may I declare that all your remarks were extremely contradictory.

"It is not possible for any airline let alone Biman to keep ineidents hidden..." was one of your statements. Please, do not make us laugh. Have you forgot-

Be less aggressive Sir, With the recent bomb ings (not a new one) at US em bassies in Kenya and Tanzania and US missile attacks in retal

iation for the bombings on al-

leged terrorist targets in

Afghanistan, Pakistan and Su

arises: why the Muslim terror

ist groups attack US embassies. citizens etc? Simply because US never cherishes a friendly attitude towards the Muslims.

If we delve into the crisis of the world we will see that US is always behind most of the incidents. America always wants to dominate the world and frequently uses military power to achieve its goal. In this way they destroy world peace.

So, for the sake of peace we urge the US authority to be less aggressive to other countries.

Shahed Economics Deptt, DU Dhaka

Correct decision Sir, As a former student of

the Department of English, DU it is a matter of great happiness for me that my respected teachers dropped the essay "Outside the Hole" by Salman Rushdie that they had introduced.

Md Mahmudul Hasan 266, Elephant Road Dhaka-1205