Founder-Editor: Late S. M. Ali

Dhaka, Wednesday, September 30, 1998

Question of Timeliness

The government's conceptualisation of the things needed to be done at the humanitarian and agricultural rehabilitation levels in the wake of the floods leaves little to be desired. But it is the implementation of its ideas which now seems caught up in a teething phase. The challenge is enormous but need not be frustratingly daunting if approached with the same clarity of thought that had helped chalk out the alleviation strategy in the first place.

The government has come forward with the Vulnerable Group Feeding (VGF) cards to ensure free food supply to 40 lakh families over a period of four months regarded as the hardship spell in the cereal production cycle. If a household has four to five members each then nearly 2 crore people would be fed through the cards, roughly the number said to have been the hardest-hit by the floods. Now, how good a start this brilliant programme being enthusiastically supported by the donor community for the fact that it took care of their distribution worries, has actually got off to? Only 13 lakh cards could be distributed in August and September whereas the main bulk of 27 lakh more await distribution in the next two months. Complaints have been aired by the numerous non-recipients for whom obviously another few days without food could mean their doom. Timely distribution of the card being of the essence here formalities relating to filling out the prescribed form and identification of the vulnerable families at the union levels with NGO help must be completed on a double-quick, yet fool-proof basis. With such a wide sweep it will be a pity if a needy one were left

Then comes the agri-credit package of Tk 3200 crore which too lags behind in terms of disbursement as seems evident from the PM's directive to get on with the job immediately. It will be no use merely dangling it - the loan must reach the farmers on time. Basically three things need to be ensured: genuine farmers must get it; there should be no corruption, political or monetary; and share croppers must be helped to find guarantors. And, if cattle, seeds, power, fertiliser and irrigation water do not reach the tillers of the soil on time there will be nothing so special about the agri-rehab programme in the end.

Unreformable Antagonism

While opening a seminar on 'Civil Society and Democracy in Bangladesh' President Shahabuddin said on Monday it was 'Civil Society' which should watchdog the distributton of official flood relief. Why is this question of watch-dogging the operations? Because the opposition is crying interminably about malpractice in the government performance. Rather than going into the substance, if any, of the allegation the President thought it wise to call upon a third party - the nebulous and at best amorphous civil society - to follow and evaluate the relief operations. This is a measure of his frustration and how we sympathise with him.

Nobody, not the President to be precise, expected the parties AL and BNP to keep stepping into each other's discarded shoes. Strikes were bad said BNP in power. Now it is their only weapon to discomfit the party in power. The AL in opposition was never happy over the BNP government's relief operations. Now it is the BNP's turn to pay back in the same coin. Even the rhetorics changed mouths with very little alteration. What are they doing really? They are being untrue and irresponsible. It is a very bad sign that between them the major parties are forcing good sense to look for other repositories of hope than political.

In postwar France the artists and intellectuals of that great country started feeling that 'politics has grown too big to be left alone to the politicians' — to believe Simone du Buvoir in her great fiction, The Mandarines. Many NGOs have assiduously been trying to say the same and carve out a niche for them. The President, in his Monday speech, gave invaluable support to the idea by underscoring the need for civil society involvement. The good or bad of it is a matter for time to decide. But that the political parties have been performing most harmfully for them, for politics, for the nation — by their hell-bent unreformable antagonism there is no doubt.

This Is Not On

How much more toll the state-owned enterprises would take on the nation? The question must have reverberated in the mind of sentient people once again as y

esterday's morning press served a plateful of last Monday's fatal bloody clash between two groups of labour union at the Adamjee Jute Mill.

More than the immediate impact of the terrorism, loss of life and the disruption to production what disturbs one most is the absence of a positive will and a sense of urgency among the powers that be to sever links with this haemorraghic legacy and right the situation once for all. Neither the party in power nor the opposition is interested to even acknowledge the damage years of political patronage and string-pulling has done to trade union movement in the public sector. What we have in places like Adamjee Jute Mill is a reign of terrorists in the name of labour union leaders whose sole purpose has been to trade personal benefit for the muscle and brute force political parties stood in need of. The problem has no doubt struck roots. But we believe this legacy of confrontation and bloodshed in the public sector industry can be stamped out. What it really takes is the willingness to place the national interest ahead of party inter-

And the first step to end a long vitiated situation would be to start and objectively pursue criminal proceedings against those responsible for Monday's trouble. Regardless of their political affiliations, the recalcitrant have to be nabbed and punished according to the law of the land.

But the key to the solution of the problem is political will. We urge the ruling and the opposition parties to address the issue jointly. Delay will be suicidal.

Civil Society and Democracy

by Justice Shahabuddin Ahmed

Relief work has been going on, according to the government, satisfactorily, but according to the Opposition, perfunctorily; and instead of cooperation, they are blaming each other, as if the flood has been brought about by some conspiratorial means. It is here where civil society must step in and see that relief goods are properly distributed, sufferings of the people are mitigated and post-flood rehabilitation work is carried out properly.

tion, it will no longer be possible. All affairs of the state are to be run by a government, consisting of three organs: Executive, Legislature and Judiciary. But some functions of the state may be assigned to different administrative units to be run by local government. But affairs of the state and functions of the government, both national and local, are so wide that it is not possible for them to manage effectively all such matters. This necessarily requires involvement of the society in different forms and capacities which come under the popular designation - 'civil society'. The civil society is in fact, a "watch-dog" over the ac-

The Employment Bank

Must it Perform Like Yet

Another Bank?

by Dr Momtaz Uddin Ahmed

To ensure better utilization of the loans and its ultimate repayment, arrangements for

training along with credit might perhaps be an economically sound approach.

Besides ensuring better loan utilization and high returns from the investments,

training facilities will contribute to the process of development

of skills and human capital formation.

but also provides scope for en-

joying power and prestige. But

amassing wealth and power

must be changed in order to de-

velop a creative and productive

entrepreneurial society where

every one seeks new opportuni-

ties, takes risks, enters into

productive pursuits and con-

tributes to the process of devel-

opment of a vibrant economy

ment Bank has thus a very in-

volved responsibility towards

turning millions of young and

energetic but idle hands into

those of creative entrepreneurs

and work forces. This, indeed,

is a job which cannot be ex-

pected to be efficiently handled

by the bank if it operates on the

principles of an ordinary com-

mercial bank. It has to func-

tion as a development-oriented

bank organized to promote eco-

nomic growth and create em-

ployment opportunities. As a

specialized Bank, it must have a

fleet of personnel who are

trained and motivated to serve

a new clientele group having

creative potentials and ideas

but without the ability to pro-

vide collateral or mortgage

against loans. Needless to point

out, our banking system has not

yet been able to reorient their

mode of functioning inherited

from the colonial days and thus

failed to serve the development

needs of a contemporary soci-

ety. Under the financial sector

reform programmes, many of

the rules and regulations have

changed and have been modi-

fied but have not been properly

implemented. An important

reason, perhaps, is that we have

reformed the rules but not those

who are responsible for imple-

menting them. Yet another

grim reminder is that the

"BIKALOP", the self-employ-

ment generating project for the

students introduced by the Son-

ali Bank in the 1980s, as a

mixed success due to inefficient

objectives, rules and norms of

operation of the Employment

Bank are yet to be known, the

media reports give the impres

While full details about the

management.

The newly created Employ-

and a modern society.

such age-old colonial process of

URS is a democratic

country known as the

People's Republic of

Bangladesh, and in our Consti-

tution, Democracy has been de-

clared to be one of the State

Principles. The Constitution

further provides for effective

participation by the people

through their elected represen-

tatives in administration at all

levels. But inspite of these pro-

visions and the fact that Inde-

pendent Bangladesh is the re-

sult of a long movement for

democratic rights, half of our

period of independence has

passed under unconstitutional

and autocratic rules. In the

well-known Judgment of the

Supreme Court in the Eighth

Amendment case democracy

has been held to be one of the

basic structures of the Constitu-

tion, and that these basic

structures are beyond the ambit

of amendment of the Constitu-

tion under Article 142. This

means, if democracy is sought

to be replaced by any other form

of government, say a monar-

chy, by amending the Constitu-

HE formal inauguration

22nd September 1998 marks a

timely step in the right direc-

tion towards reducing unem-

ployment among the country's

educated youth. Lack of em-

ployment opportunities being

the proximate cause of poverty,

any effort at creating produc-

tive employment opportunities

would be supportive of the gov-

ernment's overall strategy of

setting up a bank for giving

loans to the educated youth to

generate self-employment op-

portunities has much more

wider socio-economic implica-

tions than being equated with a

stereotype poverty reducing

cate, the Bank will provide

loans not just to any unem-

ployed educated youth, it will do

so on a priority basis (under an

excess demand and supply

shortage situation for such

loans) to those who demon-

strate willingness to stand on

their own feet and become self-

reliant. Naturally, these young

potential borrowers must have

the aptitude for taking initia-

tives and risks as profit-seek-

ing entrepreneurs. They should,

presumably, also possess some

training and/or skills which

are essential for conceiving as

well as undertaking a business

venture. If this is the case, the

Employment Bank will per-

form a very important function

of developing a seed-bed of

young entrepreneurship in

Bangladesh. Besides creating

employment and income earn-

ing opportunities for the young

work force this will help also in

creating an enterprising society

and a business culture in the

long-run, which are indispens-

able prerequisites for the de-

velopment of a dynamic private

enterprise sector. In a typical

underdeveloped society, it is

the white-collar jobs, especially

in the public sector, which are

the dreams and aspirations of

the educated youth. Because, ca-

reer building along these lines

provides not only safe and easy

income earning opportunities

As the media reports indi-

measure.

poverty alleviation. However,

of the Employment Bank

by the Prime Minister on

tivities of the public func-

tionaries.

A civil society represents the ordinary members of a society. They are either organised professional groups or unorganised people, such as the rural poor. The vast majority of the population, irrespective of their class, religion, ethnicity and culture, represents the civil society of a country. A civil society aims at creating a society in which its members can live in peace, honour and dignity free from fear of any kind. It cooperates with the state functionaries for promoting democracy in its truest term. A civil society is neither pro-government, nor anti-government; it

sion that the Bank will encour

age mainly the promotion of

small-scale agro-based busi-

nesses and trades. I would urge

that in selecting and promoting

the types of activities the Bank

should avoid duplication of ef-

forts towards promotion of

non-farm activities that are be-

ing promoted by GB, BRAC and

many other NGOs, because in

that case saturating market

demand might be a constraint

It might perhaps be more pru-

dent if the Bank's investments

are diversified into new areas

within the agro-processing in-

dustries which have better

quires some more thinking in

this connection is the average

loan size. While loans up to Tk

50,000 will be granted without

any guarantor, this seems to

inadequate to start any modern

micro-enterprise or the techno-

logically "spin-off" firms such

as buying and selling of micro

computers which is mentioned

as one of the Bank's preferred

area of micro-enterprise pro-

motion. To ensure better uti-

lization of the loans and its ul-

timate repayment, arrange-

ments for training along with

credit might perhaps be an eco-

nomically sound approach. Be-

sides ensuring better loan uti-

lization and high returns from

the investments, training facil-

ities will contribute to the pro-

cess of development of skills

nees, the authorities should

maintain a proper gender bal-

ance. Efforts at women enter-

preneurship development, espe-

cially in industries still re-

mains far too inadequate in

Bangladesh. Another impor-

tant area where the Bank au-

thorities must be especially

vigilant is that unlike in the

ordinary commercial banks

the principle of enterprise via-

bility must be strictly adhered

to in sanctioning loans to pre-

vent further spread of indus-

menace of default culture.

trial sickness and eradicate the

The writer is Professor of

Economics. Dhaka University.

Finally, in selecting the loa-

and human capital formation.

A relevant issue that re

market prospects.

is in fact a pro-people entity. In

recent years the concept of civil society has gained wide currency in the developing countries including Bangladesh Since 1980s increasing attention has been paid to the role of citizen participation, civil society and political culture for strengthening the democratic process. A civil society may cluding several Martial Law aucome to the fore in combating poverty and promoting development in various fields. According to the UNDP "Civil so-

ciety is an integral part of, and a major actor in, the new governance which the UNDP seeks to promote, especially at the national level". Civil society functions as a healthy and vibrant component of the whole governance process. A strong and active civil society may foster the three elements essential for democracy - accountability. participation and continuing

I shall now touch on some of

the fields in which civil society can help the establishment of good governance through democratic process. This year's flood which continued for over two months, has caused damage to life and property, particularly to standing crops on an unprecedented scale. Relief work, has been going on, according to the government, satisfactorily, but according to the Opposition, perfunctorily; and instead of cooperation, they are blaming each other, as if the flood has been brought about by some conspiratorial means. It is here where civil society must step in and see that relief goods are properly distributed, sufferings of the people are mitigated and post-flood rehabilitation work is carried out properly. On some previous occasions, I emphasised the role of civil society in correcting some of the grave social ills, such as violence in educational institutions, in organising general condemnation against bank defaulters who are ruining the national economy and helping the public authorities in maintaining law and or der in social life

History of our struggle for independence from the foreign rule and thereafter, for full au-

tonomy of the then East Pakistan, now Bangladesh, shows that people spontaneously par-tieipated therein and achieved the desired result. It is the democratic movement of the people including all sections like the students, labour force, intellectuals, which topped the unconstitutional regimes in-

thorities. This shows that our people got the will to see a democratic polity and that they do not tolerate any anti-democratic authority in whichever colour or shape it appears. But it is an irony that we do not find democratic behaviour from our democratically elected leadership. Look at the debates in Parliament and you find exchange of abuses mainly over some events of the long past. One thing is, however, common to all i. e. nobody learns from history. In such circumstances, it is all the more necessary that the civil society should become active and play its role assigned by history. The author is the President

of Bangladesh.

Buchwald's COLUMN

First In, Last Out

HERE is a rule that every vacationer wants to be the last person to discover a new place and doesn't want anyone to L come after him. Once ensconced, summer visitors are full of resentment for newcomers who they suspect will never appreciate the place.

What is not talked about is that people's pets also do not like newcomers. You see it every day when dogs bark at new canine arrivals getting off planes at the airport. It is said the dogs who came first refer to them as "nouveaux bitches."

Charlie, a Wheaton terrier, came to our island in 1997. He found it quite delightful and was happy when his owners decided to come back this year. When he returned, he felt accepted by the dogs he met last year, and he considered himself a veteran of the place. Then, on Main Street, Charlie spied a French poodle riding in the back of a station wagon filled with suitcases and children. When they stopped to ask directions of Joel. his owner. Charlie knew immediately that they were firsttimers and he started to growl. The poodle growled back and tried to get out of the wagon to have a go at Charlie. Charlie's owner pulled him away and scolded him.

"You can't get mad at dogs just because they came to this heavenly place after we did. You can get mad at new people, but not dogs.

Charlie seemed upset. Walking down by the dock he saw five or six dogs arriving on the ferry. It was more than he could bear. His owner said, "I know what you're thinking Charlie, but these dogs are entitled to vacations too. Perhaps they will behave better than they look."

You could tell Charlie's vacation was spoiled. The island can hold just so many dogs, and he had been assured that he would be the last one permitted to run on the beach.

I saw Charlie at his house the other day. He was stretched out on the porch and didn't seem to want to move. "What's wrong?" I asked Joel.

The reply was. "He hasn't moved all summer. He feels the island is ruined and the nouveaux bitches have taken over. Now everyone in the family is having a lousy vacation." By arrangement with Los Angeles Times Syndicate and UNB.

OPINION

Politicians vs Professionals

Alif Zabr

How our politicians behave with the professionals?

How is the relationship changing with every regime. since, say, 1947, when India was partitioned, and since 1971, when Bangladesh was

It has to be kept in mind that artificial politicians were created by vested regimes to suit their own ends, which occured more than once in contemporary history, as we witnessed several autocratic regimes come and go, and left the lingering malaise and adverse implications, leaving the societies fol-

lowing to cope with the debris. The nation had to pay for such extravaganza and misuse of energy, time, and power, for intended or unintended corrections, always proclaimed initially as motivated by magnanimous benevolence, which later turned out to be manifestations of ignoble fissiparous dissipa-

Revolutions are neither new nor novel. Negative human ingenuity is churned up and imposed upon the people in emerging regimes in the different continents. Asia. Africa. Latin America are passing through

phases of emancipation; and, lately, it has been noticed in Central and Eastern Europe, and in the CIS region, where the foreign invaders left their mark for centuries (the Turks; and the Moors in Southern Europe, the traps of socialism in the CIS, and the Vikings in Great Britain in the earlier centuries Looking further back, the spread of Aryan culture played its role in renaissance or relapse (viz Hitler).

Coming back to the question posed, the first confrontation noticed is between the itinerant regime and the entrenched bureaucracy. Soon it becomes apparent that the latter is difficult to shake or shake up. After the wooing period is over, the professionals outside this newly developed coterie find themselves at the receiving end; and their professional pride is hurt. The wound had to be carried, as it was done by their predecessors. This game is still continuing in the Third World, now more refined, after gaining insight from the misadventures. What was ignored is left as a festering sore in the society. Some tried antibiotics; with disas-

Thus a vicious circle is created: and, a any one knows, it is very difficult to get out of a vicious cycle; without upsetting more carts than one. The liabilities and the assets may sometimes be ignored, but the tilt of the balance of power is never in doubt.

The non-professionals start infiltrating the professional domains. There are changes, but these are merely replacements directed by autocratic seats of power under the guise of people's representation. Nepotism takes on the enhanced image of pseudo-professionalism. As the readers themselves can cite many examples, this exercise is aborted here.

What about the future. Theoretically it is the question of building up the escape velocity to get away tangentially from the vicious circle, as a spacecraft gets away from the earth's gravitational force. How to generate or procure this force is a part of the logistics of any revolution; past, present, or future.

The above was an exercise in mental escapism. The actual situation is much more complex than sketched above.

A hazard to health

Sir. Only one single road connects the Airport Road to Banani, Gulshan and Baridhara, over only one bridge across the Gulshan lake. How can a population so big, of this area do with one single bridge and road. For this reason only, people have to spent few miserable hours everyday inside their vehicles, wasting not only precious time and energy but also inhaling toxic fumes from innumerable vehicles going at a snail's pace. Not much use putting masks on your faces because carbon monoxide is a gas and it can penetrate any mask which allows oxygen to enter

for breathing. Added to that it binds with haemoglobin in the blood more Traffic jams pose real hazard to health, especially for children

and pregnant women. strongly than oxygen and has very harmful effects on brain. heart etc., because it prevents haemoglobin from carrying oxygen to different tissues of the body. So traffic jams pose real hazard to health, especially for children and pregnant women. CO if absorbed by a pregnant lady is likely to have sub-lethal harmful effects on the health of the foetus. Therefore one or two more bridges should be constructed across Gulshan and Baridhara lakes to ease the traffic, along with roads parallel to the Kamal Ataturk road. Also traffic congestion must be decreased in every part of the city so that we don't all die slowly by this silent and invisible killer. The two-stroke engines are still running gleefully on our roads, polluting our air endlessly. though so much has been written on it; but who cares? Just our bad luck that nobody is bothered for the health of the

citizens, in this country of ours. Whereas the country which manufactures and exports these to us, doesn't allow these in

their own cities! There these are only used outside the cities. How much they care for their citizens health is really laudable and enviable! Whereas we are being made sick, thanks to the importers and others responsible. Only couple of days back we witnessed a truck load of brand new imported vehicles of this kind, the main polluters and therefore the killers. So what's the use crying yourself

hoarse! Can't they at least fix a gadget to convert carbon monoxide to less harmful gases, as is done to all vehicles in developed countries, and save us from this premature death!

Dr Sabrina Rashid. Dhaka Cantonment, Dhaka.

A good concept

Sir. The joint meeting of 'F-BCCI' and 'BDR' is a good concept to pinpoint government about the country's economy. seriously affected by smuggling and corruption.

But the meeting has missed the opportunity to heighten the root of all evils. The increase in smuggling and corruption are due to wrong policy of import and export, the rate of customs duties, the exorbitant tariff values and the frequent change

Sadek M Salam 10/A, Dhanmondi, Dhaka.

Charity begins at home

Sir, This year's flood is reported to be the worst of the century which has created wide spread havoc throughout the country.

What the belated appeal for international help will bring to mitigate the sufferings of the distressed people is yet to be seen. But at home the trend to redress sufferings of the distressed is quiet praiseworthy.

Different organisations and individuals are contributing generously to the Prime Minister's Relief and Welfare Fund for the

victims. In the long list of donor, Proshika, a local NGO has created a unique example of generosity by contributing a hand some amount of Tk. 50 crores in cash to the PM's Relief Fund. take the opportunity to extend my sincere thanks and gratitude to the management of this organisation.

Would it be too much to expect our big industrialists to follow the suit?

Tasiruddin Ahmed 41, Kallyanpur Dhaka-1207.

"Civil servants can do anything"

Sir. I refer to the letter under

the heading "Civil Servants can do anything" appearing in the DS, on the 19th Sept. '98. It was about a civil servant of the republic calling a minister "a liar". We cannot comment on the merits of the case unless we know the details. If a civil servant calls anyone "a liar", the aggrieved person may he be a minister or any other citizen, has the right to challenge the same in the court of law by filing a defamation suit against the person concerned. Because it is a matter between a minister and a civil servant, therefore it is a matter of public importance and hence it should not go unchallenged. It should be proved beyond any doubt whether the minister had in fact lied.

Let us look at the USA. The president of the most powerful nation of the world is being torn as under for telling a lie. We have a lot to learn from the present episode of the White

Another Citizen Dhaka

***************************** Discipline Must Prevail on JU Campus

trous results.

I have been following the reports on recent events at Jahangirnagar University in The Daily Star with interest. It is gratifying to see that in this difficult time of devastating flood and its aftermath DS has given top priority also to the happenings at a university campus, as it deserves. During the last few weeks I had the opportunity to talk to a number of ex-and incumbent Provosts (both of male and female student halls) and house tutors and also to a cross-section of students. What has emerged from my talks are the following:

a) There is a profound indifference on the part of the University administration, especially on the part of the Hall administrations, towards the state of affairs;

b) There is an insatiable desire and demand by the students to enjoy Western type freedom and liberty without being prepared to shoulder the responsibilities that go with it and without having or attaining the inner moral strength and courage to resist the temptations for the undesirables:

c) Staying in Halls is not compulsory (although it is compulsory to register with a Hall to validate the admission in the University); eating in Halls is not compulsory either and the coming in and going out of the Halls are not regulated by any rules and regulations (although, I am certain there must be some rules). Jahangirnagar University is a residential university and ironically the university transports commute students from campus to Dhaka and back regularly at a cost of about a crore Taka an-

About the indifference of the

A Concerned Citizen administration: A common complain of the hall administration is that the students do not listen to the Provosts and house tutors. Even there were occasions when the female students were irregular or stayed out overnight without informing the hall authorities. When the Provost of the hall sent for the student concerned and she refused to see the Provost, the poor provost had to ignore it. This is simply because it so happened, once in the past, some guardians/parents were called by the University authorities to report to them about the irregular/inappropriate be-

wards/children, and one of the guardians thought that it was outrageous on the part of the University to try to restrict the freedom of movement of his adult (in his opinion) daughter. There is a fear that the students may raise slogans and bring out processions against a Provost who is trying to bring in some discipline in the chaotic student

All these are very real, but the question is: should the University as well as the hall administrations give up or they try to implement whatever rules and regulations they have and also try to improve the situation by introducing new laws. if necessary? In our opinion the parents and legal guardians who think like the one mentioned earlier should be asked by authorities to withdraw their daughters/wards from the University. University is not a place to enjoy freedom without

any responsibility. If the university authorities do not have necessary tools then they should endeavour to possess them through Senate or Syndicate whichever is the ap-

propriate body for it. The authorities must ensure that in a crisis situation or in the case of a serious indiscipline by the students they should be able to notify the parents or legal guardians, not the so-called local guardians (who are usually described as cousins or distant cousins and are usually pretenders). In the case of female students it should be made binding that they will be permitted to leave the campus and stay out of campus only on the strength of the written permission or personal presence of the parents or legal guardians.

At present the Provosts and the house tutors live in quarters far away from the Halls and some house tutors even live in Dhaka. This practice should discontinue. The residential quarters of Provosts and house tutors and wardens must be located adjacent to the halls to make the hall administration more responsive to the need of the time.

The stay and eating in the halls must be made compulsory. The coming in and going out from the halls must be strictly regulated. The present system of allowing students to organize mess to prepare their own foods should discontinue because it introduces many dubious elements in the hall premises which obviously compromise the security and safety of the students and it also makes the tasks of the hall administration unnecessarily dif-

It must be borne in mind that it is a residential university and at that primarily an undergraduate university with a very few post graduate students and then most of this tiny group of postgraduate students are non-resident.