Dhaka, Saturday, November 7, 1998

Accountability Initiative

If one were to pore over all shreds of banking and government department papers beans will spill about many a financial irregularity swept under the carpet for long. Those who know they did it must have thanked their stars for the noninitiation of any serious investigation into their past financial conduct which inevitably would have sent skeletons in the cupboard dropping like a hailstorm. If we had applied the western or even perhaps regional standards of accounting in the pursuit of suspicions or allegations of corruption against functionaries of government, autonomous or semi-autonomous organisations much of what has so far passed as 'financial mess' would come out as scam of the present-day financial world infamy.

Nevertheless, we are heartened by the beginning of a process of accountability marked here by a report that the Comptroller and Auditor General of Bangladesh M Hafizuddin Khan has lately submitted to President Shahabuddin Ahmed. It is revelatory of serious financial wrong-doing on three levels: misappropriation of funds by officials of three public sector banks; irregularities involving Tk 752 crore in purchase and other transactions by Food Department, T&T Board, Bangladesh Biman and Bangladesh Railway; and disbursement of Tk 563 crore in bad debt by four NCBs. We are particularly cheered by the fact that the President's public relations outfit has circulated the news adding that steps are underway to have the report placed before the Jatiya Sangsad. What has been uncovered is a tip of the iceberg, but given the scale of it one wonders what might be the size of the iceberg!

The Comptroller and Auditor General of Bangladesh (CAGB) has been accorded a statutory or constitutional position for ensuring transparency and accountability in financial matters as an integral part of government by collective responsibility which is answerable to the public through the parliament. We, therefore, have the Public Accounts Committee and the Public Undertakings Committee of the Jatiya Sangsad. We find it preposterous that the CAGB's queries with the ministries and departments having to do with the financial irregularities were not responded to by the latter. We hear that sometimes, even the relevant parliamentary committee's references to the ministries are not acted upon by them on time.

We suggest the President have a word with the Prime Minister to ensure that the system of accountability which is now on paper really gets to work.

Making Traffic Move

Parts of Dhaka are breathing again. The city's main thoroughfares, particularly those around major shopping areas such as New Market, Nilkhet, Elephant Road etc., have long been subjected to the most horrendous kind of traffic jams These jams were not necessarily caused by too much traffic. Rather, occupation of sidewalks by vendors, illegal parking at entry and exit points and some blatant violation of traffic rules by public transport vehicles were the main culprits. But in a number of areas where personnel of the Bangladesh Rifles have recently been deployed to manage the traffic, there has been a dramatic improvement. Eviction of vendors and strict application of traffic rules have done wonders. But this is only the beginning, not the end of the story.

For starters, Riflesmen cannot be expected to manage traffic forever. This remains a job for the traffic department of the Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP), despite recent induction of armed forces personnel. But this exercise has conclusively demonstrated that, when traffic laws are enforced without discrimination, then road users are more likely to abide by the rules. In traffic management — as in all other spheres of civic life — a willingness to abide by rules is what ultimately ensures the smooth functioning of a system. But such willingness can only be fostered when road users see strict implementation of rules. The success of current efforts can, therefore, be attributed to strict policing and some common sense adjustment to channel traffic flow.

This exercise has pointed to the course future events must take. The days when traffic rules were violated under the noses of the police should now be over. But the DMP also needs adequate trained manpower to ensure effective policing at all points. The DMP's traffic department is undoubtedly under-manned, both in terms of constables and officers. Their level of training also leaves a lot to be desired. These short-comings need to be overcome in a short space of time if we are to extend the limited improvement in some parts to the whole city, and then sustain it.

Why Should Minoti Die?

Seven women workers were breaking bricks on a construction site at Munshikhola, Demra on Wednesday. Suddenly overhead electric wires snapped from a nearby pole and Minoti Rani was electrocuted instantly. Six other workers received grievous electric shock.

Why should Minoti Rani die? Why should her fellow workers be debilitated? Their occupational hazard, if any, did not include electrocution. Who was at fault that Minoti died and the rest are facing uncertainty of life and living? Not they.

Minoti is the latest of the sacrificial animals offered to the utter lack of maintenance by electricity authorities. Will Minoti's death be compensated and somebody punished for causing it to her? Why not? Public Interest Litigation has a very apt case here. Indeed, ignoring it as these generally are, will be neglect bordering on the criminal. The Human Rights organisations must not let such cases by.

Perhaps, this fatal case of live overhead wire snapping has something to do with PDB's systems loss. The irregular and unauthorised connections generally use non-standard poles and wires. PDB owes it to itself to investigate Minoti's death and publish its findings in the national press.

Death like Minoti's must be treated with seriousness by the government and the society otherwise this wouldn't be a civilised polity. Law and justice will be dangerously undermined if such deaths are not proceeded against and wholly prevented in the long run. Whitman felt every death diminished him. Every avoidable death in Bangladesh diminishes this new state and its ancient people.

Village Phones and Poor Men's "Hallo"

What's the harm if taking some steps turn the table in favour of the poor we shed tears for? GB has set the tone, why should GoB not step in now? Let us think something big. Telephones are not consumer goods but produce goods - an important input to raise productivity, efficiency and equity.

HE North-South Centre for Development Research of the University of Bonn (Germany) sponsored a research topic titled: "Village Phone and the Poor: Socio-economic Impact of Grameen Bank's Communication Information in Selected Villages of Bangladesh." The researchers (myself and Rasheda Akhter of JU) chose to chase this 'virgin' area of research and to that effect, 50 village phone (VP) owners and 350 users of services from 50 villages in and around Dhaka were selected for investigation. Mentionably, the study was guided by Joachim von Braun - an ace economist of Germany and the Director of

the sponsoring centre.
Two phoney ideas centre around phones, especially, in popular discussions. First, telephones are consumer goods and second, the poor segment of the society barely benefit from such services. Our preliminary findings tend to reject both of these observations. To establish the nexus between phones and poverty, we segmented the buyer of VP services into three categories viz - Extreme Poor, Moderate Poor and Non-poor. The categorization followed the conventional wisdom of calculating the cost calorie intake per person/day, making 30 per cent allowance for non-food items and then relate per capita income of households. Again, the effects of VPs pertain to both economic and social sce-

nario at three levels: owner, household and village. About one-third of the total calls outgoing from a VP are made by the poor people in sample villages (about 1500 phone calls are made through VPs per week). The poor - like the non-poor — appear to use phone services for reasons like economic, family/personal, business, health, remittances etc. Interestingly, the poor segments seem to spend one-third of their calls on account of collecting market information. For example, they seek information on market prices of commodities, job opportunities

and land price. The share of the

poor on this account compares with 15 per cent of the calls made by the non-poor. Another important reason for which poor callers utilise the service is health related which account for 17 per cent of their total calls compared to 10 per cent

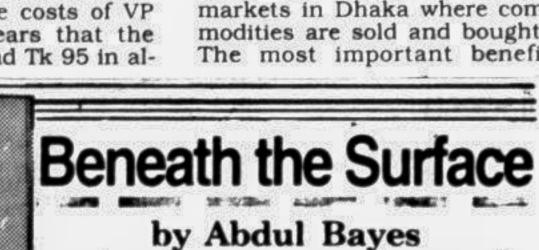
made by the non-poor. With the access to VPs, the consumers surplus (CS) to differed classes stand very high. The CS has been estimated by taking into considerations factors like (a) hours taken in alternative methods; (b) transport costs in alternative methods, and (c) opportunity costs of physical mobility. The total costs in alternative methods, thus worked out, has been deducted from the costs of VP services. It appears that the poor tend to spend Tk 95 in al-

be preferable to access to any other option available to a GB member. Why?

Let us call other options as traditional. The non-traditional mobile phone injects some non-pecuniary social benefits which traditional activities do not let, per unit, to

Let us take some examples to justify what we have said so far. The GB member's frontier of knowledge is now wider than

before because of the phone she owns. She knows the names of many foreign countries by virtue of phone calls being made by her villagers outside the country. She also gets to know the names of various markets in Dhaka where commodities are sold and bought. The most important benefit



ternative methods and Tk 17 in VPs thus reaping home a surplus of Tk 78. The non-poor also bag home surplus but of Tk 51 which is substantially lower

As noted earlier, a GB member sells the services of this latest technology. The average net income comes out to be around Tk 300/week. The income from phone services account for a respectable — about one-fourth amount of the total income of the household. An economist would like to know whether the alternative income forgone (say, from livestock or poultry) is higher or lower since the costs and benefits should take into account the alternatives forgone. We attempted to build an argument around both economic and social development. Given an equal amount of investment on phones (Tk 18000) as well as on say, two bullocks or cows, and given the equal rate of return on capital, access

to phones through credit should

seems to be that her own bari (cluster of houses) has come to be known as phone bari in the village. The ownership of the phone brought her name and fame and even village elite come to her house to make phone calls. Among these who come to buy her phone services are those who used to (a) lend her money once upon at time: (b) help her maintain family expenses; (c) hire her as maid. The GB owner — a poor woman by any standard of measurement — finds the rich invite her to marriage ceremony these

Have mobile phones made them more mobile? This is an important question thrown mostly by the critics. The answer is YES. First, at village level, off and on, she has to carry the messages to the households concerned. In the absence of her husband, son or daughter, she has to come out of the house, calculate minutes and get the bill. On the other

hand, the woman does not have to wait for husband's permission to go outside the village or even to Dhaka town. The mobile phone has allowed her to contact from anywhere she stays. That also removes many family irritants that arise from her mobility. The landmark with VPs is

that they help flow symmetric information. The services available tend to curb the carnage that the poor seller would face in the absence of symmetric information or conversely, in the presence of middlemen who mainly live on asymmetric information. With same endowments of resources one may get poorer and the other richer just on account of information hazard. Few months back, there was a rumour that the country faces shortage of salt and hence the price could rise very high. A small grocer of a village with VP could immediately know that it was a rumor and hence disposed off quickly the stock. The other grocer from a village banked on the rumour, built stocks to reap a good harvest. Unfortunately the harvest was lost and the grocer with incorrect information went broke. These are same of the virtues

of VPs. A government that cares

for the welfare of the poor

should see that the poor have

got access to information like the rich have; roads, electricity and telecommunication — all infrastructure facilities — are friendly to the poor. Access to better infrastructure is like access to basic education: the more it is, the more is development. How to replete villages with such infrastructure should be the cornerstone of thoughts of our policy-makers. The idea might need corporatization of BTTB, deregulation of telecommunication services and so forth. What's the harm if these steps turn the table in favour of the poor we shed tears for? GB has set the tone, why should GoB not step in time? Let us think something big. Telephones are not consumer goods but producer goods — an impor tant input to raise productivity,

efficiency and equity. GOVERNANCE AND GOVERNMENT

Change and Continuity in Italian Politics tics of the country, If is unable

HEN an incoming head of government stands In the Parliament and gives a tribute to his predecessor, and also promises to continue with the policies laid out by his ousted counterpart because it is in the interest of the country, we are definitely not talking about any politician or any system of government close to home.

The context is most likely a civilized western democracy! In fact this is what happened in Italy last week. Soon after his swearing in, D'Alema, the recently elected Italian premier and head of the new centre-left government, in a speech to the chamber of deputies spoke glowingly about former premier Prodi who was forced to resign after narrowly losing a confidence vote on the issue of the Budget. "In the last few days, the country has lived through difficult days. The crisis that led to Romano Prodi's resignation brusquely interrupted the activity of a government that worked well in the interest of Italy". To which Prodi and D'Alema were both greeted with thundering applause!

Furthermore, while spelling out his new coalition's policies, the new Prime Minister said, "The imperative of this government will be not to interrupt improvements being made to public finances and the economic and financial strategy laid out by Romano Prodi and which allowed us to join the European Monetary Union." This, surely is a civilised and mature democratic country, where government is merely a political tool to be shaped and used to further the goals and larger interests of the country, and not for the achievement of personal and partisan power and egotism which is the unfortunate hallmark of the politics of Bangladesh. The country of Machiavelli and of city states has learnt to see the bigger picture, while a nation of idealistic Bengalis who came into being out of a unified vision is now myopic about its goals of national life, and is being torn apart by partisan politics.

no less rich than that of the Italians, but how civilised we continue to become, is a matter. of how deeply we cultivate the elements of governance and incorporate them into every aspect of our lives, not how we play the game of governments. We can learn much by observing how other democracies work, how other governments conduct themselves without fraying the fabric of society. In Italy, last week as equally in the past, the transition from one government to another was smooth. and even during the hiatus between the lapse of one 'governo' and the formation of another, Italy operated without a government at all, with no apparent hitch. It is an admirable feature of this country that absence of government does not mean absence of governance.

The civil society, the bureaucracy, the public institutions and administrations all function like well oiled machinery. while the machinations of the oily world of politics run their own course! It is a remarkable aspect of the curious animal which is the contemporary Italian government, that although it is highly mercurial and unstable in its physical shape and composition, it yet spawns no real instability in the environment it operates in.

Since the Second World War, Italy has seen 56 governments come and go, an average of less than one per year, with some tripping on the heels of one another, and yet Italy itself has never quite lost its footing and slipped into any social or political calamity. The political atmosphere may seem chaotic, at least to the by-stander, but it does not actually breed chaos. The bureaucracy functions, the public services run smoothly, the people lead an unaffected and calm existence.

When one glances over the cast of hundreds, which are the myriad political parties thronging the political stage of Italy, it is mind-boggling to think how the political plot is kept from thickening to an absolute standstill! Consider the broad spectrum of political beliefs and affiliations that range from the extreme fascists to leftists, Marxists, moderate Marxists, Communists, reformed Communists, Socialists, Democratic Socialists. rightists, Christian Democrats by other names, centrists, right of centre, left of centre, republicans, federalists, even secessionists, and also the greens, then back to the reds!

Given this colourful background, one can appreciate the achievement of stitching together a patchwork coalition that miraculously hangs together, even if it is for a short time. A look at the present coalition proves that Italian politics certainly makes for strange bedfellows. And one admires the sturdiness of the bed that accommodates them

of D'Alema's government suggests that Italian politicians are beginning to see beyond the traditional divisions of left and right in a more mature quest for stability and consensus. Ironically, these are words that are alien to Bangladeshi politicians who are not really as, or nearly as polarized in their beliefs as here in Italy.

One thing cannot be denied that leading such a heterogeneous group will not be an easy task. But this sort of coalition is a temporary system and proposed constitutional and electoral reforms are already under examination, whose aims are to change a system that has seen 50 years of across the board proportional representation, that encourages the existence of too many small parties which destabilize the Italian political scenario.

The 1993 referendum gave the green signal to a singleround majority vote, as in the UK. The Italian version is a combination of direct election of 75 per cent of members and senators, with the other 25 per cent chosen proportionally. It was the special objective of former premier Prodi, that Italy should be eased out of its arcane electoral mold and should adopt a system that encourages a two-party system which would prolong the duration of a government's tenure. and help root out Italy's "partyocracy" evil as well as that of corruption. One of D'Alema's policy goals too, is to get a bipartisan agreement on

OSTSCRIPT

Neeman A Sobhan

all, and though it creaks, one also notices that it does not actually collapse, enough to throw the entire society into convulsions! The new coalition government of D'Alema is an alliance that broadly includes his own party, the Democratic Party of the Left (PDS) which is the successor to the Communist Party of Italy; the Moderate Marxists; the centre-right Democratic Union for the Republic (UDR) which was formed out of the wreckage of the former Christian Democrats that dominated Italian politics till the '90s when it fell apart due to corruption scandals, about which more later; the Greens.

and some independents. In fact, the following would give one an idea of the breadth and reach of the present political medley: when the new PM unveiled his 27-member cabinet, it included several former foes, 3 former premiers who have retained their earlier posts (Lamberto Dini, the foreign minister; Ciampi, the treasury minister, and Amato, the institutional reform minister) 6 women and the incumbent Mayor of Naples as Labour minister, all of whom comprise a broad assortment of Social Democrats, former Communists, hard-line Marxists, religious Catholics, Greens and centre-right Christian Dem-

It is also interesting to note that the coalition enjoys a parliamentary majority thanks to the inclusion of the centre-right UDR led by Cossiga, a former president who used to be the bete noir of D'Alema's party. And this tiny group of 31 members holds four cabinet posts of which two are the key ministries of Defense and Post and Telegraph. This kind of line-up

ocrats!

electoral reform. The heartening thing about the new government is that, in spite of such a transformation of its character, the policies it has set out to pursue will not diverge much from the mandate of the earlier one, thereby providing the reassurance of continuity of aims which must substitute for the temporal security that an uninterrupted term of office normally provides other forms of government. That the Italian system has been able to provide statesmen who see the importance of crafting bridges of con sensus and compromise-however tentative and tenuous, enabling them to join the gaps between governments and also to span the ideological gulf, is a tribute to their evolving maturity and national responsibility, and proof of the system's

viability and resilience. There is a lesson here for our Bangladeshi counterparts. Yet, like any other politically conscious nation, the Italians are brutally self-critical, and denigrate themselves as being only a bunch of squabbling 'partyocrats', politicians who are petty and corrupt. But what they, perhaps modestly, refuse to see is that the fact that their system survives both these politicians and the chameleonlike nature of their governments in power, underscores the strength of their social and political institutions that allow so many ups and downs without causing any major disruptions. And, although it is true that there is corruption in the Italian government, and inefficiency in the electoral system which creates the instability in the running of its governments.

the bottom line is that, in spite

of all that is askew in the poli-

to destroy all that is right in the life of the nation. And this strength is derived from a sound and educated society nurtured on good civic governance. that can override and compensate for the weakness and instability of its government. It also gives the society the

tenacity to overcome, slowly, its many problems of economic disparity, unemployment and downright poverty, which exist in spite of Italy's considerable development. As for corruption, today, no one can be so naive as to need to be reminded that like prostitution, corruption will always exist in any society; and that it is not the absence of corruption which is a true index of a civilised society, but the existence of a process for fighting this evil effectively that marks it as such. The first principle of good governance, and the proof of a mature and healthy society, is the rule of law.

That Italy, in spite of its corruption, more than qualifies to being just such a developed and civilised society has been amply demonstrated by the well known process of cleansing and anti-corruption crusade mounted by the judge Di Pietro. called the 'Mani Puliti' or 'Clean hands' enquiry that flushed out many corrupt officers and bureaucrats from the government. Perhaps in no other nation have so many high-ranking officials, cabinet ministers and prime ministers fallen at the altar of accountability. Yet it is not the fact that so many government officers were found to be corrupt which is the surprising thing — after all, one can name many countries, ours included where one can count on one's fingers the incorruptible - but that so many were able to be brought to account, which proves the existence of a process of social justice. In Italy, the umbilical cord tying the nation to governance and to civic and moral values is obviously still strong. That is something to be proud of. And the lack of that is something that we in Bangladesh must mourn, in every facet of our

That change in government necessarily means disruption is being proven wrong in Italy. While in Bangladesh, neither change of government, nor the continued tenure of a party in power necessarily assures the perpetuation of what is positive for the country; most times it means that the people get the same bad wine in a different bottle: the same hurtful politics of opposition by hartals, the same regressive policies of retributive justice and vindictiveness, and the same indiscriminate rape of the land - in every sense of the word. In a developed democracy where governance is deeply rooted. change and continuity in the political life can complement each other and harmonise together to achieve the greater good of a nation, as in Italy.

Here, where the people and their representatives in power 'have articulated a common picture of national identity and future prosperity, and who have a unified vision of where they want to see themselves in a greater Europe, it is a blessing when though governments change, the dreams and goals still remain the same. Today, in D'Alema's Italy, the French saying, "Plus ca change, plus ca reste la meme", would be more appropriate uttered in Italian, with a sigh of relief!

November 7, 1975

Little do We Know about the Killing of Freedom Fighters

by Ehtesham Huda

ODAY is November 7th. This day is significant in the history of Bangladesh. On this day in 1975, the country lost three brave freedom fighter army officers in the hands of the anti-liberation forces. They were Brigadier Khaled Mosharraf, Bir Uttam, Colonel Khandakar Najmul Huda, Bir Bikram, and Lieutenant Colonel A T M Haider, Bir Uttam.

Until the Awami League gov-

ernment came to power in 1996. this day was celebrated as National Solidarity day to mark the killings of these valiant sons of the soil. But fortunately, now this celebration has stopped and this national holiday has come to an end. Our present Government has abolished the fake propaganda. It is indeed a positive role taken to uphold the truth, but regrettably very little has been disclosed to the nation till date about why these three officers took their courageous stand, what were the odds and obstacles, and how they successfully dislodged the illegal government of Khandakar Mushtague Ahmed. Then soon after, why and how these three officers fell prey to the bluets and bayonets of the pro-Mushtaque force. The nation deserves to know the sequence of occurrence that led to their sad demise.

It was recently announced by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina that the government is taking up steps for carrying out proper trial of the killings of President Major General Ziaur Rahman, Bir Uttam. With the same gesture, we as citizens of this country, want to see that similar measures are taken immediately for carrying out the trial for the cold blooded killing of Late Brigadier Khaled Mosharraf, Bir Uttam, Late Colonel Khandakar Najmul Huda, Bir Bikram, and Lieutenant Colonel A T M Haider, Bir Ut-

As the first step, the nation should give official recognition to these three officers by restoring the dignity that is rightfully due to them. They were each highly decorated Freedom Fighter Sector Commanders and Sub-Sector Commander in our War of Liberation in 1971 Brigadier Khaled Mosharraf BU was the Sector battle of Koshba, Lt Col A T M Haider, BU took command of Sector 2 as Sector Commander. Late Colonel K N Huda, BB, was one of the co-accused with Bangabondhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in the historical Agartala Conspiracy Case of 1968 He was the Sub Sector Commander in Sector-8 during the war. Besides numerous victories, the famous battle of Chougacha was fought and won under the leadership of Col K N Huda, (Then Capt Huda). Many of us are familiar with Lt Col Haider's picture along with the other Freedom Fighters, and the Joint Forces Commander. General Jagjit Singh Aurora, all marching boldly bringing General Niazi to sign the instrument of surrender on December 16, 1971.

Khaled, Huda, and Haider were each upright officers and men of strong principles. All three joined the Liberation War immediately after the genocide by Pakistan Army on the night of March 25th, 1971. They fought most valiantly and victoriously in their respective Sector, to achieve the dream of Bangabondhu and the dream of the Bengali people. Subsequently they were each holding highly responsible position in the Bangladesh Army between December 17, 1971 and November 7, 1975. After the annihilation of

Bangabondhu and his entire

family on August 15, 1975, the country's sovereignty was fully at stake and went in the hands of the anti-liberation forces. There was complete disorder in the chain of command within the army. By November 2nd, 1975, a group of true patriotic officers in the Bangladesh Army and Bangladesh Air Force under the leadership of Brigadier Khaled Mosharrat BU, Col Huda, BB, and Lt Col Haider BU, became successful in dislodging the vicious illegal government. While efforts to restore the sovereignty was in motion with the principle of avoiding bloodshed, the tragic incident of killing our four National Leaders in the Dhaka Central Jail took place through the conspiring hands of Khandakar Mushtaque Ahmed. Last but not the least, we hope that this time our Government will take the necessary steps of going through those sequence of occurrence, unveiling the numerous mysteries that still

Had Mushtaque Ahmed remained in power, chances were high for all of us to witness and experience the spell of Pakistani authorities once again. Twenty three years have elapsed by now since November 7, 1975. We feel it is high time that the nation justly glorify them and their noble cause the truth must prevail, and we, the citizens have the right to

The writer is son of Late Col K N Huda BB and has written this also on behalf of her sister Naheed Huda as well as Raka Khaled, Ammereen Khaled. Taireen Khaled, daughters of Late Brig. Khaled Mosharraf

Lo the Eattor...

Noble lobbying for Nobel!

Sir. As a citizen of Bangladesh, I felt embarrassed to read reports in a section of the local press of covert attempts to get a local national leader nominated for the Noble Peace Prize for initiating the peace treaty signed on CHT.

In contrast, we read stories how difficult it is to get the Nobel Prize by deserving candidates. Prof A K Sen got it after being nominated for a number of times in the course of a decade. Dr Salam had to wait for about a decade and then share it with two scientists of the North. An American mathematician got the Nobel Prize for Economics in 1994 after waiting for nearly 40 years; and that too based on a thesis he had written decades ago for his PhD at the age of 21, back in the late 1950s.

The high points in one's life come rare, and come late, if ever. Some become famous after their death. What is the philosophy of achievement and reward, and how are these related? According to a wise saying, those who seek or crave for awards, do not deserve it.

Let us not forget our proper place in life, independent of the cursed grip of the sycophants. We cannot get rid of the latter. as it is a part of human nature.

A Citizen Dhaka

Better late than never

Sir, The USA is one of the richest countries in the world. The hard working people of America maintain a high standard of living and their per capita income is around 25,000 dollar. They enjoy two-day weekend because of their wealth, economic prosperity, industrial development, efficient administration, smooth law and order situation, social security and justice.

Whereas in Bangladesh our per capita income is only \$220, we are one of the poorest countries in the order, our standard of living is most horrible and deplorable and our economy, trade and commerce, law and order and health care are in shambles but some of us foolishly want to compete and follow the footsteps of the people of America in many ways especially in enjoying two-day weekly holiday.

It is not irrelevant to state here that we are more than 200 years backward than the people of the US and it would take another 300 to 400 years for us to have a per capita income of

\$25,000 from the present \$220. Over past several weeks we have been hearing various re-

ports that the government has realised its mistake in declaring two-day weekly holiday and now it is going to re-introduce one-day weekly holiday. We strongly believe and feel that sooner the government announces its revised decision of one-day weekly holiday instead of two- day weekly holiday is better for the entire nation. Bet-

O. H. Kabir 6. Hare Street Wari. Dhaka-1203.

ter late than never.

Strengthening CAB

Sir, To set up the proper network for the Consumer Association of Bangladesh (as advocated in a DS editorial), allocation of only one percent of VAT collection (STax may be included if necessary) in the capital budget might be enough for a start. UN and donor agencies may provide technical assistance input to start with. The ops and maintenance budget could be covered with a little subsidy. The staff must be pro-

fessionally trained. The political and administrative will has to be forthcoming. This is an essential public service, but the priority accorded officially is regrettable, realising that the consumers have a tight budget for consumer shopping, and the adulteration culture is well devel-

...A case for a bipartisan..

Sir. With reference to the article "Bangladesh — a Case for a Bipartisan Foreign Policy" by Faruq Choudhury in the DS on the 3rd November, 1998, the suggestion of being bipartisan is one thing and taking a firm stand on international issues which affect the nation is another. I personally feel that the latter stance should be adopted for the better. It would go a long way in propagating the image of the country and also tackling problems like water sharing, flood and resources management which involves the neighbouring countries.

The vain hope of garnering increased assistance and investment by being bipartisan is not going to solve matters in the long run.

As a young nation, it is time that people strove to initiate and build an identity for itself rather than adopt unfamiliar influences.

Anish V. Koshy 272/4, West Agargaon,

Shewrapara, Dhaka