

Healthy Ambitions

The health sector, despite being a crucial part of the overall development scenario, has long been neglected in government policy and expenditure plans.

The HPSP, with a total budget of \$ 2.9 billion to be spent over a period of five years, is by far the most expensive programme ever undertaken in Bangladesh.

The key to the success of the exercise, however, remains two unquantifiable factors: the level of community awareness and participation in the services, and efficiency of the referral services at the thana and district levels.

School Textbook Chaos

The National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB) is the authority to print and distribute school textbooks in good time for the academic session that coincides with the calendar year.

The system looks broken down from the front-page report in our daily yesterday that revealed a partial hijacking of the authority of the NCTB and the printing and distribution roles of the listed publishers and dealers.

The basic reason behind this mess which has been annual in its recurrence, to be candid, seems to be the laggard printing of books.

One-stop Bill Payment

The Public Administration Reforms Commission (PARC) has recommended that there should be a one-stop utility payment system.

So far customers of public utilities like telephone, gas, water and electricity have been made to pay these bills over bank counters on different dates putting them into difficult situations.

It has also suggested that a Working Committee be formed with representatives from the utility organisations, the ministry concerned and the bill collecting organisation to look into various problems that might arise from time to time.

For a Brave New Subcontinent

In every way, they are so similar that the Pakistanis and Indians are the first ones to strike friendship when they are outside the subcontinent.

BETWEEN THE LINES

Kuldip Nayar writes from New Delhi

cannot last long. They are from the same stock and share the same language and history. In every way, they are so similar that the Pakistanis and Indians are the first ones to strike friendship when they are outside the subcontinent.

I have no doubt that one day the high walls that fear and distrust have raised on the borders will crumble and the peoples of the subcontinent, without giving up their separate identities, will work together for the common good.

It was brave of Nawaz Sharif to have invited Atal Behari Vajpayee through a press interview to take a trip to Pakistan in the inaugural bus service from Delhi to Lahore.

nothing could bore through it till a solution to the core issue of Kashmir was found. What-ever efforts in other fields were considered peripheral.

For Vajpayee, too, it is a bold response. His party, the BJP, is known for its hard line on Pakistan. Just as the Muslim League in Pakistan represented the majority of Muslims, the BJP led the majority of Hindus in India.

I have no doubt that both are conscious of the expectations

they have raised by what are probably the off-the-cuff remarks. Despite failures in the past — the Tashkent Declaration between Lal Bahadur Shastri and General Ayub Khan and the Shimla Agreement between Indira Gandhi and Zulfikar Ali Bhutto — the impression spread, perhaps a wishful thinking, is that something will come out of the bus diplomacy.

In fact, the two sides should begin with the bomb. It should be de-linked from Kashmir. The first requires an immediate understanding. The second will take time, although its solution is urgent.

ter the explosion of bomb by Pakistan, I was given to understand that Pakistan, like India, would also announce 'no first use'.

Indeed, the two sides have to bury the hatchet on Kashmir. The Shimla agreement has laid down that the two sides will find a final solution. Kashmir is important because it has been dimmed into the people of Pakistan over the years that a settlement on it was a pre-requisite to the friendship with India.

If the bus diplomacy is not to go the way that General Zia-ul-Haq's cricket diplomacy did, it is incumbent on the two Prime Ministers to produce some result. They need not begin with Kashmir. But they can at least

settle the dispute over the Siachin glacier. A settlement on it was reached some years ago and the secretaries of the two countries had initiated it.

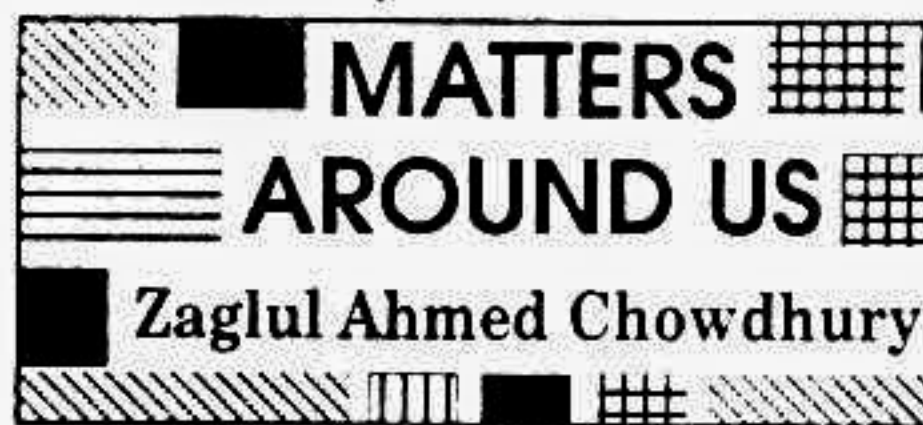
Political leaders and bureaucrats on both sides have only helped to widen the gulf because they find that the more rigid the line they take against the country across the border, the higher they go in public esteem and some prejudiced intellectuals.

There is no doubt that the subcontinent can find its own destiny according to its own genius if left alone and if the peoples are allowed to look within, not without.

Both Vajpayee and Sharif may well make the history.

On the Bus towards Better Understanding

The tone and tenor of the Indo-Pak relationship is well known. It is needless to say that despite all the assertions for making efforts to normalise the belligerent ties, it is clear the prevalent animosity will be very difficult, if not impossible, to eliminate.



Zaglul Ahmed Chowdhury

INDIAN Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee plans to be on the first to Pakistan when the much talked about New Delhi-Lahore bus service formally begins.

Formal introduction of the service may be delayed further but it appears that New Delhi and Islamabad have made up their mind on the issue and it is only a matter of time before the it finally takes off.

The tone and tenor of the Indo-Pak relationship is well known. It is needless to say that despite all the assertions for making efforts to normalise the belligerent ties, it is clear the prevalent animosity will be very difficult, if not impossible, to eliminate.

of their existence. They have fought wars and bickered endlessly over the Kashmir issue. There have been exchanges of provocative statements between leaders of both countries.

The bus service comes at a time when their relations has hit the lowest in recent times. A series of nuclear explosions in the early part of May by India and immediate Pakistani riposte were viewed as a serious threat to peace and stability of the region.

possess the nuclear weapons which they said they would not hesitate to use if it needs arise. Although both assured they would not be the first to resort to nuclear weaponry, the highly pugnacious and provocative remarks from high-ups in both countries triggered off fears that a disaster was in the offing.

But fortunately, both demonstrated restraint at one stage and the ambience improved after meetings between the prime ministers of the two countries in the sidelines of international conferences. It is also understood that those comments came out of domestic compulsions of both the governments.

Two countries later held several rounds of talks and for the first time composite talks covering practically all kinds of issues concerning them ranging from tensions in the Siachen glacier in the Himalayas to trade.

India and Pakistan are used to different kinds of diplomatic moves to ease their tense relationship. Late Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi once sent a bunch of litchis to late Pakistan President Ziaul Huq when the New Delhi-Islamabad ties were in a bad shape and the Pakistan president reciprocated the gesture by sending delicious Anwar Ratol mangoes to Mrs. Gandhi.

The much-talked bus service between New Delhi and Lahore may not change much but it certainly reflects sobering mentality of the fierce foes. The willingness of the two heads of the government to travel in the bus to the other country may not be liked by the hawks or those who believe in jingoism but certainly it holds promise for qualitatively changing the atmosphere of the bilateral ties to some degree.

The bus diplomacy may not bring anything substantial for India and Pakistan in normalising the ties but this is a welcome development towards improvement of the ties between the hostile neighbours of South Asia.

To the Editor...

Letters for publication in these columns should be addressed to the Editor and legibly written or typed with double space. For reasons of space, short letters are preferred, and all are subject to editing and cuts.

Avoiding hartals

Sir, It was a welcome initiative on the part of the Daily Star to organise a public debate in collaboration with the Centre for Alternative of Dhaka University on 'Public protest — Search for alternatives'.

I attended the lively debate and participated in it. However, have to say that the coverage of the dialogue in the DS was sketchy, and the main thrust of the discussion did not clearly come out in the report.

It may be recalled that though participants did speak against hartal, and this is perhaps something no one would not do under normal circumstances, some speakers made it very clear that the only way of avoiding hartal in our culture would be to ensure that compelling circumstances are not present and effective alternatives are available.

machinery and the emergent need was to re-establish it. The participants, you may recall, decried all hartals from the early nineties when an elected democratic government came into office and generally held the view that with the political legacy that we have, providing viable alternatives to hartal was a sine-quay for preventing it.

Even the brilliant summing-up by the DS editor Mahfuz Anam was not adequately covered in the report.

Enam A Chaudhury 3/21 Iqbal Road Dhaka 1207

Hartal and environment

Sir, It has been observed that opposition parties are calling frequent hartals on this or that plea. I have also observed that general public is not interested in hartal as it creates problems for all and stay with their labours are most affected.

Salehuddin Khan 292/A, Igah Road Dhanmondi, Dhaka-1209

Man with the shotgun

Sir, The photograph on the front page of January 27, 1999 issue of The Daily Star showed a man, suspected to be a worker of Haji Sellim, an Awami League MP from city's Lalbagh area, charging towards a pro-hartal procession of BNP on Topkhana Road after snatching a shotgun from an on-duty policeman during the hartal on January 26, 1999.

It clearly revealed the position of the opposition political parties under the present regime. When Awami League was in opposition and observed hartal for almost two years we never heard of this sort of incidents.

It is really uncanny how the AL manages to get the upper hand in every situation. In the regime of the past governments when Awami League called hartal they did not even hesitate to strip senior citizens if they were found to be going to the office, and now the ruling party activists pull the sleeves of the female members of the opposition if they take part in pro-hartal processions.

These actions are deplorable, and the government must act wisely.

Nur Jahan Chittagong

Secy in 1971 and (posthumously) Addl Secy in 1999?

Sir, While suffering a state of shock at the sad demise of a comrade-in-arms of 1971, I was somewhat amused by the obituary news on page 2 of 30th January issue of your daily, titled 'Ex-addl secy Samad dead'.

first time at his official residence of Deputy Commissioner, Faridpur sometimes in April 1969, a few weeks after I had been freed from military custody on 22nd February 1969 along with my other revolutionary friends and my leader Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. All of us were detained in military custody and prosecuted in the historic Agartala Case during the period from late 1967 to early 1969.

Next time I met Abdus Samad was towards the end of 1971 at Mujibnagar where I had come from Sector 2 for joining Bangladesh Forces HQ (BDF HQ). Having deserted his position as Deputy Commissioner, Sylhet, Samad had joined Mujibnagar Government to become Secretary, Ministry of Defence.

I met him next time in Dhaka Central Jail in 1982 where both of us landed up as detenus following the imposition of Martial Law in March 1982. We had lot of fun together including games of contract bridge in Cell No 26 of Dhaka Central Jail.

Later, I met him several times in his Sea Resources Ltd office at Kazi Nazrul Islam Avenue. During the last several years I did not see much of him but I never thought or heard, not even from his brother-in-law Abdur Rouf Chowdhury who is also a friend of mine, that he had been suffering from the fatal illness.

Col (Retd) Shawkat Ali, MP (A correct version was published next day, Jan 31 under the heading 'Quikhuani...')

Boycott the politicians socially!

Sir, I agree in principle with the letter of Dr M Rafiqul Islam (DS Feb 2) for a mass, peaceful, silent, non-assembly, and orderly open social movement to boycott the politicians socially, as matter of protest, as they have not only failed to solve the country's problems and run it normally for so many decades, especially during the decade of the 1990s, but also cannot settle

OPINION Economic and Ecological Poverty

A Husnain

The Poverty of Amartya Sen (DS, Feb 1) as depicted professionally by Anil Agarwal, the international environmentalists is bold and transparent. Now he has added one more dimension to the filling Sen matrix, namely, the 'ecological poverty' factor, a needed modern grafting from the world of the environmentalists.

The latter have been marking their mark lately with accelerated progress on the complexities of the environmental sciences. The environmentalists are also in the dock for not having the foresight to warn this civilisation immediately after the World War II. Knowledge is released in time capsules, when the time is ripe. There is also a time for evil to retreat. Joy and sorrow are part of the yin and yang of life.

So hindsight had been worked in both the disciplines of economics and ecological imbalances due to the industrialisation and technological advancements. The moral lesson is that there is nothing free in life, and compensation in some form has to be extracted individually or collectively.

The outer space has also collected a lot of man-made garbage as space-flight orbits increased each successive decade. There are electromagnetic fields around the Earth for specific natural and mystical purposes (The Van Allen belts and other phenomenon, the timing of man's landing on

the moon, and considerable classified data and information). The effects and implications of these vibrations (all matter and energy are ultimately vibrations of one kind or another, including the gravitational waves about which information is not released readily to the public for two basic reasons: security, and the unfathomable character of the research).

This Sen-Agarwal analysis, and subsequent synthesis, have to be taken up in good cheer. It is good to note that the current civilisation, so long ruled and dominated by the rich of the West, is now being mentally prepared to bow to respond to Nature's no-option arbitration, regardless of capitalistic manoeuvres for survival in its old imperialistic garb and glory, through arms and the dollar (the Euro has now been introduced for some intended purpose, the outcome of which is yet unpredictable). Nature's primeval cycles cannot be contained by human ingenuity or impunity, as confirmed by the rise and fall of civilisations (Angkor, Maya, Aztecs, Chaldean, Babylonian, Chinese, Indian), and the appearance and disappearance of continents (Atlantis, Lemuria). The Greenhouse Effect is an amber signal (if not red) for mankind to set its house in order, and pay the VAT(!) for its financial and technological, indiscretions and misapprehensions, increasing the gap of man's inhumanity to man.

disputes within themselves (the political parties). The standard of the nighting is detestable.

Some voluntary organisations may print and sell for one Taka arm badges or logos, which will sell in millions. This non-profit venture may donate the surplus funds collected for poverty alleviation schemes, under proper supervision, in which no politician may be allowed to take part.

The politicians may not be invited to any private or family function (into any drawing room) for a limited period during the first phase of the campaign. The second phase may be tougher, but peaceful, without any coercion or intimidation.

If the politicians can do it, we the citizens can do it better! Watch if I am arrested or tortured! The PM has assured freedom of the press, and the freedom to criticize the politicians and the vile politics of cursed Bangladesh. Long live Bangladesh, and down with the bad politicians.

A Zabr Dhaka

A doctor for who?

Sir, An incident on 28th January evening, made ask the above question. While crossing the road near Eye Hospital at Farmgate, Dhaka, an elderly gentleman met with an accident. A speedy rickshaw with a passenger (uniformed serviceman) hit the gentleman. The rickshaw did not give warning bell nor it had any light. A bone was fractured above the right ankle as revealed in the X-ray. The uniformed serviceman helped the gentleman to get up and home by a baby taxi.

The patient with some of his relatives came to the Emergency Section of a reputed mid-city hospital. He was again X-rayed promptly and the result made him to get admission into the hospital. The doctor came and examined the patient who was suffering from intense pain. However the doctor nonchalantly uttered that 'tomorrow is Friday and next day is Saturday, weekly holidays, days of the personal income. So the patient's treatment can-

not be undertaken until Sunday next i.e. 31 January 1999.

Instead of caring for suffering patients the doctors look for ways and means to augment their income. It is really inhuman. Holiday cannot be an excuse for leaving emergency patients untreated. Some nurses and junior doctor showed their sympathy to the patient. But the authority didn't show any concern for the patient.

Later the patient had to take release from the hospital which took about 2 hours to be taken to a clinic where he got immediate treatment (plaster) which took half an hour.

Benjamin Gomes 12, Circuit House Road Kakrail, Dhaka-1000

Fie upon opportunists!

Sir, As far as I know, no such heroic figure in the political arena shows the kind of instability and immorality as shown by our political leaders. Many of our leaders have no ideals at all. They change their slogans whenever they find some lucrative chance in some other parties. Politics is supposed to be the king of all principles that helps the people to put forward their rights and demands to the law makers and the government who lead the country.

In our country there are innumerable number of political parties, the leaders of which do not forget even the main view of their respective parties. As they have no respect or likings for a certain party, it appears to them very easy to leave it and join another one. They don't believe in the background or specific regulations of the party they belong to.

In fact they are like the vagabond bees collecting honey from flower to flower. What do they change their slogans for? Our leaders are irresponsible, opportunists, viewless and unprincipled.

My ardent request to these fortune seekers is, please be settled down first and then pay attention to politics.

Arun Kumar Biswas Dhaka University