Founder-Editor: Late S. M. Ali Dhaka Monday, September 27, 1999

Police and Journalists

THE Bangladesh Photojournalists Association's roundtable on Saturday at the Jatiya Press Club, billed to be a confidence-builder between the police and the photojournalists, went only a part of the way in fulfilling that expectation. The discussion-meet on "Photojournalism in Bangladesh: Obstruction and Challenge for the Next Millennium" was obviously induced by a recent spate in the incidence of police highhandedness against photojournalists covering agitational programmes of opposition political parties. The Inspector General of Police AYBI Siddiqui who was on hand apparently saved the day for his force by holding out an assurance for a remedy. He said he would issue written orders to field level police officers asking them 'not to go for action against newsmen'.

Photojournalists carry only a camera when they go to cover any event. There is no weapon nor any ammunition on their person. For that matter, all journalists, by definition, are non-belligerent people having no need for use of force in the discharge of their professional duties. Photojournalists just take a snap of what's happening or reporters draw a pen-picture of it. If the policemen had read their manual well enough they would have known that only when somebody had used force that he would deserve to be paid back in his own coin for the sake of maintaining public order. Journalists do neither have the gears nor any professional necessity to use physical force so they must be immune to it! Besides, a higher principle is involved here which has to fundamentally do with press freedom as part and parcel of a living democracy.

The basic difficulty with a professional police role is the advantage that the ruling party takes of them as an instrument of self-aggrandisement. The police for their part tend to think that by listening to the buzz words circulating from the political top-brass they have met the accountability criterion in a convenient, risk-free way. The policemen must be freed from partisan influences of any kind when it comes to performing their professional duties. Furthermore by training they ought to know where to use force and where not.

As it is, journalists sometimes have had the misfortune of being confronted with political activists and mastaans; and, if on top of that, they have to face police highhandedness, where do they go, how do they serve the people?

Bay of Bengal under Threat

CO-CONSCIOUSNESS is definitely not our Liforte. To the innumerable instances of environmental degradation, including slow-killing of the Buriganga, is now added massive pollution of the Bay of Bengal. In the absence of any monitoring mechanism, the sea has virtually turned into a waste dump for nearly 150 industrial units located close to it on the bank of the Karnaphuli. Adverse impacts of the industrial effluent have already started showing. In the last few years, there has been a sharply reduced catch of sea fish. More threateningly, the Biological Oxygen Demand (BOD) level in the marine water has gone up in different parts of the Chittagong coast, ranging from 0.7 to 38 parts per million (PPM) whereas the WHOaccepted level is five PPM. Deoxygenation induced by the toxic waste is taking place in the sea. In plain and simple terms, as some experts fear, the marine eco-system is under threat to the extent that, unless addressed immediately, fin-fish and shell-fish will be on the verge of extinction. Besides, there is also the bleak possibility of a huge migration of marine fish to Indian and Myanmar waters. Either way, the country will suffer, for it relies on marine fisheries in the Bay, especially shrimp, to earn foreign currency through exports. Moreover, some 1.5 million people in the area actually live on the spoils of the sea.

Dumping of toxic industrial effluent into the sea has already assumed dreadful proportions. According to a government report, 2528 metric tonnes of waste were dumped from shrimp processing units into the Bay through the Karnaphuli only in one fiscal year - 1994-95 that is. In August this year, some 200 metric tonnes of oil and 1400 tonnes of rotten rice were dumped when the carrier ran aground near Anwara. These are only two instances of deliberate pollution. There are more.

The fact of the matter is, we, particularly the government, are not appreciative of the need to keep the Bay clean for geo-morphological reasons. Alarming as the situation may be; there is time to avert disaster.

Not Again!

THE onion price is too high for comfort. Reports I in the local dailies suggest that this essential edible has registered a price rise of more than Tk 10 over the past week to stand at Tk 36-38 per kilogram. This price-hike is nothing new to the consumers. During this time around last year the price went as high as Tk 65 per kilogram. There have been all sorts of explanations by the business community as well as the commerce ministry for this annual phenomenon. With the new arrivals of onion the prices are likely to fall, but the machinations of unscrupulous traders have started early in the day to make a windfall before the supplies are replenished. Suddenly the wholesale prices have shot up by about 50 per cent for no obvious reasons. But the wholesalers don't need any explanation for raising the prices. 'Reduced flow' from India is cited as the main reason for the price-hike.

It is too well-known that bulk of the onion and pulse normally come to Dhaka from the northern region of Bangladesh and since the opening of the Jamuna Bridge flow of the merchandise from the northern region was supposed to be steadier. It always beats the imagination what market forces operate to cause such sharp fluctuations in the prices of essentials. Hopefully, the commerce ministry and the business community will put their heads together to normalise the onion price.

Transit: The Real Issues

THE issue of transit has become very contentious indeed. The debate surrounding transit was on the table for quite some time with participants seen clearly polarized in two distinct lobbies, one group has been opposing transit and the other, supporting it. The debates have been mostly forays into the theoretical realm of political economics and have been fought with the clear intention of justifying any of the opposing views. The political polarization in Bangladesh makes an objective treatment of any issue almost impossible as most arguments are made not on sound economic rationale but rather on petty personal or partisan interests. It is a sad fact of life that politicians and intellectuals here treat most matters in this way. It is therefore necessary to address the question of Transit in a more objective manner with a clear perspective of the stakes involved; for this indeed is a very vital issue which could affect the economic and political future of the nation.

The recent heating up of the is not too surprising. issue is obviously due to the general perception that the government is soon giving away transit facility to India. While it is true that the government and the party which forms it are not denying the suggestion, there appears to be quite a bit of nervousness surrounding this issue. This is seen in the government's attempt to legitimize tivities as well as in the transit by asserting that the founder of the party now in opposition was in fact the architect of this concept. This is ironic indeed since the government, the party and their intellectual cronies are vociferously supporting the political reality of an integrated global economy and the economic rationale of earning a huge direct or indirect revenue

While the government party and their cronies are trying to support the move to offer Indian goods", the opposition party, in the perennial role of a Bangladeshi political party in opposition, is denouncing this attempt. Their arguments are mainly centered around the concept of national sovereignty, a subject matter of extreme sensitivity to a people who had to make enormous sacrifices for it. The opposition politicians and the lobby behind them are trying to bring out the spectre of Indian domination through the "Trojan horse" of transit but their arguments till date have been mostly aimed at inciting the people's reaction rather than to challenge the issue in a way which is more intellectually

through this process. The ner-

vousness of the government of-

ficials are made more obvious

by the recent emphasis of vari-

ous government officials on

calling the process of transport-

ing Indian goods through

Bangladeshi territory "tran-

shipment" not "transit". This

game of juggling with words in

order to make the matter palat-

able is a very sorry attempt in-

deed because in neither ad-

dresses the key issues nor does

it indicate an iota of knowledge

of common trade and transport

gratifying. The present approach of the government suggests a gradual and phased introduction of transit facility to India. The first phase of this is the so called "transhipment", a term

vociferously promoted to mean something which it does not mean. The present proposal is in facet to "tranship" intra-Indian freight into Bangladesh vehicles at the border and to carry this on Bangladeshi vehicles over the Bangladeshi territory to the border at the other side where it will be again transhipped into Indian vehicle. One needs a magician's slyness to say that it is not Transit but transhipment. It is in fact transit of Indian goods through Bangladesh in Bangladeshi vehicles after transhipment at the border. This is a relatively costly move as it will necessitate unnecessary and spurious handling of the goods at the border which obviously will erode some of the benefits of transit. This is perhaps only an attempt to make it palatable and is only the first phase of the eventual arrangement in which the process will be streamlined. Given the failure or the unwillingness of the government to discuss the vital economic issues related with transit, the fostering of the deep rooted suspicion in the mind of people

Ideally the concept of transit is exhilarating both from Bangladeshi and Indian perspectives for obvious economic reasons. In an ideal situation one can envisage a scenario in which both Indian and Bangladeshi road/rail vehicles and inland watercraft participate in cross border trading acby Capt. Ahmed Ruhullah

be tremendous with a big boost to their international and inter-state trades. This boost will come in the way of reduced freight costs and in the savings in transit times. The resource rich states of Indian north-east would find a breather to bolster their economies which are constrained by the costly, difficult and time consuming circuitous transport links with the rest of the country and the very costly maritime access. Hopefully this will help in the greater cohesion of the Indian federation, a goal which remains elusive with active insurgency and militancy apparently on the rise in the Northeast and Northwest.

For Bangladesh, the above scenario could definitely be a great source of revenue. In economic terms we can perhaps calculate the revenue which may accrue to the national exchequer in the way of tariff for goods and vehicles for using our port, highways, railways and river ways. Additionally we can see generation of employment opportunities and increased business participation by members of our business community in new areas. The total benefit in financial terms are said to be quite astounding and supporters are coming out with various figures with a sort of prophetic certainty which is definitely exhilarating to a cash starved nation.

It is necessary to take a

fully aware and respectful of a country's international

obligations. The above conditions are not mere fantasies but are the reality as such is the state of affairs in regions where one sees the concept of transit finding success. The EC and the NAFTA regions are the prime examples.

There is no need to dwell too long on the situation here. The paucity of our transport infrastructure does not need much elaboration. Our main northsouth axis road from Chittagong to Dhaka is of gross under-capacity and of poor orientation. Whereas the north of the country is linked with Dhaka by a bridge over the Jamuna the southwest is only accessible by ferry crossing over numerous rivers. Moreover, the road system is centrally oriented with all axs touching Dhaka without bypassing the city in any effective way. The resulting congestion, delay and occasional accidents are common knowledge to all. The rail system similarly remains fragmented by the different of gauges in the eastern and western half of the country. Moreover, the capacity of the system is hampered by the preponderance of single track segments over major sections. The waterway, which provides a very efficient system for the internal transportation of bulk cargo of low value is not really an option for time sensitive high value cargo. What is clear

national trade, in the reduced spending for the maintenance of vital transport infrastructure over a difficult terrain. Even if we leave the more subtle but high value factor of national cohesion, the benefits are bound to far outweigh the costs. This is a scenario which is enormously appealing to India in economic terms.

For Bangladesh, the scenario is very different. The benefits to accrue can be translated into financial terms but what about the costs? Some of the costs can be translated into financial terms and these include spending for infrastructure. regular spending on maintenance of infrastructure. loss of potential market by Bangladeshi goods in the northeast because of competitive advantage gained by matured Indian companies located in other parts of India due to the easier and cheaper transport costs. But many of the costs are not so easy to convert into money terms, these include the costs associated with the increased congestion on our meager road, rail or water infrastructure, the economic cost of relocating a huge population for new infra structure projects, and the economic costs of pollution due to the increased freight activity which would serve a market of over 25 million people in the Indian north and northeast. The question of pollution is a very important one and this is directly related with the concept of sustainable de-

velopment. It is important to

note that in the EU road

haulage of freight transport has

been identified as most threat-

ening to the environment and

most governments are trying to

impose various fiscal and fi

nancial measures to divert as

much freight as possible to a

more environment friendly

mode of transpiration. prefer-

ably waterway or rail trans-

Ignoring the political argu-

ments against sovereignty for

the time being, it is possible to

see that even on purely eco-

nomic and ecological terms, the

costs associated with transit

are quite considerable and

needs very careful evaluation.

Unfortunately we have not seen

any attempt till date which

would give us the confront that

there remain competent au-

thorities amidst our policy-

portation.

general a sense of security and fairness in relationship. Geographical borders in such a case become less rigid and cross border movements become less rigorous. This is the ideal situation which would make the concept of transit very attractive. Unfortunately our relations with India is not based on this kind of mutual trust and respect. The Bangladeshi psyche is generally distrustful of Indian motives and always fearful of Indian machination. The reasons range from deep rooted historical animosity to real facts of Indian involvement in Bangladeshi affairs The support for the tribal insurgents, regular incidents of border clashes, water politics and indirect interference in the internal affairs of Bangladesh remain facts which cannot be ignored.

Most Bangladeshis who had

the opportunity to mix with Indians in India and abroad would recall the favoured Indian penchant for a greater India where Bangladesh ideally is only a part of India. This general Indian attitude should not be ignored as the politics in India in recent years have shown all the dirtiness of extreme nationalism, jingoism and instability. The role of India in the region has been that of a spoilt bully and Sikkim and Kashmir bear witness to the general indifference towards international responsibility of the Indian public, politicians as well as the intellectuals. With the general population in this area still uneducated and with very little democratic value, with political ideologies still without a strong foothold, and with a tremendous disparity in military and economic prowess between India and Bangladesh, it could be fatal for Bangladesh to offer India a privilege which could become a right in the long run. Students of history should look at the recent US role at the Panama canal or the Anglo-French role in the 1956 Suez crisis. One only has to consider that these heinous interference took place in spite of the presence of a conscious intelligentsia and very strong democratic institutions in those countries. The situation is unacceptably precarious if similar development is envisaged with India in the dominating posi-

It is the opinion of the author that the decision to offer transit facility to India is not a sound one at this stage of our development. The country is neither ready in terms of the adequacy of our infra-structure nor there prevails the congenial economic and political environment which would make it an all out success. Moreover, there appears to be no attempt on the part of our politicians to do a proper cost-benefit analysis encompassing all issues. It would not be prudent to push this agenda further at this stage. The concept of transit is a sensible one but this will be only feasible when addressed in the regional level and when there is a general sense of trust and understanding among all the countries in the region. It could be suicidal for Bangladesh to proceed alone on

The author, a master mariner, is the country chief of Henderson International, a UK firm of maritime and transport

of capability compounded by

inefficiency and a lack of both

commitment and intent. When

any functionary's personal

agenda transcends that of the

The decision to offer transit facility to India is not a sound one at this stage of our development. The country is neither ready in terms of the adequacy of our infra-structure nor there prevails the congenial economic and political environment which would make it an all out success. Moreover, there appears to be no attempt on the part of our politicians to do a proper cost-benefit analysis encompassing all issues. It would not be prudent to push this agenda further at this stage.

portation of intra-Indian goods over the Bangladeshi territory. In this ideal situation, the port of Chittagong is linked by well made roads and railway network with strategic population centers deep inside the Indian territory and perhaps inside Bhutan and Nepal as well. These make the transportation of export and import containers and other goods possible at the minimum cost level. It is envisaged that in this scenario there are no stoppages for trans-border crossing of goods and vehicles and these pass without much hindrance at the border. This is a concept which is conceptually possible to visualize as this kind of flow of freight transport is quite commonplace in many regions of the

The geographical location of Bangladesh is strategic in logistic terms because of the peculiar geographical extension of India to the north and east of the country. The territory of Bangladesh provides the natural and most attractive transport corridor not only because It provides the shortest route between the Indian northeastern states and the rest of the country, it also provides the easiest terrain on which a transport infrastructure can be laid. And it does not need a genius to point out that the port of Chittagong, situated strategically at the north of the Bay of Bengal, is the natural port for the entire landmass north and east of Bangladesh. It is possible to see why transit is of such a great appeal to India. In the ideal situation depicted above the economic benefit to the In-

dian northeastern state would

breather at this stage and consider other aspects of the issue. While the benefits to both India and Bangladesh are quite obvious, one must not forget the other side of the coin, the costs involved. It is necessary further to deviate from the very rosy ideal picture which we have drawn so far. Because the ideal scenario presupposes certain conditions which must be met before one can realistically accept it. These conditions are

 there exists in Bangladesh an extensive network of high quality roads and/or railway or waterway with surplus capacity;

there exists a customs agreement on regional basis which allows freedom of freight movement with a minimum of hindrance from governmental bureaucracies:

3) there exists a generally accepted trade agreement on a regional basis which allows a balanced and fair trade among nations and which dispels suspicion of unfair trading practice or dumping

by dominant economies; 4) there are competent bodies in all countries in the region capable of assessing costs and benefits associated with transit and to set a tariff which reflects the inclusion of all these factors:

and last but not the least,

5) there exists a congenial political environment where peace prevails in the region as a whole and where countries are endowed with a politically matured and reasonably educated population

is that our present transport infrastructure is poorly equipped even for our own requirements. It is also not necessary to question the adequacy of Chittagong port to handle additional cargo destined for India as the port is itself capacity; constrained and linked with the hinterland with an antiquated and poor road and rail network.

The assessment of the merit

of granting transit facility on the basis of an overall free trade environment on the regional basis also falls short of the requirement. The general environment is of suspicion where cross border illicit trades in commodities and alleged dumping grossly distort the internal markets and affect domestic industries in Bangladesh. There is a big disparity in the economic prowess between India and other nations in the region and smaller economies are burdened with huge trade deficits which greatly favour India. In

general, there prevails a sense

of distrust among the business

professionals in Bangladesh re-

garding Indian trade policy. Coming to condition (40 above, it is ironic that officials are talking about revenue without discussing the costs associated with transit. Where benefits can easily be perceived and often talked about, what about costs? From the perspective of India, costs can only be seen in financial terms in the way of tariff payable to the Bangladesh interests. Most visible benefits can also be easily translated into financial terms in the saving sin transport costs in terms of money and time, in the

boosting of national and inter-

makers who understand and appreciate the stakes involved. The opposition's slogan of the "endangered sovereignty" is generally related with condition (50) above. This is a very vital and perhaps the most important pre-condition. This is because the privilege of transit under the ideal situation described above is only workable where there is a harmonious relationship among nations and when this harmony does not depend on the identity of the party in government but rather on the relationship which is much deeply rooted. This deep rooted relationship must exist between the enlightened and

educated population with mu-

tual respect for each other's cul-

tural heritage and territorial

integrity. There must prevail in

this risky trail. consultants.

Dangerous Games: Cross Border Terrorism

Pakistan should wake up to the fact that "cross border terrorism" is the attempt to label us as

originators of the latest weapon of war against our integrity and sovereignty and that we need to

gear up our defences thereof as we are presently ill equipped to counter the enemy's assault.

ASISEEIT

Ikram Sehgal writes from Karachi

S if we did not have A enough problems on our plate already, what is happening as far away as Dagestan and Moscow is being laid at our doorstep, albeit indirectly. Russia's Caucasian problems go back many centuries but they are keen to forget history and find new scapegoats. Imam Shamyl fought a 30-year war before he was subdued by the Tsar, nonetheless the Imam's Chechnyan kinsmen took due revenge a hundred odd years or so later, humbling the once mighty superpower during the 1994-96 Russo-Chechnyan war; while Afghanistan was an independent State until it was made to "invite" aggression from Russia's predecessor communist State, the Soviet

brought to its knees. The Russian unconditional withdrawal from Chechnya gave it de facto independent nation status but was humiliating and left deep scars on the Russian people who have neither forgotten the freedom fighters of Chechnya and Afghanistan nor forgiven them. Both the nations now seem to Russia to have come together in a new holy "Islamic" alliance to oust them from Dagestan. What started as a simple border incursion by a band of guerillas led by the Chechnyan warlord, Shamyl Basayev, seems to have ramifications far beyond the normal. Unfortunately for Pak-

Union, which was ultimately

this controversy by events and personalities most of which (and whom) are not within our control. However this has given a golden chance to India to try and pin the "terrorism" label on us by linking the Muslim freedom struggle in Kashmir as only a part of a wider "Islamic terrorism" initiative.

On the eve of the United Nations General Assembly session they are propagating that Osama Bin Laden has announced a holy war (Jehad) against India, this neatly coalesces with the fears of the United States and with that of Russia. Having priorities of terrorism, nuclear proliferation and drugs smuggling. US concerns as a Superpower coincide with that of Superpower-thatonce-was, Russia. If you add Chinese concerns about Islamic activism among the Uighurs of Sinkiang province, Superpower threat perception came a com-

plete circle. Or so you think! What about the growing fears among the governments of Uzbekistan and Kyrgystan about guerilla groups, ostensibly trained in Pakistan and Afghanistan and operating on the mountainous fault line that runs through their borders and continues into Tajikistan and Turkmenistan with an enclave

or two in Azerbaijan? Add that to the concerns of Iran about the Shia community in Afghanistan as represented by. the Shia Wahdat and you come back to the wider question of the Taliban rule in Afghanistan as opposed by the "Northern Alliance" led by Tajik warlord Ahmad Shah Masood. That Osama Bin Laden has sanctuary in Afghanistan, courtesy of the Taliban, is being used as a "smoking gun" to paint Pakistan as somehow being "collaborationist", as the chief provider of training and logistics to Islamic terrorism any-

where in the world. With JUI's Maulana Fazlur Rahman and Sipah-e-Sahaba's Maulana Azam Tariq using the Aabpara Market in Islamabad as a convenient Hyde Park to threaten to "kill all Americans on sight" if anybody touches Osama Bin Laden, our enemies do not need to spend any money on "black" propaganda, it is be-

ing provided for them gratis. For once the Foreign Office is on the ball, having rushed to condemn the terrorist acts in Moscow and Dagestan where bombs have destroyed large apartment buildings housing families of Russian army men, among other civilians. This is as it should be, we cannot condone (or for that matter seem to be condoning) such terror anywhere. There is no doubt that the vast majority of Pakistanis support Chechnyans and they are sympathetic to their struggle to liberate Dagestan; there is a difference between genuine guerilla warfare and terrorism as a struggle for independence that targets civilians and we cannot seem to be in any manner supporting terrorism. The armed struggle on the Chechnya-Dagestan border is a regular conflict. As much as Osama Bin Laden has caught the imagination of the Pakistani public, it must be remembered

populated locality. However,

there is only one way in the east

of this area to communicate

with the main town. But there is

a canal which has to be crossed

by a bridge made of bamboo. But

sometimes this bridge crossing

becomes very risky. During

floods water rise up to the

bridge and it even goes under

water. Many people then just

cannot venture to cross it not to

that the bombings of the US Embassies in Nairobi and Dares-Salam have to be condemned in the strongest possible lan-Any liberation struggle has to be directed against uni-

formed opponents or those civilians directly in support of the war effort, not old men. women and children, any attack on innocents has to be labelled a dastardly act in an unequivocal manner, as is the norm of any civilized society. The attack on the Breguet Atlantique by Indian MIGs in Pakistan territory was a deliberate act of terrorism, so is the Russian Air Force attack on civilian targets in Chechnya. We do support the Kashmir freedom struggle but it is directed against Indian Occupation Forces in Held Kashmir as well as their civilian surrogates as it has clearly been over the years. Uniformed persons taking part in blutel repression and subjugation of human rights are legitimate targets in an independence movement, however planting of bombs where innocents may get hurt or the targetting of civilians not engaged in counter-terrorism is an act of terrorism. Shamyl Basayev's fight in Dagestan is legitimate, the bomb blasts that levelled apartment blocks in Dagestan and Moscow are not i.e. if they were planted by Chechnyans in the first place.

After the Polish incident which Hitler staged to legitimise his invasion of Poland, the world has to be careful of such callous acts by countries which would target their own innocent people if it serves their greater designs. It is quite possible that the Russians are staging these incidents to build up both domestic and world opinion.

Our biggest problem is the information media. This is not only Mian Nawaz Sharif's but Pakistan's biggest disaster area. We have failed miserably in not only projecting Pakistan's point of view but have also been unable to counter the adverse and blatantly false propaganda that has been churned out against us. There are two reasons for this; one is glaring lack

nation and its leaders, both are in deep trouble. In Pakistan there are too many PM-hopefuls and many look to come in through the back-door by building bridges with Pindi, putting priority on their own ambitions and the careers of their own close relations to the exclusion of all other motivation and interests. If Mian Sahib remains blind to such blatant personal agenda, he will not remain in power much longer. Add to that the fact that the Zee TV has led the assault against Pakistan in the electronic media, you have to ask the question, how is one expected to react to a hard-core

Zee TV person in a senior management position in our media? Whatever his antecedents, can we take the risk of his being at the nerve centre of our media strategy with complete access to planning and implementation? The taking up of cross border terrorism is a major threat to the integrity of Pakistan. We need a task force to engage in damage control. Already the Pakistan Army has been the target of vicious attack in the foreign media; the next step is to officially label us as the source of all Islamist terrorism in the world. Pakistan will not exist if we cannot maintain the sanctity of the Armed Forces. While one is certain that the concerned agencies will work overtime to dispel this for the sake of Pakistan and himself.

Mian Nawaz Sharif has to get in professional management into the media even if he has to hire the likes of Saatchi and Saatchi, J Walter Thompson, etc. to viz. (1) contain and deflect adverse propaganda, (2) counter such propaganda and (3) advise and help in re-structuring our media instruments to face the new challenges posed not only by the emerging situation but by high-tech advance-

ment in the world. Pakistan should wake up to the fact that "cross border terrorism" is the attempt to label us as originators of the latest weapon of war against our integrity and sovereignty and that we need to gear up our defences thereof as we are presently ill equipped to counter the enemy's

If Kathmandu can, why can't we?

istan, we are being drawn into

Sir, Kathmandu has imposed a ban on baby taxis (threewheeler autorickshaws). Calcutta did that long time back. This proves only one thing, that they do care about their citizens' well-being. But why are we so unfortunate that our leaders don't care a bit for us? They simply don't care if we are getting sick from pollution or if the IQ of the whole nation is diminishing because of the lead poisoning from inhaling the toxic fumes. All they care about is their own political gains.

Well, if the government is not going to impose a ban on the import of baby taxis (a's a hand-

ful of rich are benefitted from its import, as well as the exporting country), then it is an earnest request to the government not to allow these air and sound polluters to ply on the main city thoroughfares. Let them ply only in the outskirts of the city.

Dhaka.

Dr Sarah

Mr Lockwood's remarks

Sir, Mr Lockwood's remarks regarding the opposition's absence in the Asian Parliamentarians' Conference is unwarranted and he definitely exceeded his limit. But we must not forget the fact that when

any foreign dignitary comes, our political leaders lodge complaints about the internal political situation castigating the opponent political parties and highlighting their failures and seek redress from them. In fact our leaders themselves create an atmosphere for such comments but when such utterances go against any particular party only then that party decries; on the other hand, the opponent party perhaps appreci-

Khijir Ahmed Bagbari, Sylhet

Culvert wanted Sir, Janpur South Para of

Nargis Parvin Sirajgonj town is a densely

speak of the children and the old ones. It may create unwanted incidents at any time. So we urge the authority that the bamboo-made bridge be replaced by a culvert for the benefit of the large number of people of this area.

Strajgonj.