

A cheery SAFF triumph

Bravo, Bangladesh! WHEN they won the tough semi-final match against India, the general mood of expectation suddenly transformed into high hopes. Local fans would not have been happy with anything less than the top honours, and the boys have not disappointed them. Bangladesh are the new SAFF champions.

The final, however, turned out to be a long-drawn affair, though the supremacy of the Bangladesh side was never in question. The match was level-pegging at 1-1 after the extra time, and the penalty shootout, perhaps the most unjust way of finishing a thrilling encounter, could not be avoided. The boys again did not lose their equanimity, and clinched the issue with some accurate placement of the ball. The Maldives also deserve credit for holding their own for an excruciating 120 minutes.

Some of the local players have really done well in this tournament. Motiur Rahman Munna, who scored a tremendous goal against the Indians, got another chance to prove his class in the final, but his power-packed right-footer hit the crossbar. The players stood their ground with a sense of purpose and determination.

That said, George Kottan, whose two-year stint with our national team ended with the SAFF final, must be a happy man. He had to perform the difficult job of lifting the sagging morale of a side that had apparently lost its sense of direction. Kottan, however, did not give up and succeeded in developing the team into a tough-fighting unit. He has shown what a good coach can achieve.

Our football has got what it needed, and the fans would like to see the SAFF triumph as a turning point for it. The organisers should make some sincere efforts to push the game ahead, as the overall conditions are now ideal for it to scale new heights. The boys have to perform brilliantly in the days ahead so that we do not have to bask in the glory of just one memorable event.

Transport woes on the increase

More passenger vehicles may not be the only answer

WHEN the two-stroke autorickshaws and autotempos went off the city streets from January 1, it expectedly led to a vacuum in the public transport system. The alternative measures, undertaken by the government, proved inadequate to offset the crunch the ban on some 20,000 three-wheelers touched off. Albeit a little slow on the uptake, the government has so far tried hard to ease the predicament for the residents. It has commissioned more buses, both single- and double-deckers, for the Bangladesh Road Transport Corporation (BRTC) fleet and also paved the path for the private sector to bring in more passenger vehicles -- minibuses, human haulers, compressed natural gas-run autorickshaws and taxicabs. Unfortunately, some owners and drivers of the CNG-run three-wheelers and taxicabs are out to make a windfall at the expense of extreme inconvenience to commuters. As if this was not enough, the government made an upward revision of fuel prices, giving a handle to the transport owners to charge exorbitant fares from passengers. So, now the question is virtually more about reining in profiteering transport owners and drivers than meeting the shortage of passenger vehicles, although the latter holds the key to the former.

We would say the authorities need to move in both directions: arrange transport alternatives as well as put in place regulatory and monitoring measures to streamline the sector as a whole.

The government has given a specific timeframe to the owners to install fare-meters in the CNG-run three-wheelers. So far as the import of such meters is concerned, it has made little progress, which means fare control still looks a distant possibility. There is yet another problem: three-wheeler and cab drivers more often than not refuse to take passengers to places they want to go. The passengers can complain to the police about it, however, in most cases, time constraints and poor availability of law enforcers rule out such a remedy.

There is another dimension to it. In its bid to arrange more passenger vehicles, the government seems to have ignored the infrastructural reality. Simply put, the city road network is already overburdened and more vehicles could mean greater traffic chaos. The network needs dispersing. To add to the troubles, reckless driving on rickshaw-free roads has resulted in a few fatal accidents lately. Obviously, the transport authorities now face a multi-dimensional problem and need to come up with a comprehensive strategy to deal with it. The first step should be to put in place a monitoring mechanism to din sense into the transport operators' ears that they ought to serve the passengers, not exploit them. If this can be done, other ills will be naturally eliminated.

OMAR KHASRU

BNGLADESH has now been incorporated among the infamous and marked group of mostly Muslim majority terror-risk countries by a paranoid, suspicious, nervous, terrorist in every bush and under every bed mindset good old Uncle Sam. This, in effect, is a rudimentary case of blacklisting. The assertion is both untrue and manifestly unfair. This nation, however, will have to wear this insidious badge of disgrace in the foreseeable future.

The unwarranted US action is a slap in the collective face of peace-loving, tolerant, moderate and accommodating citizenry. It is also a pariah and vacuous victory for politicians of the rival party. Among other untenable and flawed raison d'être, the inclusion in the terror-risk list is a desired outcome of fallacious, phony and elaborate propaganda and word-peddling by a group of columnists and intellectuals. Our big brotherly big neighbour, with the strident and incessant but unfounded allegation of Bangladesh as a fundamentalist country and a safe sanctuary for Taliban and Al-Quida, played a major role. The Indian media joined in the disingenuous cacophonous chorus. Of all the countries of the world, India is perhaps least qualified to accuse any body else of intolerance and communalism. A harsh and indoctrinated party in collaboration with extremist fringe front groups rules the country. If the

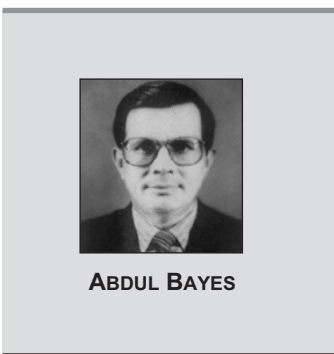
recent hateful, frenzied, divisive and insufferable campaigning by BJP in the Indian state of Gujarat is any indication of things as they are and things that are yet to come, India has no moral authority to lecture others on morality and ethics.

The unmerited US action will have deleterious impact on trade and commerce, in visa and travel barriers, in student admission in the US for higher study but none more harmful than for young male students, employees and especially a hundred thousand undocumented Bangladeshi workers (polite synonym for illegal aliens) in the US. And none of them deserve it. The magnitude of harassment, hassle, infringement, anxiety and aggravation that the expatriate Bangladeshis in the US will have to face is enormous, unenviable and unjustified.

The only remaining superpower has been totally unfair. But we cannot forget and forgive the local minions and purveyors for this turn of events. And special mention has to be made of the major opposition party. So what if in the name of opposition to the government this action has resulted in tremendously detrimental effect on the whole nation? So what if in an effort to disparage the current regime they have painted, with a broad brush, a contemptible label on the metaphorical and collective forehead of all citizens? They are least bothered and they could not care less.

The government cannot shun and shirk its responsibility either. Inept diplomacy,

Rural Bangladesh: Changes and challenges



TODAY, in this column, I shall attempt to present few of the aspects of the agrarian changes that swept Bangladesh during the last decade or so. And to this effect, I shall use the first ever inter-temporal data set generated by the International Rice Research Institute (IRRI). Just to remind the readers, IRRI conducted a survey in 62 villages of Bangladesh on 1240 households in 1987. In-depth investigation was carried out on socio-economic variables affecting people's lives and living. Structured questionnaires were administered and multi-stage random sampling technique was used. To examine the changes in parameters over the decade or so, the same questionnaires were administered on the same households (about 1900 as result of splitting households) in 2000. Thus the changes that could be in evidence from the data set relates to 12-13 years.

Inevitable inequality? Land is the scarcest of all factors of production throughout the world but, perhaps, more so in the context of Bangladesh. Here too many people tend to chase too few lands. Leaving the limited amount of land aside, it is further alleged that land distribution is not egalitarian either and the skewness is growing over time. To put the premise on an empirical plane, we usually categorise rural households into functionally landless (owning up to 0.2 ha), marginal (0.2-0.4 ha), small (0.41-1.00 ha), medium (1.01-2 ha) and large (2.0+ ha). In 1987, households owning up to 1 ha (i.e. functionally landless, marginal and small) constituted 83 per cent of all households in rural areas and the total land under their ownership was 32 per cent. Over the decade or so, they almost retained their position as a group but

the land under their ownership marginally increased to 36 per cent. On the other hand, the large land owning households (owning 2+ ha) comprised 8 per cent of all households and commanded 42 per cent of all lands in 1987. In 2000, this group constituted 5 per cent and claimed 37 per cent of land. The inequality in the ownership of land is quite evident in rural areas with little sign of abatement. Digging further into the data set, one could observe some revealing statistics. First, the average size of

percentage point every year. What about the distribution pattern of farm lands? In 1987, about 71 per cent of farm households (holding size up to 1 ha) cultivated 24 per cent of the total land. In 2000, they constituted about 81 per cent but could cultivate 46 per cent of land. Interestingly, farm households with 2+ ha comprised about 11 per cent and controlled about 36 per cent of land in 1987. But in 2000, they were only 4 per cent and controlled 23 per cent of the land. The following observa-

or even take back their rented out parcels. Ipso facto, modern technology would perpetuate poverty and inequality in rural areas. And finally, if a household does not have any other income generating options other than eking out a living by cultivating, on average, 0.67 ha of land, the income derived would meet only 70 per cent of the minimum calorie requirement required to lift the household out of poverty line. And here lies the growing importance of non-farm activities where government should step in

account of their lack of access to expensive inputs required to grow modern varieties. It is, perhaps, the proper time to test the hypotheses using IRRI data for the two comparable periods. In 1987, only 24 per cent of the cultivated land in Bangladesh was covered by irrigation -- the leading input in modern technology. The share rose by 2.5 times to 60 per cent in 2000. During the same period of time, rice area under modern varieties increased almost by 2.5 times from 33 per cent to 70

had 27 per cent of their parcels under irrigation in 1987. In 2000, 58 per cent of their rented in land remained covered by irrigation. In the case of the use of modern varieties, they were not laggards either. In 1987, the area under modern variety of rice was 43 per cent but in 2000, the share was 70 per cent. On the other hand, relatively more solvent tenants -- called owner tenants with half the cultivated land owned and the half rented in -- performed better by raising the area under irrigation from 21 per cent to 58 per cent and the rice area under modern variety from 32 per cent to 68 per cent. By and large, as far as adoption of modern rice variety and irrigation were concerned, tenants performed no worse -- even better -- than the owner cultivators.

BENEATH THE SURFACE

In 1987, only 24 per cent of the cultivated land in Bangladesh was covered by irrigation -- the leading input in modern technology. The share rose by 2.5 times to 60 per cent in 2000. During the same period of time, rice area under modern varieties increased almost by 2.5 times from 33 per cent to 70 per cent. But irrigation could have increased inequality among farm households due to the alleged differential access to the package and possibly due to the alleged "irrational instinct" of the small peasantry.

owned land per household declined from 0.61 ha in 1987 to 0.53 ha in 2000 -- by about 13 per cent. At disaggregated level, poor households' land size declined from 0.33 to 0.20 ha -- by about 43 per cent. That means, demographic pressures continue to hunt rural households, perhaps, more heinously, the poor ones. Second, concentration of land in the hands of fewer families continue in Bangladesh and land being the leading source of income in rural areas also increases inequality between the rich and the poor households. Third, land distribution in Bangladesh over the years -- a la Mahabub Hossain -- points to lower pauperization rather than differentiation. And finally, the concentration of owned land might justify a redistributive land reforms but, in the face of tiny size of holdings, could also nullify the economically efficient use of land.

tion follow from a closer examination of the data set on farms and farm size.

First, as far as farm size or cultivated land size is concerned, the average per household declined 16 per cent from 0.87 ha to 0.67 ha between 1987 and 2000. Special mention may be made of poor house holds whose cultivated land size declined from 0.56 to 0.41 ha -- by 30 per cent. Second, concentration of farm holdings also continues to grow but, perhaps, at a lesser extent than in the case of owned land. To use technical jargon, the gini coefficient -- depicting the depth of inequality -- should have lower value for farm land than for owned land. It is simply because farmers might cultivate more land than they own through the operation of tenancy market. That would moderate the inequality effect. Third, large land owners seem to be parting with cultivation as the main source of income and gradually moving towards more remunerative income generating options (e.g. business, transport, services etc.). Admittedly, these activities require literacy, credit and skill to which they have universal access. Fourth, the trend seems to reject an earlier hypothesis that modern technology would leave less land in the tenancy market as "profit maximizing" large land owners would cling to their holdings

with appropriate policy instruments to help the poor.

While the bad news is that some are leaving lands, the good news is that some others are cultivating their left out lands. These "some others" are the relatively poorer segment comprising functionally landless, marginal and even small farms in rural Bangladesh. Data reveal that area under tenancy increased from 23 per cent in 1987 to 34 per cent in 2000. Especially, poor households' area under tenancy rose from 35 to 51 per cent during the same period of time.

Small but smart!

Small-peasant farming system -- based on household labour -- have long been criticised on several grounds. First, they are fired at for their failure to exploit the economies of scale. Too small as the holdings are, allegedly, they cannot use efficient mechanical devices to reap home better harvests. Second, they are considered as "irrational" since they fail to take advantage of the new opened up opportunities in the face of risk-aversion. It may be mentioned here that both of these allegations loomed large on the eve of the advent of modern technology in Bangladesh. Many famous economists at that time argued that modern technology could bypass the small and marginal farms on

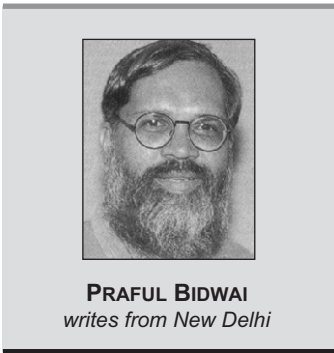
per cent. But irrigation could have increased inequality among farm households due to the alleged differential access to the package and possibly due to the alleged "irrational instinct" of the small peasantry.

The findings from the field stand quite contrary to the conventional wisdom: the rate of adoption of modern varieties and the intensity of irrigation use was higher among the small and the marginal farms. For example, large land owners (2.01+ha) had 22 per cent of their land under irrigation in 1987 and the share rose to 48 per cent in 2000. The areas under irrigation of small farms increased from 28 per cent to 67 per cent. Again, large land owners had 28 per cent of the rice area under modern varieties in 1987 and 62 per cent in 2000. The figures for small farms are 45 and 75 per cent, respectively.

Tenants not trailing!

It is generally argued that modern technology could bypass tenants -- either owner or pure -- in the face of surrendering a part of the share in output while, at the same breath, shouldering alone the input costs. But it could be observed from field data that pure tenants -- without any owned land whatsoever and mostly meaning the poorest in the village --

Politics of exclusion-inclusion : A confused policy on NRIs



INDIA'S public is witnessing three bizarre contradictions. The government organises a gigantic Pravasi festival to felicitate Persons of Indian Origin (PIOs) living in 130 countries. This celebration, with lavish banquets, ends at Rashtrapati Bhavan. But the same government imposes the passports of Kashmiris -- Hurriyat Conference leaders.

Our ministers speak in high tones of India's inclusiveness. But the Home Minister threatens a witchhunt of people merely suspected to be "foreigners". Mr Advani's target, unsupported by evidence, is 15 million Bangladeshis living "illegally", besides 11,500 Pakistanis, who will be summarily deported. Third, our leaders prattle on about vasudhaiva kutumbakam (the world is our family). But the government says it will grant citizenship only to 4.5 million of our 20-odd million PIOs, in the US, Canada, Australia, Singapore and the European Union. At work here are incompatible notions of inclusion and exclusion. PIOs comprise four distinct

Can we extend citizenship to foreign nationals, but deny rights to those who, we vehemently claim, are our citizens -- Kashmiris from the Valley, Muslims from Gujarat?

What, apart from "dollar apartheid", explains the exclusion of countries with the strongest, richest, continuity with India, like Mauritius, Fiji, Surinam, Guyana?

There are other problems--in the PIOs' description as India's "dias-

groups. Oldest are 19th century "indentured" labour. Second are the one million-plus Indians who went to Britain in the last century, some via East Africa--mostly shopkeepers, blue-collar workers and postal clerks.

The third group comprises post-1973 Gulf migrants--without full residency rights. The fourth consists of affluent professionals and businessmen who migrated to the US,

ment flows into India, and four percent of foreign direct investment.

By contrast, humble Gulf-based workers remitted four times more money. Without this, India's economy couldn't have survived the 1970's oil-shocks.

Affluent NRIs, like Swaraj Paul, Lakshmi Mittal, and Hinduja, invest in India out of the profit motive, not patriotism. Mr Mittal, the world's richest (non)Indian, says: "[The]

a bargain over investment. It's about universal rights for all citizens.

The "PIO Card" is pragmatic insofar as it permits a non-citizen certain conveniences for 10 years -- in return for \$500. But citizenship is different.

Dual citizenship may not even be practical. Many nations don't accept the concept. Most democracies define rights in non-ethnic terms. Why does the government so

network. Yet, the parivar drums up xenophobia, e.g. against Ms Sonia Gandhi.

A rift was noticeable at the Pravasi "jamboree". On one side were OECD-based businessmen who admiringly heard the likes of Mr Advani defining Indianness solely via Hindutva. His offensive statement about every Indian having Ram and Sita engraved in his/her heart brought a sharp reaction from Nadira, V.S. Naipaul's wife, who is sympathetic to Hindutva. Panchajanya editor Tarun Vijay loutishly attacked Nadira as a "Non-Resident Pakistani".

On the other side were liberal-Left scholars like Amartya Sen and Meghnad Desai, who stressed Indian culture's inclusiveness. Sen brilliantly argued against the kupamanduk (frog-in-the-well) attitude. He said some of Ancient India's greatest accomplishments were the result of interaction with China, Arabia, Greece and Rome.

Nadira rebuffed Vijay: she was born in Kenya, carried a British passport, and was married to a Trinidad Brahmin. She said the exchange reminded her of Pakistan: "When I questioned Islamabad's human rights record ... they attacked me ... [and] ridiculed me for not knowing Urdu, and they said I was sympathetic to Hindus ..."

Is this the kind of intolerance that we should emulate? Should we counter mad mullahs through imbecile sadhus? Should we, like Mr Narendra Modi, study how Pakistan's madrassas work--to create "Hindu" schools of violence? Isn't it time to reject insane politics?

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OPINION

Indemnity Ordinance 2003 : A rational judgment

MILA MOHAMMAD

PLEASE refer to the commentary, "PM will be wise to withdraw the ordinance". I am very much tempted to quote the first sentence of the commentary, as it says "A place in the Guinness Book of World Records is now virtually assured for us for having a law to protect the killing, torture and jailing of thousands". It urges the Hon'ble Prime Minister to save the nation from living in shame. In this backdrop, we may recall the hue and cry raised by The Daily Star in particular over the spiralling crescendo of devastating law and order situation that engulfed the whole nation. Despite genuine attempts, ability of government to arrest or reverse the situation had been sadly inadequate. This led to continuous and ruthless criticism over its failure by The Daily Star. We thus all remember the circumstances that necessitated the launching of Operation Clean Heart. I need not mention how this operation was welcomed and received spontaneous acclamation across the board including the leader of the opposition. A plethora of articles, appreciating the initiative, has been published not only in local but international media as well. As a very recent example, International Herald Tribune has published in its

January 15, 2003 issue an article titled "On Dhaka's streets, two radical changes". Regarding Operation Clean Heart, it says that although it raises human rights concerns, it has been used in a legal manner and "there is no doubt that the campaign is popular among all levels of society, the poor perhaps most of all." It also says that "Begum Zia seems sincere in her efforts to break the links between crime and politics that have long besmirched Bangladesh democracy and caused otherwise sympathetic aid donors to tighten their purse strings."

It is, therefore, ironical and truly regrettable that the commentary makes no reference to the background and compulsions under which the drive was launched. In no way is it an exaggeration to say that the Armed Forces have protected the large interest of the people in a situation that had gone beyond control. It lacks balance, impartiality and objectivity in weighing the magnitude and dimension of the compulsions facing the government in comparison to the legal concerns that the commentary has highlighted. The latter can't be ignored but they also can't be viewed in isolation. It can't also be forgotten that dire charges were made accusing the government of having bolstered the expansion of a new military culture and the difficulties involved in having the

army return to barracks. Obviously, one incentive would have been to provide indemnity. On balance is the easing of horrendous situation of complete law and order breakdown against preventing excesses that were inevitable given the magnitude of the situation. For many it boiled down to protecting the army instead of protecting the criminals.

The good faith of the government as well as Armed Forces in conducting Operation Clean Heart is beyond question, as we see that a good number of arrested persons belong to the ruling party. The criminal transgression was so deep-rooted that it was almost impossible to offset, given existing facilities and tactics. A more concentrated and focused technique was essential to frighten the crooks. All this was done for the greater interest of the country as a whole. An ordinance of this kind is, therefore, necessary to provide immunity to the army troops since they were deployed in the greater national interest of curbing crime and terrorism in the society.

The question before us is, whether the ordinance is "ultra vires" of the basic structure of the Constitution. It can't be fractured even by Parliament or the Supreme Court. This indemnity was promulgated as per article 46 of our Constitution, which lays down specific circumstances and an environment,

under which indemnity can be applied.

During the whole period of the operation, as we saw, the government was fully conscious and vigilant about its neutrality and fairness and the joint force also maintained the best possible restraint over their activities. In case of overindulgence committed by the army personnel, appropriate departmental disciplinary actions had been taken against them. However, ultimately, a sense of security has returned to the people, which was the main objective of the operation.

I would like to end up with a line as mentioned in the article of the International Herald Tribune, "Sacrificing individual rights may be necessary to ensure the safety of the majority". To wrap up "it is rather better to have a position in the Guinness book for restoring the law and order situation in the country than to top the list of the countries catalogued according to worst law and order situations."

In conclusion, I would like to say that we have enough detractors to sully the name and image of our country from within it. It is a shame when responsible citizens seek to do the same from within the country through blind prejudice.

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