

## Lawmen target of assault?

*Police reform holds the ultimate answer*

CRIMINALITY is taking an unusual course. Police are increasingly coming under attack, particularly from a band of political extremists in the southern districts. Two constables were killed last Saturday in an armed attack on the police in Bagerhat district. Lawmen have been doped to be robbed of their weapons. We are not going further back to recount other stories.

Perhaps, the vulnerability of police was never felt so acutely in the past. Obviously, killing of law enforcers is not an ordinary crime and is likely to be interpreted as a dangerous undermining of the enforcement mechanism itself. The police image has been lowered in the public eye for many reasons, so much so that occasional successes pulled off by them tend to be overlooked. Let's not forget, they are the government's most obvious law enforcers insofar as dealing with the public goes.

The police appear helpless in certain cases with poor equipment or logistical backing. In other cases, they are blame-worthy on account of poor intelligence work or insidious connections. They have clearly been outnumbered and outgunned by the extremists or pampered criminal rackets in some encounters. Given the overall situation, it will be wrong to assume that hyped moves like reshuffling the police administration at the top or in the middle rungs would be effective enough to deal with this new wave of crimes.

As we have written many times in this column, the solution lies in increasing the efficiency of the police manifold which, in turn, will depend on better training and motivation across the board. Of course, the police will have to be equipped with modern weapons and communication gadgets in order to enable them to outsmart the criminals. So it boils down to the same old theme: there is no substitute for police reform. It is often heard that the armed forces must be modernised to keep pace with the fast changing global situation. Don't the police need to be modernised for the sake of internal security? The attacks on police are a proof of the fact that we are not doing enough to meet the challenges on the law and order front.

## Project cars being spirited away

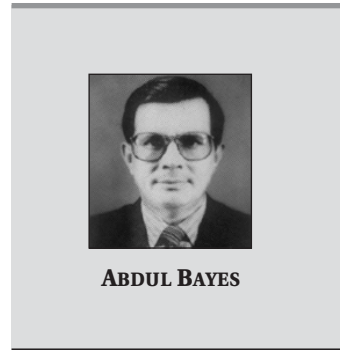
*Immediate investigation called for*

IT is probably another prime example of widespread corruption and bad governance prevailing in the country. We are talking about an investigative report published in the Bangla daily Prothom Alo on the disappearance of cars bought under different projects from time to time. It clearly reveals that more than one thousand vehicles attached to various development projects in the last seven years were not sent to the government transport pool nor do the authorities have any clue of where those have gone after the expiry of such undertakings! At least there are some records of how many vehicles had been allocated since 1995, but those allocated beforehand remain completely unaccounted for. Governments seemingly suffered from amnesia there!

According to regulations, all vehicles should be handed over to the government's central transport pool within three weeks after a project ends. Anyone violating the regulation is liable to be penalised with a fine. What a small punishment for such a big crime. But even that apology for a regulation has been violated with complete impunity a greater pity that? All these vehicles were used in various government projects, which means that the ultimate responsibility for the project officials' failure to account for the automobiles lies with the different ministries. The vehicles could not have vanished like this without their knowledge. Therefore, the allegations made against them can't be wished away.

The question is where did vehicles go? Whether they have been sold off or given away as gifts or being rented out -- someone has to be accountable for that. We are dumbfounded to learn from the way things look now that no department ever felt the need to regulate this phenomenal corruption going on so openly and for so long? Now that the newspaper report has brought out the facts it is incumbent upon the authorities to order an immediate investigation into the scandal and punish those responsible for it.

# Of family farms and plantations : Boosting export



ABDUL BAYES

YUJIRO Hayami, the eminent economist engaged in rural research, dealt with the issue of family farms and plantations under globalization in a recent research paper. I reckon that this is an important topic for the general readers as well as for those studying agricultural economics. The reasons are not far to seek. Plantations are portrayed as the products of multinationals and within a country, of capitalists while small farms are considered to be uneconomic and unsustainable. One needs to delve deep into the debate and draw policy conclusions. *En passant*, in tropical Asia, family farms and plantations are the two contrasting modes of agricultural production. Allegedly, the systems are least recognised and researched in academic angles and hence assume importance in enhancing the frontiers of knowledge on their relative strengths and weaknesses. Hayami's eloquent exposition embraced an examination of the past performance of these two systems and then shed some insights into the potentials and prospects under a globalised regime.

"Plantation" points to large estates producing a crop (or crops) for commercial purposes where the use of hired labourers under a centralised management system is prominently present. In Bangladesh context, we may think of tea estates as such plantations. "In Asia, it is a new institution brought by Western colonialism for extracting tropical agricultural products for export to home countries, which became specifically common after the 1870s with the innovation in transportation including the opening of Suez Canal and use of steamships and railways. In contrast, family farms, in which operators try to stake out subsistence from small tracts of land cultivation mainly by their family labour, is the old institution existed since time immemorial". Under the traditional paradigm that developed under colonialism, plantations purport modern enclaves geared to international markets. Family farms or "peasants", on the other hand, are dominated by subsistence farming and are accused of not responding to profit incentives created by the changes in market demands and technology. To the critics, family or small farms are irrational and inefficient. Are family farms far off from incentives? Are they irrational and inefficient?

**Beautiful small**  
The "stereotyped" view suffered a rebuff from three great development economists e.g. Theodore W. Schultz (1964), Hla Myint (1965) and W. Arthur Lewis (1970). Schultz convincingly argued that small farms in traditional agriculture are rational and efficient in resource allocation and that they remain poor not because they are irresponsive to economic incentives but because only limited technical and

market opportunities are available, to which they can respond". Drawing upon the development experiences of Southeast Asia, both Lewis and Myint established Schultz's hypothesis and described how they responded vigorously to market incentives in opening new lands for the production of export cash crops. Available empirical researches in Bangladesh also support the contention where small peasants are observed to be no less responsive to incentives (where available) than large farms. It is therefore established that not only plantations but also family farms could be at the cockpit of

farms are able to utilise the abilities of family workers with low opportunity costs and little employment opportunities outside home.

### Bountiful large

There are scale economies inherent in the production of tropical export crops under plantations. But plantation crops could also be grown successfully by family farms. There are few crops that are subject to strong scale economies at the farm production level. However, significant scale economies emerge only at the levels of processing and marketing. If the supply of farm-

side edge on exports but not for domestic consumption so that family farms mainly produce them. The crops for which centralised processing and marketing are not needed, plantations have no significant edge over family farms. Typical examples are cocoa and coconuts. The fermentation of cocoa and the drying and smoking of coconuts to make copra can be easily handled in small lots, with small capital and small indigenous tools and training. Sugar could be another candidate for plantation owing to inherent scale economies from production to extraction but perhaps not

exploitation of natural resources which Myint called "the vent-for-surplus development".

### Plantations and problems

Hayami highlights few problems with plantations. First, plantations have to be capital-friendly operations mainly due to spatially dispersed and ecologically diverse farm operations. Conventional loans from government and the easy access to private credit also encourages substitution of capital for labour. But in many countries, such substitutions become socially inefficient in a regime of relatively abundant

hinge on a volley of factors such as population density of the region, the development of public infrastructure, the nature of crops grown and the quality of management. "It is however inevitable that the negative impacts of the plantation system tend to outweigh its positive contributions as population increases in once-sparsely populated regions and as unused land becomes scarce".

### Hayami-hopes

Hayami suggests that in the backdrop of economies shifting from land-abundant to land-scarce stage, it would be appropriate for tropical economies to promote family farms, not plantation system. Family farms proved to be equally or more efficient producers of tropical export crops using the family labor and low supervision costs relative to plantations based on hired labour. That does not mean that plantations should be dismantled through coercive measures. For the promotion of family farms, government should provide not only public goods like physical infrastructure but also build up research and extension systems. The responsiveness of the small farms to incentives through research and extensions have amply been demonstrated by the adoption of modern varieties of rice in Bangladesh and other crops in other parts of the world.

To help small farms achieve efficiency, agricultural products and input marketing network should be strengthened in rural areas. An interesting point that Hayami drives home is the fact that in low income countries, small farms are not that much exploited by the middlemen -- as they tend to operate under competitive conditions with thin marketing margin -- but by state monopolies. "The exploitation of smallholders by government monopoly practices in agricultural product and input marketing has been significantly reduced in the 1990s owing largely to structural adjustment policies under the lead of IMF and World Bank." But the notion that the market environment facing smallholders are competitive in the absence of government intervention does not mean that there exists no scope for government to step in. In fact, the transaction costs could be reduced by an extent by providing public investment in communications, information and social sectors.

And the last but not the least is the removal of "urban-biased" and "landlord-biased" policies historically adopted to fuel industrialisation and large landowners. The cost of protection to industries in terms of efficiency and social welfare has amply been demonstrated. Governments should shed the earlier approach and come with small-friendly policies.

### Last words

It appears that plantations have been faced with some perennial problems with rise in population density and fall in land frontiers. However, two options are available to make the export of tropical crops efficient. First, plantations could embrace subcontracting arrangements with a large number of small farms. And second, small and family farms should be encouraged through provisions of infrastructure, research and marketing and other public goods. Large may be bountiful but small is always beautiful!

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## BENEATH THE SURFACE

It appears that plantations have been faced with some perennial problems with rise in population density and fall in land frontiers. However, two options are available to make the export of tropical crops efficient. First, plantations could embrace subcontracting arrangements with a large number of small farms. And second, small and family farms should be encouraged through provisions of infrastructure, research and marketing and other public goods. Large may be bountiful but small is always beautiful!

commerce and concomitantly, the effective carrier of economic development. And in fact, as Hayami argued, under the first wave of globalisation by which tropical economies were integrated with the world market, small farms were not lagging behind, if not leading it.

There are many advantages of family farms but let us find a few. First, small or family farms predominantly rely on family workers. In the face of being dragged by demographic pressures, they earnestly devote their labour on the small parcels to eke out a living. They try to maximize family's well being subject to given constraints. And like hired workers, these families do not shirk labour in the absence of supervision. It is especially pronounced in agricultural production characterised by inherent difficulties in the enforcement of hired labour. The problem is not so acute in industries where there is standardised work, which are relatively easy to monitor even under a remote control system. The second advantage of family farms -- following from the first -- lies in crop cultivation covering areas of far and near that warrants constant care and commitment. The subsistence farms cannot afford to have the luxury of shirking, as it would economically ruin the family. Large plantations are mostly suitable for monoculture under hired labour and managers. And finally, non-family operators could make reckless use of draft animals and machines and thus causing capital loss.

Therefore, "a landless person with a family who owns animals and/or machines and possesses some managerial skill will find it more profitable to rent in land than to hire out his endowments separately. Similarly, a large land owner will find it more profitable to rent out land than to manage a large operation because of scale diseconomies arising from the use of hired workers". Thus, Hayami argues that there may be technological scale economies arising from the use of indivisible inputs such as managerial ability and animals/machines but that could be offset by the presence of scale diseconomies from the use of hired labour. This phenomenon shows that nuclear family farm is usually the most effective barring some plantation crops that need large-scale processing and marketing. And finally, family

produced raw materials is time-bound i.e. to be supplied at a fixed time schedule, the vertical integration between large estates and large scale centralised processing/marketing management becomes a call of the hour. Examples are -- processing of palm oil, sisal and tea. "The manufacturing of black tea at a standardised quality for export requires a modern fermentation plant into which fresh leaves must be fed within a few hours after plucking. The need for close coordination between farm production and large scale processing underlies the traditional use of the plantation system for black tea manufacture. Unfermented green tea, in contrast, remains predominantly the product of family farms in China and Japan."

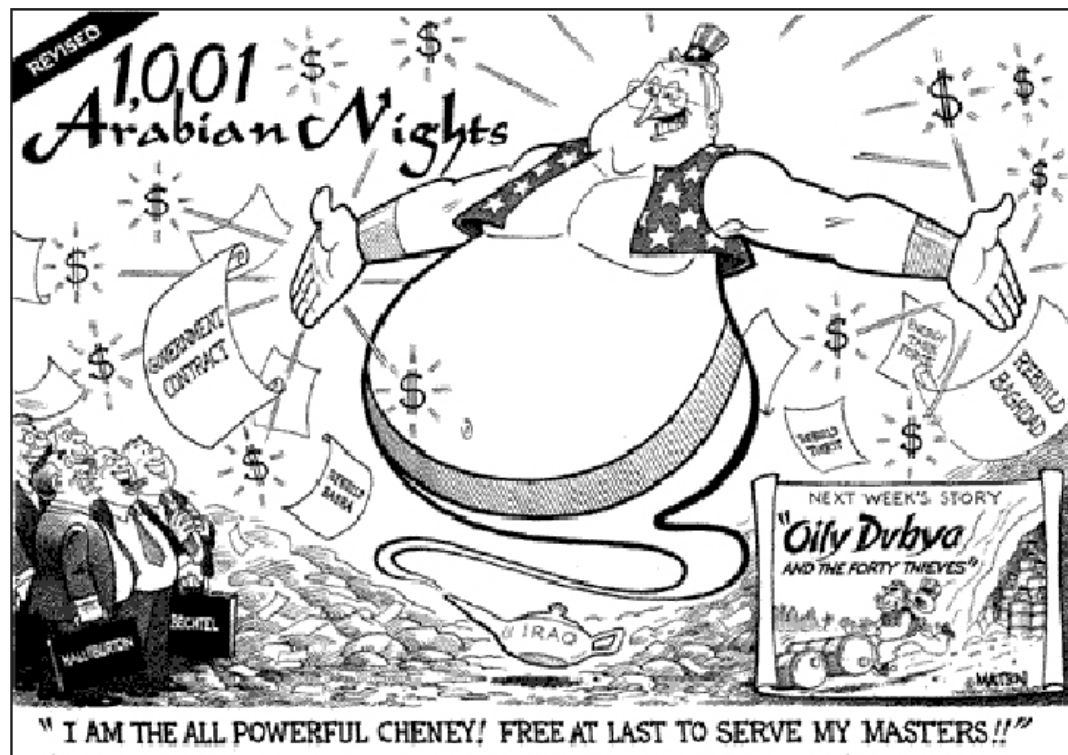
Take the case of Banana exports. Harvested fruits must be packed, sent to the wharf, and loaded on a refrigerated boat within a day. A boatful of bananas that can meet the quality standards of foreign buyers must be collected within a few days. Therefore the whole production process from planting to harvesting to exporting must be controlled to meet shipment schedule. Thus plantation has a deci-

so much urgently as for tea or bananas.

Plantation system failed to fare well in regions where indigenous population had established family farms. Admittedly, the system developed in response to increase demand for tropical products by industrialised nations but in many cases regions did not have suitable physical conditions and significant peasant population to match the demand with supply. *Ipso facto*, virgin lands had to be cleared, physical infrastructure had to be built and labourers from more populous regions had to be imported and trained. Thus the establishment of plantations required huge capital investment and to internalise the gains, large tracts of lands for cultivation. "Viewed from this perspective, it follows that the plantation system evolved not because it was generally a more efficient mode of productive organisation than the peasant mode. Instead, the system was adopted because it was the most effective type of agricultural organisation for extracting the economic benefit accruing from the exploitation of sparsely populated virgin areas, typically in the development process based on the

labour and scarce capital. Second, agricultural land tends to be cultivated less intensively under plantation system that employs mainly wage labour and usually practices monoculture. "Complicated inter-cropping and crop-livestock combination are more difficult to manage in the command system, implying that both labor input and income per hectare are lower in plantations. This is a source of inefficiency in the plantation system where land becomes scarce relative to labour under the pressure of population growth. In contrast, small-sized family farms tend to cultivate land more intensively". Third, the problem of bio-diversity following the production of a single crop assumes more importance in a regime of environmental concerns. Fourth, plantation system breeds class conflicts between labourers and managers/capitalists. In terms of the criterion of social stability, plantation system performs worse than a system where relatively homogeneous small producers owning small assets perform agricultural operations.

But whether plantation system would bag home plus points would



## OPINION

# Lauch disasters: Where lies the remedy?

CAPT HUSAIN IMAM

ON Monday, April 21, 2003 two motor launches MV Mitani and ML Mazlishpur were caught in nor-wester and capsized -- one in the river Buriganga near Pagla and the other in the Meghna near Bhairob. 'Mitani' had more than 400 passengers on board and 'Mazlishpur' was carrying a bridal party of 100. More than half of the people travelling by these two ill-fated launches are reported to have died in those tragic incidents. Launch disasters are not new phenomena for us. Every year we witness similar incidents with shock and horror. Most of the casualties take place either during the religious festivals when thousands of people from the urban areas rush to their village homes in the coastal or riverine districts availing river transports or during the inclement weather of the *Kalbaishakhi* and monsoon season

when rivers at times become turbulent. This time the two ill-fated vessels, having been caught in the nor-wester (*Kalbaishakhi*) capsized and sank. As usual, the government has ordered investigation of the incidents. The results are known to all. Needless to say, given the track record of investigations, the public has little interest or confidence in such investigations. As an instant measure, the government ordered stoppage of plying of all inland passenger vessels from 3 pm to 8 pm every day during the nor-wester season. I wonder what they would have done during the religious festivals. Would they have stopped people going home using river transports? No, this is not a solution. We do not sever our head when we have headache. The launch owners have rightly voiced their opposition to this "Tughlaki" order and finally been able to convince the government to withdraw the order. Being a seafarer with experience of working with the P.R.S. and then

BIWTC for nearly a decade (1971-81) I daresay with reasonable confidence that these incidents of launch disaster taking place every year, notably almost all in the private sector, can be greatly reduced if not totally eliminated if we are serious about it and address the problem in its true perspectives.

Causes of recurring launch disaster in the country are many. As have been highlighted by different quarters from time to time, specially after each incident, these include: faulty design, structural weakness, constructional failures, lack of adequate safety measures, absence of qualified crew, weakness in inspection procedures, obtaining of fitness certificate through unfair means, overloading, disregard for weather forecasts etc, etc. While there can be no denying that all these are more or less contributory factors to the incidents, if I am asked to identify one single reason, I shall without any hesitation mention that it is the inherent fault in the design and construc-

tion of these motor launches.

There has been little or no consideration for stability criterion either in designing or in constructing these vessels. If properly examined for stability, very few of these vessels will be found complying with the most important stability requirement of having positive metacentric height (GM) in different conditions of weather and load. The result being, when these vessels get listed to one side or other either by external force such as wind and waves or by internal movement of passengers in a panicky situation, they tend to list further and further and finally capsize. The second alarming fact is that these vessels by fault of their designs do not have easy emergency exits to enable the passengers to jump over board in times of necessity. The third dreadful concern is that most of these vessels are not equipped with sufficient and easily accessible life saving appliances such as, life jackets, life buoys, life rafts etc. If

they were, death toll would have been far too low.

To summarise, if the vessels are designed, built and equipped in accordance with the standard rules of construction of passenger vessels meant for the waterways they are intended for, the incidents of launch disasters can be greatly reduced. According to one newspaper report, there have been more than 500 launch disasters in the country in the last 27 years. The figure should not have been more than 50 had there been any serious attempt to rectify these basic faults.

An article titled "Launch disaster: Looking into the causes" jointly written by Mr Zahidur Rahman, Chartered Engineer, Fellow, Institute of Marine Engineers and Ex local Chief of Lloyds and myself following a similar launch disaster in the river Meghna was published in The Daily Star on January 24, 2001. I find it justifiable to repeat here a paragraph of that article which

read as follows: It should be a matter of great shame and disgrace on our part to have to admit that accidents and casualties in our river transport system shot up astronomically compared to that of colonial days. Despite the establishment of IWTA as a regulatory body and promulgation of many statutory rules and regulations for the construction and operation of the mechanised rivercraft, the almost unsafe and un-sea/river worthy vessels continued to ply and incidents involving loss of lives in hundreds continued to multiply because of the gross negligence or indifference to public safety by the profit mongering launch owners on the one side and the corrupt regulatory bodies on the other.

Capt Husain Imam (Master Mariner UK) is ex-Marine Superintendent, BIWTC.

## TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR

Letters will only be considered if they carry the writer's full name, address and telephone number (if any). The identity of the writers will be protected. Letters must be limited to 300 words. All letters will be subject to editing.

### Arabic signage in ZIA

While the enthusiastic readers of *The Daily Star* Letters Page are engaged in a fierce debate over the Arabic signage in ZIA, the neon sign in question is still there, flashing with full glory and the authorities concerned seem least bothered about public objection and are not at all interested in taking the sign off!

Samira Khan  
Banani, Dhaka

only to divert the original argument into a religious one.

The ZIA neon sign debate had nothing to do with religion. The only point of argument should have been whether it is necessary to install an Arabic sign in the international airport of a country where Bengali is the mother tongue and English, as in majority of the countries used as a second language. Had the authorities installed the sign in Hindi or Spanish, would similar arguments have been raised? Would those hypersensitive people still be able to relate the issue to religion?  
Asif-ud-doula

Mohammadpur, Dhaka

All those debates that have taken place in this Letters Page, debate related to religious issue top the list-- "Make Arabic compulsory in schools", "Hijab controversy" and now "Arabic neon sign in ZIA".

So many serious issues which need urgent attention remains overlooked but anything having remote relation to religion raises long lasting debates without reaching any headway. But what's the point of these debates? Isn't religion a very private matter? And shouldn't it remain separated from our national life?  
Anik Arman

Dhaka

I am surprised to learn that a huge media hype is generated by the news of displaying Arabic sign at ZIA. I do not agree that the Arabic sign is at all necessary at the first place. But the arguments are now reached to a political dimension and on the secular nature of our constitution. In a civil society representative democracy is a full proof system which by virtue of its nature implements and safeguards the secularity in the society. Democracy and transparency remain the supreme custodian to uphold the secularism. Therefore the separate secularism slogan is not needed if the society is

democratic. By legislature Britain is not a secular country; it is a Christian country. Nevertheless in custom and in the rule of law it strictly adheres to the policy of secularism.

Another shocking dilemma in our constitution is the proclamation of Nationalism and Socialism at the same time. How on earth this two can be practised side by side. The objectives and aspirations for both of them are opposite in nature. Socialism preaches internationalism which is a stark contrast with the proponents of Nationalism. Our constitutional experts might have muddled up the matter or are ignorant about the basic principles of politics and in the history

of making of the nation states in the world stage. May I take the opportunity as a reader of *The Daily Star* to my dear contributors to start a debate on such constitutional matters which need to be addressed in full for the benefit of our society?  
Mohammad Salahuddin  
London

### Is patriotism a crime?

I was wondering what would be the main charge against Tariq Aziz, Deputy Prime Minister of the fallen Iraqi government. Patriotism? He was loyal to his nation, to his people and to the administration he served. Since neither USA nor Iraq is a signatory to the Interna-

tional Criminal Court, some experts think it may be difficult to prosecute Iraqi "war criminals" in an international tribunal.

Of course one could argue that by not wanting to fight a war and asking for UN inspection team to return Iraqi officials have violated the norms of war and are, therefore, "war criminals". Actually, the legal problem can be solved quite easily. Mr. Donald Rumsfeld should go the American television to declare that "any person who fails to support USA given the choice between defending his own country and supporting the invading United States (defined as the administration headed by Mr. George W. Bush

and his advisors) will be deemed to have committed crime against humanity.

Besides absence of evidence will not be treated as the evidence of absence. This new legal precedence will apply to all those captured in Iraq. "Why I choose Mr. Rumsfeld? His defense of looting in Iraq was so convincing that he could be trusted to do it again." An Oxford professor has recently written a piece in Los Angeles Times on the premeditated nature of the loot of Iraqi national and civilisational treasure (see "Method to Madness in Museum Looting", LA Times April 17, 2003). So nothing seems impossible any more.  
Habib Khondker  
Singapore

I really don't understand why people relate everything with religion and create an unnecessary complication