

Hiatus in NATO on mend

G-8 summit proves a catalyst

It was a welcome return of normality between North Atlantic partners hitherto cast adrift by their differences centring around Iraq war. The first healing touch was glimpsed on the opening day of the G-8 summit at Evian, Sunday. The host French President Jacques Chirac and US President George Bush burying their Iraq hatchet smiled and shook hands firmly before the latter was ushered by the former on to the hotel patio where leaders from other countries were waiting.

The differences over Iraq caused an unprecedented breach between long time NATO partners and western powers; the house seemingly divided, had on one side the US, UK, Spain and Belgium and on the other France, Germany and Russia. Set against this backdrop, we welcome the unfolding signs of rapprochement which hopefully will have a sobering influence on the shape of things to come by way of fostering a just world order.

The war on Iraq was unjustified when it was launched and it looks equally so even after its execution. The US' touting of the presence of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) in Iraq ostensibly as the reason for waging the war stands negated; even after two months of the total US-British control of the country no traces of WMD have been found. The world has more grounds to say now that the war was eminently avoidable. The reality is, after the war we have a more complicated world calling for a unified, collectively statesmanlike approach to be steered clear of the confusion besetting it.

The whole world would like to believe that the voice of the people will be truly echoed and represented by their leaders in future. The Iraq war highlighted differences between the world public opinion and the avowed policy of some powerful western countries. No good can come to the world from triumphalism of the few. What the NATO partners experienced was, to our mind, differences of opinion rather than a crack or cleavage in the fold. On that note, we would like to see the US appreciate why Germany, France and Russia behaved the way they did on the Iraq crisis. That their position was closer to world public opinion is also a fact of life. The point is, for a stronger fight against terrorism there is no substitute for a consensual coordinated approach addressing the roots of the complex phenomenon.

The blend of participation by leaders of developed and developing nations at the G-8 summit and the focus on Africa, poverty and AIDS in developing nations are a welcome path-breaker for such an otherwise exclusive gathering of big powers.

Cheating at exams

A change of attitude noticeable

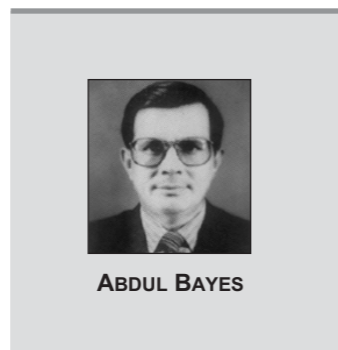
SINCE the beginning of the Higher Secondary Certificate examinations we have been witnessing scenes at the test centres that are markedly different from the exam days of previous years. At least that's the impression we get from the reports in newspapers. We haven't seen any large scale cheating; we haven't seen students being searched in public for copy chits; there has not been any pandemonium at the centres nor have we heard of thousands of students being expelled for cheating.

Undoubtedly, the credit for this should largely go to the strict measures taken by the government. There doesn't seem to be any doubt that steps like frisking at the entrance, fining for copy shreds found, installation of close circuit camera at troublesome centres and deploying Rapid Action Force for vigilance brought the change in scenes we had been used to for last few years. But all these measures have not been hundred per cent successful either.

We have seen photographs of madrassah students falling at the feet of State Minister for Education on being caught redhanded. We have also read stories of teachers beaten up by students expelled for cheating. The measures have more or less proved effective in bringing down the number of expellees to a considerable extent. And that's the kind of success the authorities should build upon to make the exams as fool-proof as possible.

It's now more than obvious that sincere efforts by authorities do bear fruit. We simply hope that taking cue from this they will continue to strive for better results including a change in the social attitude of resignation to, or even acceptance of, anything that's not normal or legal. To curb the menace of cheating in examinations, nothing short of coordinated efforts by teachers, parents and the saner majority of the student community are needed.

Diversity, diversification and development



ABDUL BAYES

MOST of the South Asian (SA) economies are mainly agrarian. However, appreciably, agricultural performance all over SA has been improving over time. An important characteristic of SA is its diversity in climate, soils and other agro-ecological conditions that permits farmers to cultivate a variety of crops, rear different species of livestock and catch wide range of fish species from various sources. The Simpson Index of Diversity went up from 0.59 in 1981-82 to 0.64 in 1999-2000 indicating a gradual movement away from crop production to fruits and vegetables. There are, of course, inter country variations. Bangladesh, Nepal and Bhutan displayed less diversity over the years compared to others. In Bangladesh, for example, rice is at the peak of the products produced accounting for more than three-fourths of the cultivated area. But the rest one-fourth area is, reportedly, highly diversified.

On the other hand, the SA countries are poor and have long been leaning on protection to promote economic progress. But with growing globalisation, the countries are rightly on their toes to face the chiming challenges thrown by globalisation. Since the late 1980s, they have been pursuing a process of economic reforms. The hitherto closed doors began to open up. Most of them have laudably liberalised economy to become more open than ever. But despite the euphemism enshrined in the so-called openness, concerns also loom large with unfolding globalisation of agriculture. The changes threw both challenges and opened up new opportunities before them. There are two contrasting possibilities that SA economies are

faced with liberalization of agricultural sector. First, apprehensions that influx of "heavily" subsidised cheap imports from the developed countries might swell the market to cripple domestic production and employment. And second, there is a glimmer of hope hovering around the prospects of raising agricultural exports, especially of high value and labour-intensive commodities.

In a recent research conducted by the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), the

marketing costs and easy and quick disposal of commodities. It also reduces the risk of post harvest losses from spoilage. The observations of the authors seem to be in consort with micro level findings of the present writer. With the completion of the Bongabandhu Bridge (Jamuna bridge) and establishment of feeder roads connecting the highways, production and marketing of perishable products in the northern regions of Bangladesh increased. The price spread of

towards horticultural crops. Relative profitability emerged as an important element in decision making. The regression coefficient is positive and significant. Fruits and vegetables are highly profitable compared to cereals and other crops. For example, relative profitability of fruits was more than eight times higher than cereals. The corresponding figure for vegetable was 4.8 times. In a recent dialogue with farmers at Bangladesh Rice Research Institute (BRRI) spon-

ing but with weak contractual arrangements and informal transactions discourage diversification. There is observed to be a positive correlation between growth of horticulture crops and the proportion of small holders. Such a move on the part of small holders to horticulture would enhance income and employment: first since it is highly profitable crop and generates regular flow of income and second, because its is labour intensive in production. But again, the absence

sensible since diversification means putting eggs in different baskets and thus minimises the risk of losing all at once.

Scope for employment generation is higher with diversification. The non-cereal crops absorb higher amount of labour than cereal crops. Drawing upon Indian experience, the authors of the research appraised us that while production of rice needs 105 man days/ha, that of potato requires 200, tomato 195, onion 125, cauliflower 120 man days/ha. Rough estimates suggest that 1 ha shift in area from rice to potato would generate 95 man-days of additional labour. By and large, excepting eggplant, all other vegetables are more labour absorbing than cereal or non-cereal crops. The additional employment generation, needless to mention perhaps, has welfare and equity considerations in rural areas.

Tasks ahead

SA countries need to respond to the realities by reforming institutional arrangements, which can appropriately integrate production and markets. Appropriate infrastructural development and private sector participation in value addition and processing could be important areas of thoughts. "The most intricate puzzle is how to ensure greater participation of small and marginal landholders in the process of agricultural diversification for sharing benefits of globalisation. They are moving in favour of high value commodities but this group of farmers has high transaction cost due to tiny marketable surplus, which negate their higher production efficiency. It is expected that contract farming, cooperative's and group actions may lead to better opportunities for small holders to augment their income..."

Let innovative initiatives and institutions move hand in hand to reap home rewards from growing globalisation. Globalisation is a wave where you can ride or be swept away. The fate seems to be a function of institutional strengths and weaknesses.

Abdul Bayes is Professor of Economics at Jahangirnagar University

BENEATH THE SURFACE

"The most intricate puzzle is how to ensure greater participation of small and marginal landholders in the process of agricultural diversification for sharing benefits of globalisation. They are moving in favour of high value commodities but this group of farmers has high transaction cost due to tiny marketable surplus, which negate their higher production efficiency. It is expected that contract farming, cooperative's and group actions may lead to better opportunities for small holders to augment their income..."

issue of liberalisation and agricultural diversification in SA countries came to the forefront. Reputed researchers such as P.K. Joshi, Ashok Gulati, Pratap Birlhal and Laxmi Tewari delved deep into the dynamics of development of agriculture under a regime of liberalisation. Allow me to present some of the interesting insights from that research

Defining diversification

Diversification denotes different meaning to different people at different levels but based on various definitions, the authors arrived at the nature of diversification. For example, diversification could mean (a) a shift of resources from farm to non-farm activities; (b) use of resources in a large mix of diverse complementary activities within agriculture and (c) a movement of resources from low value agriculture to high value agriculture.

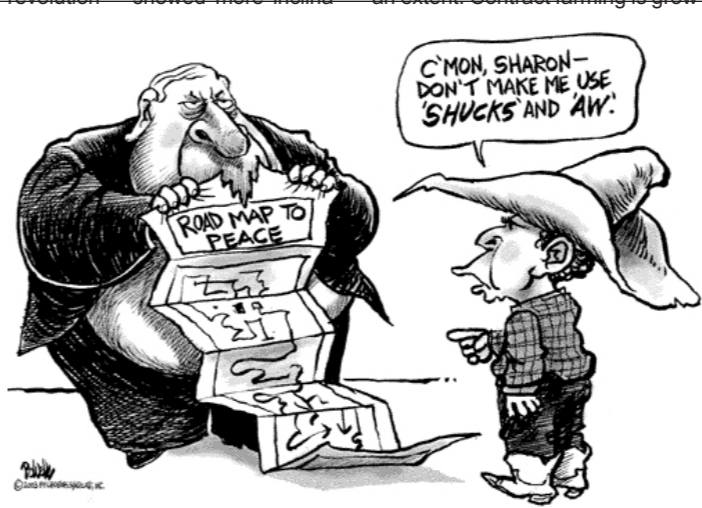
Determinants of diversification

When and why do farmers decide to diversify production? Seemingly, a panoply of factors tend to influence the decisions but we submit few from the findings. Better markets and road network are reported to have induced diversification in favour of horticulture crops. Better market and road network means low

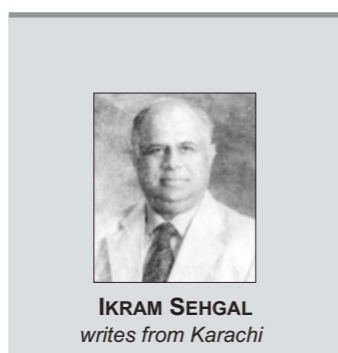
horticultural and vegetable products also came down. The scenario is quite different from that of a decade ago.

Another important determinant is irrigation -- a proxy for technology adoption. The authors found that the coefficient was negative implying that production of horticultural commodities tend to decline with the rise in the ratio of irrigation to total areas. Rainfed areas -- deprived of technological advancement and hence bypassed by the green revolution -- showed more inclina-

sored by PETRA Project, I noticed some farmers expressing eagerness to produce onion -- relatively more profitable than rice. But the lack of proper storage facilities, allegedly, stood on their ways. The problems pertaining to horticulture or other non-rice crops are reported to be storage, price volatility and uncertainty. It could be attributed to poor vertical linkage between production, marketing and processing. Development of appropriate institutions, could, however stem the rot to an extent. Contract farming is grow-



Indispensable or indefensible?



IKRAM SEHGAL  
writes from Karachi

THE President and the country are both at a crossroads, partly because of Pervez Musharraf's own making in accepting convoluted legal advice complicating the constitutional situation but mostly due to the drastic changes in the geo-political circumstances since 9/11. While the full details of the deadlock on the LFO talks are still to be publicly aired, the crunch really lies in the President being the constitutional Head of State while hanging on to the office of the COAS. Where is ample evidence to suggest there is room for compromise on all other issues but a major part of the Opposition bloc has shown no inclination to budge unless the comprehensive package includes the shedding of the Army uniform by the President. The Opposition have shown a penchant for freezing all Parliamentary work.

In any democracy the President cannot be the Army Chief concurrently. As long as Pervez Musharraf is COAS, this is not democracy but a continuation of the military regime, to suggest otherwise would be a farce. The democratic institutions

may have been put in place but it would be incongruity to suggest that while one man holds power through the barrel of the gun we are a democracy. The gradual democratisation process will not be complete until the COAS doffs his uniform. What the Opposition is suggesting is not wrong, theoretically.

Nine/eleven came after the SC verdict giving Pervez Musharraf three years till Oct 12, 2002 for a return to full democracy. The US has paid scant attention (or respect

(this year) of home remittances, lifting of sanctions, etc.

When India found to its chagrin that we had become an "allied" state instead of being a "terrorist nation", they contrived to force us to the brink of nuclear holocaust. It required nerves of steel for Musharraf to keep his cool in the face of conventional war destruction by an enemy poised on our borders in an offensive posture; this could have potentially led to nuclear devastation. From refusing to talk to

within the Assembly, in trying to "civilianise" Pervez Musharraf".

If the Assemblymen continue to run riot within the sacred Parliamentary halls and the President is powerless to intercede, either on behalf of the government or against it, it would be open invitation for the Army to again intercede. And given Musharraf's benign rule which went against the grain of traditional martial laws in not having martial law courts and maintaining complete media freedom, the next

not fail to try and exploit.

The geo-political and domestic circumstances point to the solution being that the President should continue as COAS till the term of his (COAS) office is over in early October 2004 with the proviso that if the President deems it fit that circumstances permit that he relieve himself of the COAS post before Oct 2004, he would do so voluntarily at his own discretion. This formula gives the Opposition a definite date

great success on many issues, most importantly in vainly advising him against the holding of the Referendum, one does get the feeling that while he hears you intently, he does not listen. The perception of a condescending attitude is dangerous, it alienates friends and supporters. The great rulers of the last 50 years to emulate are Deng Tsao Peng, Lee Kwan Yew and Nelson Mandela, they all made a difference to their respective nations without making a difference to their own personal fortunes, or allowing their associates to do so. All of them have attributed their success to listening to good advice. They had no "court jesters" to give them "advice" on national issues. The President has a responsibility to the nation to turn to the best possible talent in the country to tackle the country's problems and not be susceptible to the advice of "loyal friends". Court jesters are necessary for a ruler, they help him (or her) relax from the pressures of office, but it is fatal for the country if their advice is taken seriously.

The "power play" going on in Islamabad about suspending/dissolving the Assemblies may be a necessary "Sword of Damocles" but it could backfire if it really comes to pass and is not handled with sincere intent. The President must understand that while presently he is 'indispensable' to the country he must not make his own position indefensible by risking his credibility on the advice of aides without knowledge or experience espousing what he wants to hear rather than what is good for the country.

Ikram Sehgal, a former Major of Pakistan Army, is a political analyst and columnist.

AS I SEE IT

The "power play" going on in Islamabad about suspending/dissolving the Assemblies may be a necessary "Sword of Damocles" but it could backfire if it really comes to pass and is not handled with sincere intent. The President must understand that while presently he is 'indispensable' to the country he must not make his own position indefensible by risking his credibility on the advice of aides without knowledge or experience espousing what he wants to hear rather than what is good for the country.

even to its traditional allies when their national perceptions (as in Iraq) have clashed with the US primary national interest, today that happens to be the eradication of "international terrorism" personified by al-Qaeda. Even though Pervez Musharraf had the courage to make a U-turn in the country's supreme interest, in the real sense he had hardly any choice. The President took a personal risk being brave enough to put country before self. But do take a look at the economic (and political) windfall we have had because of 9/11, from going into default, we had a surge in economic terms because of aid, outright grants, debt rescheduling, tripling

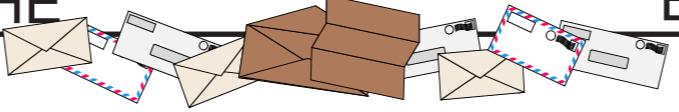
us under any condition, in a complete reversal Vajpayee is all "honey and sugar". The Indian PM wants to even discuss the core question of Kashmir, the raison d'etre for the collapse of talks at Agra! Notwithstanding Kashmir's freedom fighters repeatedly crossing the fine-line into terrorism by attacking civilian targets, God alone knows we fit the world's perceived billing of "most terrorist nation" state for our ill-advised support of the Taliban. Thanks to the quick decision by Musharraf, the US attention did not shift to Pakistan, not that we have not tried our level best to be called a "failed nation", take for example the behaviour of our Parliamentarians

military rule is likely to be a tough affair. Repression could likely lead to reaction by the citizenry, turning civil disturbances into armed insurgency and ultimately to a full-scale civil war. And simply because the President needs a comfortable fail-safe period to ensure that the democratic process is not violently retarded? There has to be an exit strategy for the Armed Forces. As much as it is constitutionally ahistorical, so is the present arrangement of being not quite democratic. So why continue this Catch-22? In the present scenario any step back by the President will be taken as a sign of weakness on his part that the immaturity in our political culture will

while giving the President the option of the date of retirement without a Sword of Damocles held over his head because of a definite cut-off date. With the buck firmly on the President's desk and the fact that he is not a lame-duck incumbent, he can retire as COAS earlier and show that the nation's trust reposed on him was not misplaced.

In the meantime it becomes incumbent on the President to listen to good advice from those who hold the country's interest paramount and have the performance criteria to go with it. The President is a very personable man but after advising him in print and in person without

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.

Eid-ul-Fitr and H.S.C exam

First they installed an Arabic neon sign in ZIA, now they have made all HSC examinees-- Muslim, Hindu, Christian, Buddhist-- to write a paragraph on Eid-ul-Fitr! What next? Sabrian Khan Dhanamondi, Dhaka

exam like HSC. Anis Anam Jigatola, Dhaka

I am an HSC examinee of this year. And I would like to let the readers know how confused we were when we were asked to write a paragraph on Eid-ul-Fitr in our English First Paper exam. I have seen others celebrating Eid and we celebrate it in a way too. But how can we, the people of different faith, write a paragraph on it in depth and that too on an important exam like HSC! I am not saying that there shouldn't be any question on religious issue but why should it be compulsory? Why couldn't it have been optional? Christina Gomez Shidheswari, Dhaka

Port crisis Chittagong Port is the lifeline of Bangladesh economy. I urgently request the government and the

authorities concerned to resolve the present stalemate occurring in the Port. Boris Gulshan, Dhaka

The Port must be reverted to its normalcy and improving its efficiency should be the top priority of the government. The government must act now before it's too late. Shahid Dhaka

Railway through Jamuna Bridge First time in the history of Bangladesh the meet between East & West part of the country through passenger railway is going to commence from next month. Silk City Express (Dhaka-Rajshahi) and Sundarban Express (Dhaka-Khulna) will open a new chapter of connecting the people between the capital and other two divisions of the country. This is indeed a good and positive step. There are a lot of rooms for

improvement especially in Dhaka-Rajshahi and Dhaka-Khulna sector as a new and better looking inter city service can play a vital role to connect the capital. Rail service is still the best and safest communication mode in Bangladesh still there is plenty of room for improvement. Iqbal Ahmed Dhaka

"Anti-Americanism" I am writing with reference to the letter "Anti-Americanism," by S Khan (May 30). Mr. Khan is right to express his displeasure at the spate of anti-American letters published by The Daily Star. Most of the letters and articles published by The Daily Star are highly contrived and biased. Most letter writers rail against America for leading a war to oust Saddam. They fail to mention that Iraq has been brutalised by an odious dictator for the last two decades and the U.S. military intervention was actually late in coming.

say of our religion in the Waz Mahfils! I request the government to close down those madrassahs which only produce fake and hypocrite mollahs and moulanas only to receive donation from the Arab countries. Iqbal Ahmed Dhaka

Madrasah students caught cheating I thank The Daily Star for printing a picture on the back page on 30th May 2003. It showed the students appearing in the Alim examinations at the Bahira FK Jameul Ulim Alia Madrasah fall at the feet of Minister for Education Ehsanul Haque Milon on being caught cheating. Later they were expelled and sent to jail. My question is to those madrasah students who want to pass the examinations by copying and not by learning what our religion is, what will they teach in the madrasahs or

country, and you will see a different Canada, celebrating with its American cousin America's mode and culture, its music and movies, its accents and idioms and its "pursuit of happiness." Mahmood Elahi Ottawa, Canada

Vacancies in overseas trade wings Bangladesh is a least developing country having multifarious problems. Its economy largely depends on foreign aids. For its survival foreign currency is very much needed and we can earn foreign currency by exporting our goods abroad. One of the main objectives of our foreign policy is economic diplomacy. It has been rightly envisaged in our export policy is 'export or perish'. But a recent news is very much worrisome in this regard that "operations of about 50 per cent commercial wings of Bangladesh missions abroad have almost come

to a halt, as posts of trade officials remain vacant." The posts of commercial counsellors are lying vacant in very important places like London, Beijing, Brussels, Los Angeles, Washington and Moscow. The inordinate delay in appointing the key position in the commercial wings is affecting our exports badly. In absence of adequate, qualified and experienced officials in the commercial wings in Brussels where the European commission and the World Customs Organization headquarters are located, the Bangladesh mission there is failing to cope up with the work pressure. In the face of price fall in the international market, Bangladesh export earnings fell short of target by over four per cent in the first three-quarters of the current fiscal year. So, it is highly expected that the Prime Minister Office will look into the matter at an urgent basis. M. H. Bari Khulna