

Frightening revelation?

The government owes it to the people to hold a judicial inquiry

THE free exchange of allegations between SA Khaleque, the ruling party MP from Mirpur and Salahuddin Ahmed, the state minister for communications, on the floor of the House Saturday should have left the government shell-shocked; but in public eye a concern for transparency might have been willy-nilly addressed. The BNP lawmaker accused the state minister of taking a bribe of Tk 25,00,000 in lieu of granting permission to Dipzol for setting up a CNG station, purportedly, on his land. He added something else to the accusation by pronouncing a poser that if 'hooligans or extortionists' were pampered like that how could the law and order situation improve? To that, rising on a point of personal explanation, the minister levelled a counter-allegation against the ruling party MP calling him a land grabber of Mirpur-Gabtal area. It may be mentioned here that only recently newspapers reported land-grabbing and forcible eviction from ancestral lands by the BNP MP from Mirpur.

There is no doubt the government felt embarrassed over this unexpected turn of events with two of its own MPs being locked not in a debate but an extremely unsavoury diatribe. This has had to do with the image of the government, so that there might be attempts by some party insiders to persuade the two ruling partymen to withdraw from the warpath lest it affected the party reputation anymore. But we believe this approach, if at all taken, may only serve the party but not the interest of the people. The charges and counter-charges, once made against each other, whatever be the trigger, on the floor of the House, are public property and knowledge now. These cannot be swept under the carpet. The government owes it to the public to pursue the allegations, order an inquest and bring out the truths. The 'embarrassment' should not be allowed to get the better of the government's best administrative judgement. It would also be impolitic on the part of the government if it happened the other way round. So, we demand a full-fledged judicial inquiry into the whole matter.

Verdict on Sony murder case

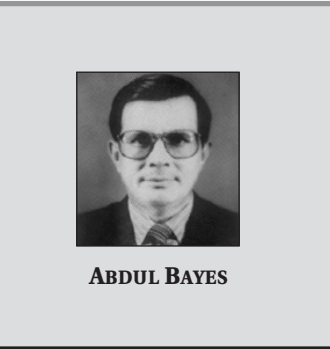
Welcome example of speedy justice delivery

THE verdict on the murder of a meritorious student at the country's topmost technical university within a year of the dastardly crime only proves that if the authority wills to do something, they can do it. The government certainly deserves plaudits, not just for the quick disposal of Sony murder case, but also of other such cases in recent times. Her untimely death sparked such anger among everyone that the verdict has been rightly hailed very widely. It is so outrageous that the life of a vibrant girl who had big dreams about herself and whose parents had pictured a bright career for her, was cut down so brutally by some criminals at a university campus. The court's verdict has been therefore greeted with some emotion.

We hope such a judgement would work as a deterrent. We presume that was the whole idea behind selecting a certain number of cases for quick disposal. But until the verdicts are executed, the purpose would remain unfulfilled. Sony's parents, too, have demanded quick execution of the verdict to ensure proper justice. The convicts include some absconders. So there is a need for manhunts to bring them to justice. Only when that is done, the cycle of justice and that of deterrence will be completed.

The decision to make a list of sensational cases and disposing them of through speedy trial tribunals would only bring trust for the police and the judicial system. Now, we would urge the government not to remain confined to select cases but to expand the circle and include a greater number of cases for an expeditious disposal.

As they sow, so they reap



ABDUL BAYES

THE village is called Varaura -- 2 km west of Srimongal. Janab Abdul Hamid (78) of the village told me that the word 'Varaura' comes from 'vara' meaning a vast container -- made of bamboo canes -- to store paddy. The height of a container could stretch up from the floor to the ceiling of the roof. The old but still active pure tenant told me that, in the past Varaura was very much a rice village. But growing urbanization and communications, luring and bashing business rebed Varaura of its rich rice heritage. In this Hindu dominated village, half of the households are reported to be pure tenants, one-third owner-tenants and the rest, owner-cultivators. The average size of owned land -- as reported -- is 80 decimals, family size six, and two to three years back, the 'resource poor' households could hardly afford five months' food from their own fields.

By and large, Varaura is a poor village but, I suppose, lies in a rich location. The Dhaka-Sylhet highway passes by the side of the village and Srimongal is five minutes' walk from the village. I saw few buildings at the centre of the paddy fields, as if bricks got over bountiful rice fields. Reportedly, lands lie in the hands of the businessmen and *Londonis* (settlers in London). Some of the villagers lost land when they wanted to go to London but were cheated by the middlemen. The dominant form of tenancy in the village is share cropping with traditional fifty-fifty arrangements. But unlike elsewhere in Bangladesh, the landlord does not share the costs of inputs. In that sense, Varaura village is still backward.

Old is not gold!

While modern varieties of rice (MVs) began spreading fast in Bangladesh, Varaura village continued to cling to the cultivation of

traditional crops. The per acre yield of these crops are very low, say, 7-8 maunds/Kare (30 decimals). Such a yield reminded me of the 1960s when my own villagers used to bag home poor harvests from local varieties. However, recently the Agricultural Advisory Society (AAS) -- an NGO working for Poverty Elimination Through Rice Research Assistance (PETRRA) project -- stepped into helping resource poor farmers. The purpose of PETRRA is to help moderately poor farmers or future poor farmers with cost effective technologies to raise rice output so that they can graduate from present

properly and judiciously. Keeping this in mind, AAS also arranged training programmes for both male and female farmers. The former was trained on roguing the fields and the latter, on preservation of seeds at homestead. According to a farmer, his wife now shares almost half the hard labour in sustaining good seeds. Farmers have been advised on how to grow seeds from the foundation seeds that they were provided with and also how to prepare productive seedbeds. Farmers told me that, the training are paying dividends in terms of increased yield per unit of land and seeing the size of the crops grown,

to be grown in five Kares in the past are now being grown in 2 Kares of land. For the poor with little endowments of land, this also meant that the endowments of their lands doubled over time!

By the time I visited the village, three-fourths of farmers have already adopted MVs. No more free lunch! (There is no free lunch after all). Farmers are now ready to pay for seeds and fertilizers and other input costs to reap home a better harvest that has never been dreamt of. Meantime, they also learnt about the balanced doses of fertilizers and some of the farmers I met, even taught me about the impacts

households also went up. Food deficit has been reduced by 2-3 months. I was told by a sample of farmers.

Good and bad luck

During my visit to the village, I talked to three young and energetic resource-poor farmers. They are Nikesh (26), Mozam (20) and Fahim (25). The average size of their owned land is estimated at 85 decimals and they were shouldering the responsibilities of feeding their respective family of seven or so. Interestingly, at the very outset, these young farmers responded to

BENEATH THE SURFACE

According to T. W Schultz, the Nobel Laureate in economics: small farmers are very much rational and efficient. They try to maximise the objective function subject to the endowments of resources, knowledge and technology. An expansion of the frontier of knowledge through training, extension and at times by the provision of subsidy could enhance their production possibility frontier.

position. These targeted 'resource poor' farmers have land endowments not exceeding 100 decimals or so, they work for others' land and can meet rice needs of 6-7 months from own sources. It is assumed that if these resource poor could be provided with suitable technologies and some knowledge about rice cropping practices, possibly, they would rise up and not join the ranks of the poor. However, as per PETRRA-path, AAS came forward to introduce MVs like BARRI *dhan* 28 and 29 to Varaura villagers. It is estimated that the yield rate of these crops is three times the traditional ones.

But risk-averse as they were, the resource poor farmers of the village refused to accept an unknown, unseen and unheard of package at the initial stage. AAS then selected a sample of resource-poor farmers and provided them with seeds and fertilizers free of cost. The risks thus were shared between AAS and the target resource poor farmers. The selected farmers grew the MVs and demonstrated the developments in the fields where, like an industrial exhibition, farmers from far and wide came to visit 'paddy stalls' of the resource-poor farmers.

Not by seed alone

Seed is the source of growing rice but could turn sour if not handled

the villagers of Varaura have been vying for MVs. As Janab Abdul Hamid said to me: "BRRI *dhan* 28 and 29 are good for the poor because 2 Kares of land now take care of five Kares." Janab Hamid wanted to indicate that what used

of different types of fertilizers on rice plants. However, good luck for them, as the water is free and flowing from the hills through narrow canals locally known as "chara". Food supply increased and *paripassu* food availability for

the call of AAS and embraced the risks of growing MVs in their fields. But at times risk is also rewarding. In the 2001/02-boro season, Nikesh produced six maunds of seeds and stored it in the house in suitable containers. Bad luck for



Ayodhya settlement impasse: Let the courts prevail



PRAFUL BIDWAI
writes from New Delhi

THE Bharatiya Janata Party seems to have bitten off more than it can chew on its trademark issue: Ayodhya. It has failed to obtain a favourable archaeological or legal verdict on whether a (Ram) temple pre-dated the Babri mosque.

Its efforts at negotiating a solution to the temple-mosque dispute have been rebuffed by the Vishwa Hindu Parishad, which accuses it of "betraying" Hindus to Muslims! The temple issue, which once united *Hindutva* streams, now *divides* them.

Archaeological excavation at Ayodhya hasn't produced evidence that a Hindu temple existed where the Babri mosque stood.

The Archaeological Survey of India -- which reports to a government led by *Hindutva* zealots like Messrs L.K. Advani and Murli Manohar Joshi, themselves charged in the Babri demolition case -- has submitted two new

"status reports".

These two show no evidence of a pre-existing temple. If there was one, its structural remains would have been found beneath the mosque's floor. The only pre-Babri structures found are brick walls and lime (*chuna*)-plastered floors, characteristic of medieval Islamic practices.

According to leading historian Irfan Habib and eminent archaeologist Suraj Bhan, "matters have become definitively clear" with the ASI's latest reports. Its 55 new

bearing or associated with any Hindu architectural tradition. They couldn't have been a temple's components.

The experts quoted above say the Devanagari inscription, about which *Outlook* magazine (June 2) made a hullabaloo, was made in was a *computer-manipulated* image, which is "quite modern. [The letters] read *napala du rabh*, with no resemblance to the word *svaahom* followed by word *Ram*, as alleged."

The pervasive presence of ani-

the Ram *chabutra* was a *haуз* (water-reservoir) with a lime-plastered floor. Most other "antiquities" were glazed pottery, pestles, bones, etc., which point to a temple's *non-existence*.

The ASI's excavation was excessive: professional archaeologists would have dug just four trenches around the Babri structure, in place of the 100-plus. In archaeology, more *isn't* better. The sole evidence of a pre-existing temple has to be its *structure* -- plinth, base, walls, etc. This is absent.

The time has come for a clean, principled approach to Ayodhya. No single spiritual-religious organisation has the authority to decide this complex issue...When social negotiation breaks down, and political leaders fail, the law alone can resolve disputes. Parliament legislation is no substitute for judicial determination.

trenches cover the entire mosque complex and much of the surrounding area, including spots next to the Ramlalla canopy.

Yet, say the experts and associates like Supriya Verma and Jaya Menon, who closely observed the excavation as litigants' nominees: "In trench after trench, no structural remains below the mosque's floor level have been found..." [Those] found in some trenches are all related to construction associated with the [Babri] mosque."

Much fuss was made about "pillar bases" of a hypothetical temple. But only seven were found in six (of 100-plus) trenches, without alignment. They are not load-

mal bones with cut-marks, glazed ware, and finds with "Arabic inscriptions of holy verses", and the "absence of even a trace of anything" indicating a temple's remains, suggest that no temple pre-dated the Babri mosque at the site.

There is powerful evidence that underneath the Babri lay *another mosque* from the (pre-Mughal) Sultanate period. "The Babri Masjid structure was superimposed on a pre-existing mosque constructed out of stones and plastered over with lime mortar, plastering being an art brought in by Muslims," says Professor Bhan.

Also found under the Babri structure was graves. Underlying

The VHP's temple claim is based neither on facts nor any scriptural authority. It's based on *invented*, irrational faith.

Millions of people were *taken for a ride* by *Hindutva* fanatics -- like medieval mobs who would hunt witches on mere suspicion. The entire Ayodhya movement was driven by revenge for "past wrongs". Its divisive politics was meant to spread hatred and lynch people.

The VHP, true to type, says Ayodhya is a matter of faith. It demands a grand temple must be built at Ayodhya; a mosque can only be built 10 km away. But the Jama Masjid already exists, 1.5 km away, as do other mosques!

The VHP rejects the Kanchi *Shankaracharya's* "compromise" formula because he is a Shaivite whereas Rama belongs to the Vaishnavite tradition. The formula envisages building a temple and mosque close to each other, and dropping the Mathura-and-Kashi issue altogether.

The *Shankaracharya* is acting on behalf of the government, as he did in March 2002. The compromise's timing is no coincidence; it comes just when an adverse court verdict is likely.

It's a bit late in the day for Mr Vajpayee to say that the temple issue should be free from party politics. It's the *BJP* which politicised it *first*. Mr Vajpayee himself declared the Ayodhya campaign a "national movement". The various forces involved in the Babri demolition are indulging in finger-pointing, while evading responsibility.

The time has come for a clean, principled approach to Ayodhya. No single spiritual-religious organisation has the authority to decide this complex issue.

An honourable, equitable compromise on Ayodhya alone can win Muslim confidence. If *Hindutva* forces remain intransigent, the courts alone must be left to deal with it.

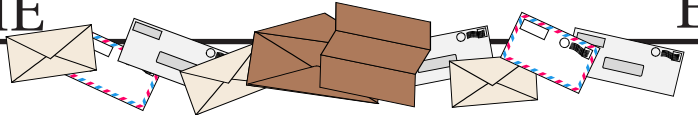
Eightyfive percent of Muslims, according to an *Outlook* survey, don't want to gift the Ayodhya land to the Hindus, without an assurance on the mosque's rebuilding. An unfair settlement shouldn't be imposed on them.

When social negotiation breaks down, and political leaders fail, the law alone can resolve disputes. Parliament legislation is no substitute for judicial determination.

There must be no humiliating, dishonourable, unjust compromise, which erases the crime committed against Indian people in December 1992.

Praful Bidwai is an eminent Indian columnist.

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.

Channel i

I recently went through an interview of Shykh Siraj published in the culture page on June 18. I expected that more effective and enterprising views would come out of the interview. However, this invoked me to think about certain programmes that Channel-i might consider airing.

While still in school we used to read about Florence Nightingale, Joan of Arc and characters that not only inspired us but also enlightened us. Apart from these characters if we look into English literature of previous centuries there are many interesting stories that have lasted through the ages and are still famous. For example Shakespeare's comedies and tragedies still have great impact on us.

My suggestion to Channel-i is to seek advice from the university teachers of various departments -- from English, Bangla, History etc and ask them to suggest a few characters, incidents that they may consider telecasting.

It would not have to be elaborate and the programme may be shown in a story telling form, while only the major characters would be portrayed. This would leave a lasting effect on the young and old alike.

Dr. N.N. Fyzzenesa
Former Professor IER, DU

Lawyer's agitation against the proposed budget

I am pleased to see that all professionals of the country have been included in the budget of FY 2003-2004 for submission of income tax return and have been advised to obtain trade licence. This is an area where all successive governments have failed to identify as a sector evading payment of income tax judiciously for generations. In the meantime one of the professional groups have sprang on their feet and started agitation for non-payment of tax. It is quite painful to see that they have been demanding

and leading procession off and on to separate judiciary from the executive; claiming themselves as champions of democracy, justice and the most enlightened members of the society on the one hand and contrarily by a resolution of association of the highest court of the country urged the government to withdraw the provision of tax return!

Rezaul Huq
Lalmatia, Dhaka

Saddam's Iraq

Saddam is gone. That chapter is closed. A new era has started.

Is Saddam alive? May be or may be not. But history will always keep him alive solely because he has established the truth that liberating the already liberated people by a foreign force is nothing but enslaving the people to the coalition of axis of willing and merely a bitter lie and also for that he has been succeeded to award the world two big liar -- Bush and Blair.

God knows if ever Iraq will be

able to emerge from doom to boom again!

Nur Hossain
Bangshal, Dhaka

Rasulpur

We, the residents of village Bobar Kandi of No. 1 Charmoutia union under Sudharam thana of Noakhali district, have unanimously decided to change the name of our village to 'Rasulpur' during a meeting attended by village elders. Bobar Kandi does not sound or mean anything good. Our village has a school, a madrasah, a mosque, a post office and a number of other organisations and many of our villagers are currently employed overseas. We want to give the village a good sounding and meaningful name.

So it is our fervent request to the higher authorities to do the needful to have our village renamed 'Rasulpur' at the Settlement Department and all the relevant organisations.

Haji Md. Lutfur Rahman

On behalf of the villagers
Rasulpur (Bobar Kandi), Noakhali

Middle-class and education

Talking about price hike of every kind of commodities is quite common among the people of all strata. Especially during Budget declaration, general people pray for one single thing that is they don't want any more price hike. But unfortunately, the prices of necessary commodities go up and people try hard to make an adjustment between limited income and the ever-growing expenses. But we seldom think or talk about the growing expenses in educational sector. In our country it seems that providing decent education for children of middle-class family is getting tougher day by day.

In this competitive society, private tutors are necessary for obtaining good result. Most of the students of Science Group in S.S.C and H.S.C level need at least four or

five teachers to obtain a standard grade and for doing better the number of private tutors goes up. In the case of Arts and Commerce, the students also have to take tuition to at least two or three teachers. Moreover, the fees of the private colleges are exorbitant, almost beyond the reach of the middle-class. Most parents prefer private institutions for their children to ensure better results. But, unfortunately most of the time they fail to do so because of financial constraint. Therefore, they eventually end up in public universities.

Rifat Mahbab
Dhaka University

Israel's Nuclear Programmes

The US stand against Iran's alleged nuclear programmes is hypocritical to say the least. The exposure by the BBC of Israel's nuclear programme in its excellent documentary aired last Sunday and the US position on the issue have

convinced us that the US has no moral authority to question any other country on the nuclear programme, not even the North Koreans. The treatment by Israel of the guy who blew the whistle on its nuclear programme also revealed in the BBC documentary proved beyond doubt that in addition to being the regional bully armed to the teeth with nuclear and chemical weapons of mass destruction, Israel is also the worst violator of human rights and at par with the worst dictatorships existing now.

US attitude over Israel's now well documented programmes for production of weapons of mass destruction is a clear example of how the rest of the world sees the USA today; a Super Power pursuing shamelessly a policy of double standards. Here you have the Israelis who have produced all conceivable WMDs but the US exempting it from any international inspection and Iran who is accused of producing it and the USA threatening invasion to subject the Iranians to inspection. The

only conclusion that one can draw is that Iran's fault (as was Iraq's under Saddam Hussein) is not with pursuing the nuclear option (if it is) but in being an Islamic state.

What enrages me even more than the US hypocrisy and its double standard is the position of the rich Arab states. Why can these countries get together and demand of the USA to apply on Israel the same conditions that it has already applied on Iraq and now threatening to apply on Iran? They have the financial clout. On my part, I have no hope that they would and ultimately some divine intervention would be necessary to make the US see how wrong it is in following this double standard. The total subservience of the US administration to Israeli interests or Israelisation of US foreign policy is turning full circle and it is only a matter of time that the rest of the United States would see the folly of their neo-conservative leaders and force a change.

Shahjahan Ahmed, Dhaka