

second problem is related to

accessing markets. The US and

Japanese markets are not meant for

Bangladeshi vegetables. An arsenal

of tariff and non-tariff barriers tend to

bedevil exports. The Chinese

government has somehow

managed the access through

China emerged as the dominant

player in vegetable markets of those

countries. It is not clear as to why

Bangladesh vegetables should not

be allowed provided the exporters

follow the food safety rules. The

pilateral negotiations and thus



LATE S. M. ALI

DHAKA TUESDAY SEPTEMBER 16, 2003

Unseating a lawmaker

A landmark verdict on electoral accountability

HIS is the first such example of law catching up with an electoral fraud taken to the court by a defeated candidate in the last general election. The High Court having found Jamaat-e-Islami leader Delwar Hossain Sayedee in breach of election rules on campaign spending stripped him of the membership of parliament. The court has found Sayedee guilty of concealing sources of election fund, spending money in excess of Tk 5 lakh ceiling and not filing an affidavit on poll expenses to the Election Commission. The HC in its verdict has also declared the election null and void.

We congratulate the High Court division on handing down a milestone judgement. It has to be noted that an electoral petition has been creditably disposed of at a half-way point of the parliament's tenure with an efficacious relevance. The expeditious delivery of the verdict has been exemplary. The judgement is a big step forward in establishing accountability insofar as the electoral expenses go. We are heartened by the fact that electoral expenses were taken to the court and that a decisive verdict has been delivered. The initiative was good; the court pronouncement has been forward-looking; and hopefully, a vigorous accountability process has been heralded.

This should actually flag off a serious discussion and debate on transforming some outmoded election rules into a set of electoral reforms. For, palpably, there are grounds to conjure up an impression that an overwhelming number of election contestants overshot the campaign expenditure threshold of Tk five lakh by miles in the last General Election. The election theatre has become a playground for the rich, an outlet for black money and a nurturing harbour for criminal elements. So, there has to be a serious rethink on the entire gamut of election laws and rules so as to reform them to square up with the whole lot of contemporary electoral challenges and vices

The reform question not only cuts across party lines it also requires of the political parties to assume a role themselves. The expectations at the party level from election seekers seem to be 'fetch as much money as possible to emerge as the highest bidder' so as to be the party nominee. Selection of candidates is based more on monetary or funding considerations these days than on any intrinsic eligibility criterion. Only comprehensive electoral reform can change the situation.

Official decision to assassinate Arafat!

International norm touches a horrific new low

N the field of international relations, the statement of a vow by a government to kill somebody, a leader to be precise, is something unheard of. Well, that is exactly what the Israeli government has issued as a direct threat to the life of Yasser Arafat. Tel Aviv government has made it clear that they want to get rid of the Palestinian leader, Yasser Arafat, both politically and physically. Israel's graduation to this horrendous public stance on finishing off Arafat is a study in both arrogance and indulgence, the latter given by the USA. Earlier on, speculations on his assassination were in the air; then the announcement to expel him was officially made; and now the vice premier of Israel says 'killing Palestinian president Yasser Arafat is an option'. It has broken all the norms of civility in international relations. Words fail us to convey our sense of outrage adequately. It's preposterous that someone could even conceive such an idea. The statement goes beyond state terrorism and steps into a mafia-like resolve with an official stamp. We demand that the Israeli vice premier withdraw his statement immediately. Here the role of United States will be of utmost significance. We noticed that the US had condemned the announcement to expel Arafat. It had made its displeasure known to the Israeli leadership on that count. We want to hear a strong condemnatory statement from the US on the subject, if they have not already issued one. In addition, we urge the superpower to persuade Israel to refrain from declaring such a vicious intent in future. What has become important now is Arafat's security. After such open announcement, the issue of his safety cannot be taken lightly; it must receive a high priority. Who else can ensure it better than the US? Let Washington be the guarantor of Arafat's security.



ABDUL BAYES

HE share of agricultural products in total exports of Bangladesh is estimated at 0.40 per cent. According to the statistics revealed by the Export Promotion Bureau (EPB), Bangladesh exported agricultural products worth Tk. 1473380 thousand (USD 25 million) in 2002/03. Half of the earnings came from the export of vegetables. The situation was, more or less, similar in 2001/02. We tend to observe a rise, feebly though, of agricultural exports and especially export of vegetables over the last few years. Another important item that seemingly shows signs of strength is exports of rice, obviously fine and aromatic rice, that rose from Tk. 11272 thousand in 2001/02 to Tk.19980 thousand in 2002/03. In one of my recent observations in this column. I took the position that provided the government has proper polices on board, exports of rich rice could reward us fabulously. And there exists ample for small and marginal scope farmers to reap home better returns from rich rice. Some private and NGO initiatives in recent years tend to extend support to my hypothesis.

However, today in this column, I shall attempt to present a case study on the export of vegetables. The idea is to inform the readers about the linkage between institutions, incentives and small vegetable growers. How are small holders hooked on with the vertical integration in a globalised regime? To this effect. I shall draw upon the experiences of an institution engaged in harnessing the

growers.

that Chandina and adjacent areas are well known for the cultivation of vegetable crops due to favourable opportunities available to small soil condition and water supply. recollect my early days in that area when I also used to witness a lot of

Vertical integration and vegetable production

BRAC breakthroughs Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC) -- a reputed NGO -- is one of the leading exporters of vegetable products. am told that the organisation accounts for one-tenth of our total vegetable exports taken together. BRAC aims to feed the famous supermarkets in Europe and the Middle-east countries at the moment but hopes to harp on other outlets in future BRAC started the business in

1997/98 with 30 contract growers

vegetables being grown and harvested and trucks filled with to feed distant domestic markets.

Beyond boundary This time it looked different to me First, the products are mostly destined for markets outside the country compared to inside in the past. Second, prescriptions provided by the GAP -- good agricultural production -- from the European countries are being followed with right earnest. The GAP manual suggests the farmers

about what chemicals to avoid, how

for this crop. Kenya is reported to be one of the principal sources of supply in the world market. BRAC imported the technological and economic knowledge to embark on growing French Beans in Bangladesh, for the first time through its contract growers and sell to foreign markets. One important ramification of this new variety, reportedly, is that the

women do the whole harvest. Again, one acre of French Beans requires 200 mandays of employment which is much higher

determinants for vegetable production. Relating their findings from India to Bangladesh, observed small variations in terms of the issues under consideration. Vegetable production in Chandina has been surging over the years. The major drivers to this development are the following. First, good infrastructure -- roads and telephones -- to quickly connect the area with major consuming areas in and outside Bangladesh. This is also aided by market high density

government should try to reach for such negotiations. And finally, to make vegetables a safe food for foreigners, exporters should be allowed to import machinery at zero duties and provided with capital at reduced rate of interest from banks. Besides, vegetable exporters should be supplied with trainers and other consultants free of cost. By and large, government's helping hand in capacity creation could make the

Pessimism is, perhaps, the pet

position for most of us especially

pertaining to exports. And if it is

primarily agricultural produce

needless to mention, our pessi-

mism seems to perk at pinnacle.

The policy makers, sordidly, never

pondered on the prospects of

agricultural exports in a globalised

regime. They had only been

minding the manufactured exports

luring them with a lot of incentives

and institutional supports. It would

not be unwise to claim optimism on

the future of our agricultural exports.

The government should seriously

think about expanding the exports of

beans a boon

Last words

BENEATH THE SURFACE

To make vegetables a safe food for foreigners, exporters should be allowed to import machinery at zero duties and provided with capital at reduced rate of interest from banks. Besides, vegetable exporters should be supplied with trainers and other consultants free of cost. By and large, government's helping hand in capacity creation could make the beans a boon.

covering seven acres of land in Chandina Thana. The place is very close to Comilla town and stands just by the side of the Dhaka-Chittagong highway. The contract with growers stipulates that growers would supply vegetables to BRAC as per specification, quality and price set by BRAC. The "unwritten contract" has been in effect since the time BRAC started business and now applies to 300 or so growers covering 40 acres for whom BRAC appears as a buyer. Growers bring their produce to BRAC export office at Chandina where sorting, grading and cooling facilities are available. From Chandina, the products are sent to Tongi ,Dhaka, where BRAC has recently built a modern pack -- costing around Tk.60 house million. The products are assembled there and marked for foreign markets via airlines. The pack house is yet to be fully furnished with equipment but given that, BRAC could comfortably cater to the needs of the growing demand that it expects to face. Allow me to remind the readers

they seem to have learnt over the vears. Third, during the discourse, it could also be observed that over half of the income of the small households originate from vegetable production. And finally they had accepted the unwritten contract "because never ever we observed a breach' The contract helped them in three principal ways. First, they no longer

much organic manure should be

applied and what are the ways of

growing green crops. By and large,

cleanliness and cost effectiveness

are the two important lessons that

have to submit to the swings of prices of their produce marked by the whims of the market. Second, contract helped them plan production, receive training and adopt technology. And third, the contract abolished the role of the middlemen in between the producers and the buyers. As I could understand, long beans are being bought at Tk. 13/kg where the fob price is Tk. 29 giving the farmers 44 per cent of the total price. In the presence of middlemen, the share could hover around 35-40 per cent.

The unknown

French Beans are not produced in Bangladesh. But in the world market, there is a great demand

than cereals and other vegetables. Thus French Beans production is not only labour ntensive but also pro-women. In winter, this crop claims more than 90 per cent of the land under vegetables grown by the contract arowers

Safe food, secured women

Because BRAC aims to export the vegetables different supermarkets of the world, it has to see that proper grading, sorting and cleaning is done before putting them on plane. I was told that 30-35 women work throughout the year to make things acceptable to foreign buyers. Half of them are reported to hail from female headed households, about one-third are divorcee and the rest from very poor socio-economic conditions. The opening up of Chandina vegetables to foreign markets thus opened up the doors for poor women to engage in activities not generally generated by those destined for the domestic market

Determinants of development

In a recent research paper, Ashok Gulati and Sudha Narayan (IFPRI) noted important village level

(number of markets/1000 ha of gross cropped area). Second, relative profitability of vegetable production is higher than comparable crops. Farmers, reportedly, feel more economically sound with growing vegetables than other crops. Third, the climate is conducive for increased production. Fourth, the advent of the modern rice technology helped release land for crop diversification and finally.

urbanisation and increased per capita income acted as a driving force from the demand side. Access and ability But exporters of vegetables -- be it an institution like BRAC or individuals -- face a volley

problems as they vie to capture world market for vegetables. The most important problem is transport For example, Bangladesh Biman is the only airline that they can rely on when other airlines refuse to carry vegetables. The reliability of Biman to carry the goods time remains a big question mark. It is therefore mperative that either other airlines should be induced to carry Bangladesh vegetables or some craft should be converted into cargo. In fact, cargo availability could increase exports by a big

margin, I was told by exporters. The

rice and vegetables in the world market. And Chandina experience of BRAC suggests, neither food safety regulations nor technology or training would discourage our growers from facing the chiming challenge. Only the government needs to rise to the needs with proper policy prescriptions. Abdul Bayes is professor of economics Jahangirnagar University

The Iraqi cauldron

been bought off even before the first shot was fired, many of them trusted blood relatives of the dictator.

The "shock and awe" strategy followed by the rolling "blitzkrieg" northwest along the Basra-Baghdad approach roads was spectacular. With "imbedded journalists" traveling with the advancing tank and mechanical infantry columns, this was real-life "made for TV" war. Except in some key nodal points, eg Nasiryah, where it seems that the local Iraq commanders could not be bought

(L of Cs). Dust storms affecting the entire battle area temporarily halted the advance short of Baghdad and gave heart to the military cynics who gave vent to their worst fears on prime TV. Everyone braced for "Fortress Baghdad", but instead of giving battle in the streets of Baghdad, the vaunted Republican Guard melted into the night. Rumsfeld was proved right, the war was effectively over. Or was it? Lt Gen (Retd) Jay Garner, an old

Iraqi hand (he was liaison with the Kurds during the last Gulf War) who was appointed the overall US off and refused to abandon their

ground reality and put their wellmade plans for a long Iraqi occupation on the road to potential disaster. The men should have been made to report to their parent units and formations, and given lifesustaining monthly allowances for the survival of their families. During a period of between six months to a year they should have been duly screened for their loyalties to the old guard as well as their suitability for employment. Those verified as being purely professional should have been inducted into the civil bureaucracy and a civil armed

ineffectiveness in policing Iraq. Though the majority Shia population blamed this as the work of Saddam's handymen, they were unanimous in anti-US protest. The US has ordered the Shia militias to be disarmed, just as vocally the militias are defying this order. In the absence of adequate policing by the thinly-stretched US forces they say they need weapons for selfprotection. With Iran already supporting an anti-US proxy war in Afghanistan, what is to stop this neighbouring country from interceding in the Shia majority

those suffered during the war, the Republicans will be subject to extensive media exposure duly orchestrated by a whole coterie of Democratic Party Presidential candidates. The cost of "the war after the war" is also escalating as evidenced from the additional US\$ 87 billion Bush has asked for from US Congress. In the current polarised political environment will the legislators bail the US President out?

The US has repeatedly asked for two brigades of Pakistani troops for Irag, while President Musharraf was initially amenable to the idea he had put a UN or OIC mandate (and participation by other Muslim countries) as a caveat. In the present political environment there NIII de strong domestic politica

it a blood-cycle will be in the offing.

making the entire Middle East anti-

Pakistani. With our luck this is more

we prepared to take the risk in the

face of what one knows is a moral

duty of providing succour for the

Iraqi people? In the circumstances

the sending of Pakistani troops into

Ikram Sehgal, a former Major of Pakistan



IKRAM SEHGAL writes from Karachi

HE Pentagon's senior civilian hierarchy has some armchair warriors who have never heard a bullet fired in anger, they were right about the war being over in a short time, verv wrong about the

"the war after the war". As senior a person as battle-experienced US Army Chief Gen Shinseki kept on insisting, even when he was vindictively declared a "lame duck" by US Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld more than a year before he was to retire, that the invasion (and occupation thereof) of Iraq needed "more boots on the around" The senior military hierarchy united against Rumsfeld as much as their predecessors did against McNamara and his whiz-kids during Vietnam. Frustrated with the inherent caution counselled and keen to put into practice the new high-tech concept of lightning IT warfare that could not be tried out against the Taliban in Afghanistan. Rumsfeld found a kindred spirit in

Gen Tommy Franks, the overall US Commander in the region. Rumsfeld and Franks had reason to feel confident about a quick victory in contrast to the informed military assessment that victory would take some time, even against a dilapidated and obsolete Iraqi military machine. However, they knew something that we didn't even though it was certainly a matter of speculation, critical decisionmaking personnel in Saddam

English Dictionary, Sally Wehmeier,

who informed me on 8th September

included in the recently published

Dictionary of English. The preferred

spelling is 'organigram', with

organogram' as an acceptable

How and when we started using

the word in Bangladesh? May

know the fact from any wise person?

Deputy Manager (Admin), TSP

Md Saquee Hussain

variant.

The US has repeatedly asked for two brigades of Pakistani troops for Iraq, while President reaction against the sending of any Musharraf was initially amenable to the idea he had put a UN or OIC mandate (and participation troops to Iraq. We must play a role in bringing peace to the people of Iraq by other Muslim countries) as a caveat. In the present political environment there will be strong but the political and human cost may domestic political reaction against the sending of any troops to Iraq... Are we prepared to take be too high a price to pay. Any attack on Pakistani troops will invoke selfthe risk in the face of what one knows is a moral duty of providing succour for the lragi people? defence, the retaliation thereof

AS I SEE IT

defensive positions, the offensive was really a rapid "flag march" across the desert plains. No obstacles were prepared, natural or artificial, very few anti-personnel and/or anti-tank mines were laid. This must be the first full-fledged war in modern history where not a single bridge, for that matter not even a single culvert, was set for demolition by the defending forces.

The Iragi Army regulars were told by their compromised leaders that their dispersal, rather than fighting the advancing enemy, was part of the overall strategy of fighting a guerilla war. Small arms, rocket aunchers, grenades were hidden in hundreds of caches in pursuance of such tactics. Small units of Saddam loyalists and Baa'th Party irregulars, not aware that their senior field commanders had no intention to fight, carried out sporadic "hit and run" and suicide-bombing attacks along the Lines of Communications Hussain's military hierarchy had

Administrator, soon found the bureaucratic-going way beyond his capabilities to handle and Paul Bremer 2 replaced him. Paul Bremer has done reasonably well as a civilian administrator under the circumstances, restoring socioeconomic and civic facilities on a priority basis as well as inducting Iragis into the mainstream of civil administration. He forced through a governing Iragi Council drawn from all ethnicities and religious factions, a skeptic Iraqi population (and the

Arab world) is giving them grudging acceptance. A functioning cabinet has also been put in place. However Paul Bremer's major mistake was disbanding the Iraqi

Armed Forces and the entire civilian bureaucracy, thereby putting more than a million able-bodied men out of jobs. In retrospect, the US will look back on this major "faux pas" as the defining moment when optimistic planning overcame

forces doubling as a law enforcement agency. By literally putting trained manpower into the streets without future hope for the survival of their families, Paul Bremer ensured that a vast silent majority of professionals were forced to join a strong nucleus of an anti-US guerilla force consisting of die-hard Saddam loyalists and Baath Party regulars as well as Arab and Muslim volunteers.

Stray operational setbacks like car bombs exploding and casualties due to stray guerilla activity cannot be labelled as "defeats" as much as the killing of Uday and Qusay and capture of many of Saddam's inner circles cannot be called "victories" These are simply incidents in the overall mosaic of war and post-war. However the car-bomb killings of UN Administrator Victor de Mello and Imam Baker al Hakim, were major public relations (PR) disasters, they showed up US

could escalate and before you know areas in Iraq? Only six months or so after he had scornfully brushed aside any a probability than a possibility. Are possible UN role in Iraq before, during or after the war, US President Bush is now asking for UN support in a major reversal of US' Iraqi policy. To get such a mandate the US will have to make compromises, the Iraqi cauldron is a major nonit is highly unlikely that EU countries starter like Germany and France. or for that matter Russia and China, will accept a commanding US

Army, is a political analyst and columnist dominance over the UN in Iraq. While the military command should stay with the US, given the large number of their forces on the ground in Iraq and the need for having a workable operations HQs staff, the military has to be under a UNappointed Administrator answerable to the UN and not to Washington. This UN-Protectorate idea may presently be a non-starter but with tent errors an election year approaching and combat deaths already more than

CORRECTION The second title of the first editorial in our yesterday's issue contained two typographical errors: 'fantacism' and vigourously'. The words should have read 'fanaticism' and 'vigorously respectively. We regret the inadver-

TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE

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.

Necessity of easy academic courses

In order to meet the demand of time a number of English medium schools have been established in the country. To keep pace with international standerds, most of these schools are following tough books along with huge syllabus on English, mathematics, science and others even at primary level without considering whether an average child can assimilate with that or not. In most of the cases it is seen that the children are overburdened with the stress of tough academic courses as well as chained to procedures and examinations.

As a result, a good number of children are losing interest in study. They are suffering from psychologi-

cal disorders and getting poor marks in the examinations. And the parents are rushing madly to private dictionaries were consulted too, tutors or coaching centres. but in vain. In order to solve this problem, the Later on. I inquired about the

authorities of those schools should design the syllabuses of different subjects keeping in mind a child's limit. Rubab Abdullah Dhaka Cantonment, Dhaka

Organogram: How the word came?

All government and nongovernment offices use the word 'organogram'. But while we type word in the computer, it denotes wrong spelling (word). Having seen the situation, and out of curiosity, I consulted the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary to find out the meaning and related Complex Ltd., Patenga, Chittagong words etc. (if any). Some other Thanks, Imzy!

Thank you Imzy for your outstanding performance in the third test against Bangladesh and your nice word with the editor of the Oxford comment that you will sacrifice a 5-0 win in ODI series to Rashid latif against Bangladesh. Ah, what a 2003 (by e-mail) that the word is notion of loyalty to the captain! It was great that he remembered that Oxford Dictionary of English, and a leader is always a leader, be he a will be included in the next edition of cheat or a thief by heart. the Oxford Advanced Learner's

On the other hand, what did Rafiq do? He did not run out Gul. It was a great chance. To show his own generosity, he drowned his team, his country. It's completely meaningless as they were about to celebrate the great victory.

Victory is everything, anyway, anyhow! It's the sign of good cricket!

Ashish Chittagong

Reduce train fair on Dhaka-Sylhet route Comparing to Dhaka-Chittagong route, the present rate of train fair is

very high on other routes. Nonetheless, the distance between Dhaka and Sylhet is in no way greater than the distance between Dhaka and Chittagong. And, over the years, the passengers have been paying unjustified charges. However, the communication minister has appeared to be a saviour. When this issue was brought before him, the railway authority proposed to increase train fair for the Dhaka-Chittagong route. Fortunately, the

minister rejected the proposal. Moreover, the minister directed to

reduce the train fair of Dhaka-Sylhet route. The decision got louder applause and was broadcast in the television.

Even though the decision was made, it has not been implemented yet. Months have passed, but the rate has remained the same. Aside from the unavailability of tickets due to corruption, non-implementation of such an important decision is painful to the commuters. Since the road between Dhaka-Sylhet is still risky and construction works are on, the passengers largely depend on train. Even if the construction works are finished, train journey would remain unattractive due to mismanagement and corruption. Would it be worthwhile if they reduce fair then? Oli Md Abdullah Chowdhury Save the Children Sweden-

Denmark, Gulshan, Dhaka The Pakistan tour

EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR

Thank God that due to technical advancements the cricket fans now can watch all their favourite players sitting in their cosy homes thousands of miles away, following every progress of the game.

Though Bangladesh lost the Test series, it definitely put up a brilliant fight and considering the age of the team, it definitely was not an easy catch and they fought very well. Heartiest congratulations to the budding stars of Bangladeshi cricket for whom a very bright future definitely awaits

Again judging from the performance of the Bangladeshi boys in the one-dayers against Pakistan, though they have by now lost the two, their performance should never

Looking back at all the matches played so far we find that Khaled Mahmud has come up as a capable captain who never got shaky. And we have found very good batsmen in Habibul Bashar and Rajin Saleh and Alok Kapali, who are equally good bowlers. Mohammad Rafique definitely did good bowling and Mashrafe Mortaza also deserves a favourable mention as a bowler. And Alok Kapali's bowling and fielding.

both were superb I am confident that Bangladesh team will do better in the coming days as it gains more experience of playing against experienced play-

Syed Faiyazuddin Ahmad Leicester, UK

be underestimated.