

Arms cache uncovered

Let's not jump to conclusions

THE police are to be congratulated for the intrepid raid that uncovered a huge cache of weapons and landed two policemen in hospital for their pains. There is no doubt we are all safer due to the courageous actions of SI Saidur Rahman and constable Neyamat Ali and the removal of such weapons from the streets.

However, an arms haul of this magnitude is also cause for concern. This was the first haul of such a scale in Dhaka, and the police were shocked to find that arms had penetrated into the heart of the capital and that such a sizeable haul could exist right under their noses. The recovery of the arms raises the question of how many more such caches might still be there.

It is clear that a thorough investigation is called for to determine whose weapons were recovered and how they managed to get to Dhaka. The authorities need to look at all the possibilities and spare no effort to get to the bottom of where the arms came from and what they were intended to be used for.

The home minister's statement in this respect was a little presumptuous. By publicly mentioning that the authorities are investigating links between the arms haul and "the so-called third force" he points the finger of suspicion in that direction.

We fail to see what can be gained by this public pronouncement. Pointing a finger of suspicion in one direction cannot possibly advance the investigation that needs to be undertaken without any preconceived notions. If anything it runs the risk of prejudicing the inquiry. And since nothing has yet been proved one way or the other, it was premature to even mention it.

At least in this instance the ills of the country are not being blamed on the opposition. Nevertheless, if it is perceived that hints of possible third force involvement constitute an unwarranted diversion, would it come as any surprise?

Sri Lanka in deeper crisis

Power struggle gets fiercer

THE stand-off between president Chandrika Kumaratunga and prime minister Ranil Wickremesinghe is getting more complicated by the day. The power struggle they have been locked in with an outside chance of yielding some form of compromise, both being leaders of the Sinhalese majority, has acquired a new dimension: it has turned into a power game.

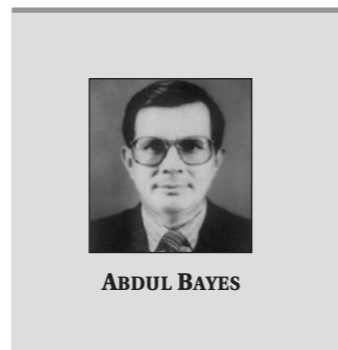
President Kumaratunga lately sounded out an offer of compromise to the premier through the media she controls containing two elements. First, she has agreed to share defence responsibilities with the prime minister; and secondly, she has asked for expanding the negotiating process with LTTE to include a peace advisory committee comprising more parties. The prime minister has rejected the so-called package deal which relents in one area while demanding something in another area. Obviously, it doesn't go far enough with the prime minister riding on a sympathy wave since the sacking of a part of his cabinet in his absence on November 4 which pushed Sri Lanka into a constitutional crisis.

The continuing tussle between the two is giving Tiger supremo Velupillai Prabhakaran grounds for asserting that he would invoke the right to self-determination. In fact, he has already warned that the Tamil minority would seek a separate state "if the two leaders of the Sinhalese majority scuttled the peace bid with their bickering". No one in the right frame of mind would like to see the Tamil rebels walk out of the peace process that has not only been internationally acclaimed but had also come to an advanced stage.

Set against the backdrop of unmitigated differences between Kumaratunga and Wickremesinghe, the atmosphere is rife with speculations that the parliament may be dissolved after voting on the national budget on December 18. This is likely to be followed by an announcement of a date for mid-term elections.

If the election results meant a renewal of the similar dichotomous relationship between the President and the PM, then what? Basically, the co-habitation negotiations should be given a chance.

Agricultural research: Paying for penny



ABDUL BAYES

THE Consultative Group of International Agricultural Research (CGIAR) comprises few institutions of repute that were aimed to help developing countries face their challenges towards food production and food security. Initially, before CGIAR stepped in, there were one or two such institutions for crops, like wheat and maize, working in isolation and, to some extent, in an uncoordinated fashion. Later, the areas of interventions expanded -- for example to include rice, fish, agriculture etc -- and as a result, more institutions developed to face the growing demand for researches in food and food systems. At that time, CGIAR was constituted to put all the institutions under one umbrella so that donors' dollar could be utilized optimally and in as coordinated compliance -- in the search for food production and food security in developing countries. I am told that, as of now, there are as many as 16 institutions under the umbrella of CGIAR spreading all over the world.

The International Rice Research Institute (IRRI) and the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) are the two institutions of CGIAR that have been working for a long time in Bangladesh. As I mentioned in some of my earlier writings in this column, both IRRI

and IFPRI played pivotal role in the improvement of rural livelihoods and food security through their funding of National Agricultural Research System (NARS) as well as through their researches on issues that affect food production and food security.

Impact of rice research

What had been the contribution of agricultural research in general and rice in particular? A straightjacket answer to this question would, perhaps, be very diffi-

cult. What has been the impact of the technology initiated by IRRI on the cost of producing rice? First, the yield rate of rice, reportedly, increased: modern aman varieties have 56 per cent higher yield than traditional aman. And modern boro rice has 175 per cent higher yield than traditional aus rice. The primary benefit of technological progress has, therefore, been reaped in the form of cost savings from rice production. Second, there have also been indirect benefits to the society. For example, the government has saved scarce

benefits.

How does that compare with costs of development and transfer of technology? During the time the estimates were to be done, Government of Bangladesh invested, on average, about USD 2.1 million/yr for rice research. In addition, funding agencies channeled USD 1.5 million/yr to rice research through IRRI-BIRRI collaborative project. Another USD 14.5 million was spent annually by the DAE for technology transfer. The total investment was thus USD 18 mil-

but easily imaginable.

Rice research and poverty

Two large-scale surveys at household level show a significant improvement in poverty between 1987 and 1994, the period of rapid technological progress. Another study covering 62 villages for 1987 and 2000 also revealed the same kind of information. Although the growth of agricultural production was much less impressive than in the non-agricultural rural non-farm sector (a product of the green

colleagues that Indian agricultural ministry, reportedly, proposed a rise of the amount of subscription for CGIAR to about \$10 million a year (from 7-800 thousand now). The increment is suggested to make a stronger presence of India in CGIAR meetings. However, we fail to understand why Bangladesh should not be a paid member of the CGIAR. Of course, there was a time when Bangladesh could hardly afford to pay for membership -- a time when Bangladesh had to move for food aid to feed teeming millions. But over the years, Bangladesh has gained resilience in terms of food production and food security and emerged as an example in the group gaining self-sufficiency in food grain. The achievement should be added mostly to the activities of the CGIAR institutions. Both IRRI and IFPRI played a positive role.

We feel that Bangladesh government should now pay the membership fees every year and should "earn" its voice in the deliberations of the CGIAR. We reckon that the yearly subscription could be half a million dollar or Tk. 3 core or so. This is minuscule in terms of the costs but would, possibly, raise the image of the country substantially in the international forum. There is a saying that a free lunch (if exists at all!) does not guarantee the quality of the food nor does it accept any allegation from the "free rider". Let's pay, partly at least, for the penny that we earn or save through the stewardships of CGIAR institutions and make ourselves proud of being a paid member.

We only hope that agriculture and finance ministries would pay their kind attention to this aspect.

Abdul Bayes is Professor of economics at Jahangirnagar University.

BENEATH THE SURFACE

We feel that Bangladesh government should now pay the membership fees every year and should "earn" its voice in the deliberations of the CGIAR. We reckon that the yearly subscription could be half a million dollar or Tk. 3 core or so. This is minuscule in terms of the costs but would, possibly, raise the image of the country substantially in the international forum.

cult since some of the contributions are directly quantifiable while others remain absolutely qualitative in nature (unless imputed to value). However, from economists' point of view, a commonly used method of estimating the returns from investment is the economic surplus approach. This approach estimates the benefits from research in terms of changes in consumer and producer surplus resulting from the technological change. Benefits are then related to research cost to estimate net present value, or benefit-cost ratio and internal rates of return. Admittedly, to my mind, there was no attempt to identify the costs and returns from investment excepting the one done by Dr Mahabub Hossain (of IRRI). Hossain applied economic surplus approach to determine the costs and benefits of rice researches in Bangladesh.

foreign exchange that might otherwise have been spent for imports of food. As we know, there has been a decline in food imports since 1980s and Bangladesh is almost on the verge of food grain self-sufficiency. The net benefit to the society per unit of the additional output is the difference between the acquisition cost (c.i.f price) of imported rice over the unit cost of producing rice internally.

According to Hossain, the total benefits were USD 13,040 million during 1973-93 periods, or an average of USD 652 million/yr. The total cost saving in rice production was USD 5,975 million or an average of USD 229 million/yr. If the benefits had been held in bank or on bonds at a 10 per cent rate of interest per annum, the present value of the benefits would have perked at USD 14.3 billion in cost saving and USD 33.5 billion in total

lion/yr. The benefit-cost ratio for the investment in rice research and technology transfer is estimated to be 16.6 if only the cost saving in rice production is considered. There were additional benefits in the form of foreign exchange savings, as argued earlier.

The government allocated, on average, USD 2.1 million/yr for rice research, which was complemented by an additional 75 per cent of funds, channeled by funding agencies through BIRRI/IRRI. This significantly developed the skills of BIRRI scientists through graduate training and helped improve laboratory facilities and other research infrastructure. The development of "human capital" in the realm of agricultural researches that IRRI/BIRRI collaboration brought about remains as "bonus" or spill-over benefits for Bangladesh. Hardly quantifiable

revolution itself) land and labour productivity rose at an impressive rate suggesting a favourable trend in total factor productivity. The cost savings in rice production and faster growth in rice supply compared with population growth have contributed to a fall in rice prices by about 1.6 per cent a year. Needless to mention perhaps that the decline in the real prices of rice largely benefited landless and the poor segment in both rural and urban areas.

Paying for penny

While Bangladesh reaps home rich dividends from technology and researches of CGIAR institutions, reportedly, she continues to be a non-paying member of the CGIAR. CGIAR membership requires annual subscription from participating countries. The other day I heard from my learned Indian

Correcting electoral anomalies



IKRAM SEHGAL
writes from Karachi

LOOKING at the many external and internal factors contributing to proliferation of terrorism in Pakistan, and elsewhere in the world, lack of people's participation in governance stands out as a primary reason. Pakistan is famous for having invented the Ayubian phrase 'democracy suited to the genius of the people', whereas the correct phrase should be 'democracy suited to the genius of the rulers'. Ayub wanted to be a popular President, that could only be possible by an unfettered democracy. Unfortunately his associates in the bureaucracy fed him the requirements of a 'guided democracy' as a means of furthering their own rule. Acting upon the genius (advice) of his associates, most of whom abandoned Ayub as soon as they calculated that crunch was imminent, he opted for 'Basic Democracy' as suited to the genius of the people. Half a century later, one should not be surprised where the same slogan has re-surfaced and why (and from whom) it emanates. For over 50 years now we have muddled through various forms of people participation in government, none have really given our people's the freedoms enshrined in our own religion that are the essence of democracy.

Any democracy that has indirect elections at any level is flawed; indirect election is an open invitation for manipulation. Moreover money plays a decisive role in indirect elections. The net result is that whatever form of democracy we invent to suit the genius of the moment does not last beyond the moment. Invariably, this creates frustration about the system among the populace, setting in motion a chain of events leading to disorder and anarchy, and thus

uting to discord i.e. a struggle for the diminishing economic resources available, it ferments the reasons for confrontation. Militancy as a means for self-protection easily converts into offensive action, and ultimately to terrorism.

People's participation requires that the majority vote must rule. As things stand today, an average of less than 40 per cent of the voting populace goes out to vote nation-

group in any constituency continuing because of this flawed electoral process, voter apathy leads to less and less participation in the democratic process. The voter perceives that his/her vote is of no consequence to the final result, this results in the percentage of the national vote being reduced every year. The majority thus gets to be ruled by a united minority, even when there is a 'huge mandate' of the elected i.e. with less than 30 per cent of the votes cast, the last Mian

30 per cent of the vote along ethnic lines, another 27 per cent of the vote may be given because of sectarian consideration, maybe 25 per cent of the vote goes to another candidate along tribal lines, the balance 18 per cent being a mixed vote. According to the 'run-off' formula for 'majority vote', the candidate having 30 per cent of the ethnic vote and the one with 27 per cent sectarian vote will be pitted against each other to try and get a majority from the balance 43 per

next election as a person who obtained the earlier vote on false premises. In every subsequent election the voting public will be far more perceptive for whom to vote for. With the competition becoming more intense, more and more voters will head for the voting booth. This will also lessen the influence of money, the candidate has presently to focus his (or her) budget on a small percentage of the electorate to get a majority, this will not be possible over a broader base of the electorate. As time goes on the ethnic, sectarian, etc factors may continue to matter, they will become lesser bogeys for democracy to contend with. It is only by voters crossing the divide of prejudice that real democracy becomes potent for good governance. That is the essence of democracy, to bind the electorate together and remove the divides polarising them along specific lines.

For Pakistan, it is of critical importance that we get our electoral process right, not only for democratic norms but to terminate the divisive state that our society is in. As the economic pie diminishes and the competition for resources becomes more acute, the various divides assume emotional content which leads to militancy. One has to only look at the banned religious outfits to see how militancy flourishing along sectarian lines has been converted to terrorism. People's participation is a basic accountability that is a must to ensure that polarisation of the populace does not occur, this participation has to be meaningful for ensuring good governance. This can only be achieved by having logical and pragmatic electoral process that negates the polarisation of society in Pakistan.

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

AS I SEE IT

It is only by voters crossing the divide of prejudice that real democracy becomes potent for good governance. That is the essence of democracy, to bind the electorate together and remove the divides polarising them along specific lines. For Pakistan, it is of critical importance that we get our electoral process right, not only for democratic norms but to terminate the divisive state that our society is in.

allows authoritarian rule to take over power in the country. This 'doctrine of necessity' would always be acceptable on a temporary basis for a short period to ward off anarchy from our society, regretfully in Pakistan necessity has assumed 'the doctrine of permanence'.

We may debate the form of governance and the operative system thereof till Kingdom Come, unless we correct the basic flaws in democracy, we are engaging in an extended exercise in frustration. The major obstacle to good governance is non-acceptance of the power of the individual vote by the 'first past the post' system of electing our representatives. In a society where there are sectarian and ethnic issues, people's participation is a dire necessity. Unfortunately our present system supports polarisation along sectarian and ethnic lines and when this combines with another factor contrib-

ally, the percentage reducing gradually over the years because of public apathy. In an average constituency, the elected candidate obtains only 25-30 per cent of the votes cast, a majority of the populace he (or she) is representative of will not have voted for him (or her). The aspirant candidate targets ethnic and/or sectarian community to which he (or she) belongs and shuts out the rest in focusing on obtaining their vote. Once elected, this problem becomes even more acute, as only those have access to the fruits of governance who have voted for the elected representative.

The citizen needs to tap into the institutions and resources of the State for his/her daily needs, being shut out leads to frustration and eventually further polarisation. Where the population is evenly divided, citizen participation in the democratic process continues but with unassailable majority of one

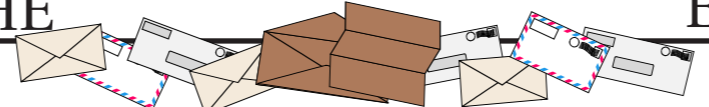
Nawaz Sharif regime controlled 70 per cent of Parliamentarians. With the younger population getting their right of franchise for the first time, frustration at this state of affairs will lead to apathy and have tragic consequences for the nation. This potential disaster needs to be addressed on an emergency basis.

The voting pattern shows that very rarely any candidate manages an absolute majority i.e. more than 50 per cent of the votes cast. If anyone of the candidates cannot manage more than 50 per cent then it becomes obligatory for the State to ensure that there is a second round of elections where at least one of the candidates will get more than 50 per cent and thus represent a majority of the voters in any constituency. To illustrate the example let us take for a model any urban constituency with a mix of ethnicity, also divided but along sectarian lines and tribal boundaries, etc. One candidate may get

cent of the vote that has gone to neither of the first two candidates. He (or she) has to convince the voter that did not vote for him (or her) in the first round, that he (or she) will be the best person to represent the voter in the electorate and that he (or she) is not a parochial and narrow-minded individual who will only look after his own particular constituents. Thus the candidacy has to reach across ethnic, sectarian and other considerations.

It could also be that the majority of the voters simply do not like the candidate getting the maximum (but not the majority) votes in the first round, they will gang up in the second round and vote as a lesser evil for the candidate getting less votes in the first round. Once the person gets elected, he (or she) will have to continue the wooing of his constituents during the period of his (her) incumbency or the voter will vote the candidate out in the

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.

B. Chowdhury

Following up on what Mr Shahjahan Ahmed has written regarding Mr Chowdhury's short presidential tenure (DS, 17 November 2003), I would simply like to point out that our ex-President was made to resign within seven months of his presidency. Surely had he stayed longer, or perhaps if he had still been there, we probably would have witnessed some remarkable changes in our state of affairs.

It was only because his views and ideas would have brought about some positive changes for once in the history of our country, was he deemed to be a threat to the in experienced members of the party, and that he was compelled to resign. And hence, I strongly feel that we were in no position to judge Mr Chowdhury during his time as president. However, if we are to be judgmental, the only conclusion I can draw upon, given his credentials, is that he is one of our coun-

try's most remarkable politicians, who is certainly an important asset for Bangladesh both as a politician and a leader.

Nuher L. Khan
University College London (UCL)

Why Concord failed?

This is amusing that a Bangladeshi metallurgical graduate has been able to detect that due to the limitation of knowledge in material science of Anglo-French scientists, Concord, the supersonic jet failed to survive. I hope, after reading this analysis NASA will propose to appoint him as Director General of flight safety for Space Shuttle as well as to determine the cause which resulted the disintegration during re-entry of the shuttle causing death to valuable lives.

I joined EPIDC in 1962 and continued till my retirement. He was known as Nut Shakil. I do not know where he is now. However, I feel that before expressing his views in the newspaper he should

have studied what is metal fatigue and composition of titanium and total thrust of four Olympus Jet Engines' effect on this sleek white bird.

The expected life of this supersonic commercial jet, which breaks twice the sound barrier to reach a 2-mach speed for which this was not allowed to fly overland, was also a consideration. Concord flew for long 30 years with few hundred thousand take offs and landings covering millions of miles. Passengers' safety remains supreme of the Airline using such aircraft.

Besides, of the total payload it used to carry 80% was fuel. In spite of \$5000 one way ticket this was uneconomic particularly after AIR FRANCE crash during take off and 11th September 2001 which has heavily reduced the revenue. These are the two reasons that forced both BA and Air France to discontinue Concord operation and not the reasons expressed by the metallurgical graduate of Bangladesh.

KMF Sayeed

20/32 Babar Road
Mohammadpur
Dhaka.

Vice chancellor

Once upon a time, Vice Chancellors of university used to get special respect from the society. It was and is still a very respectable position. But as ill luck would have it, in many cases the VCs are not getting their due respect. As we know, a VC is appointed by the Chancellor who may be the President or Prime Minister of the country. A public university is governed by individual Act passed by the National Parliament. Hierarchically the VC is next to the Chancellor (President or PM). But often protocols is not maintained in occasions of dealing with VCs. Their status are sometimes degraded. So, it would be appreciated if the government ensures proper protocols for VCs thereby retaining their dignity and status.

Prof. M Zahidul Haque

Dept. of Agric. Extension & Information System
Sher-e-Bangla Agricultural University, Dhaka-1207

Our ineligible law enforcers

After four years of murder the judgement in the sensational Sergeant Ahad murder case was delivered on the 19th of November. In the verdict two including the main accused were awarded death penalty, and one was sentenced to life time imprisonment. But ten of the accused were acquitted off the charge! And this is where the mask of our law enforcers was removed.

The court knew that the acquitted were actually guilty but it had nothing to do. The court mentioned that the investigative officers did not carry out the TIP or the test of identification parade.

The Judge also criticised few of Ahad's colleagues for neglecting their duty and termed them 'ineligible' for law enforcement. The

court also advised concerned authorities to take necessary action against them.

The directive from the court is not surprising as from the time of murder Ahad's wife lodged the same complaint. But neither the AL nor the present government listened to her cry. Although the primary accused divulged the name of the same officers but no step was taken. But Ahad's wife was threatened not to speak any more.

The present government is doing many things for the improvement of law and order. But will there be any action against these corrupted officers? I think the government should take step immediately as it is a directive from the court. And it is also an opportunity to rub off corruption from the police force.

Those officers should be punished so that no more Ahad tragedy take place in the future. The whole nation is ashamed of it. And it is time to prove by the government that they are really interested to punish corrupt police officers.

Moin ul Alam.
Minto Road, Dhaka.

Austerity and wanton government expenditure

Every new government which assumes power preaches austerity but as time passes it starts spending huge amount of money from the public exchequer on holding various functions, ceremonies, parties, seminars, workshops, pomp and show to earn ostentatious name, fame and publicity.

Ours is a poor country and our per capita income is one of the lowest in the world. To call spade a spade we have a deficit budget every year but tactfully in theory and practice we camouflage with some new patchwork and heavy load of billions and billions of dollars loans from foreign countries and agencies and we try to project and prove that we have a balanced or surplus budget.

We wonder is it necessary at all to hold highly expensive and luxurious Iftar parties one after another for a selected few of rich and affluent persons or diplomats at the cost of our public exchequer and at the cost of untold sufferings of our poor people?

We are also astonished why ministries, government organisations, public sector corporations and NGOs hold seminars and workshops at five star hotels like Sonargaon and Sheraton? Who pays the bills for dinner, lunch and the hire charges for the gorgeous halls?

What benefit do the common people get or what the common people learn from such seminars and workshops?

O.H. Kabir
6, Hare Street, Wari, Dhaka-1205