

## Science is Sound Investment

Acting President Justice Shahabuddin has echoed the sentiment of most people, particularly the scientist community, by wishing there had been an Ekushey Padak for contribution to science and technology.

However, the lack of a Padak is small-fry compared to the woeful lack of funds for research work. Investment in basic science, whether by the state or the private sector, is evidently a low-priority area. It is difficult, if not impossible, to understand why science has remained such a neglected area, 20 years after independence.

It is often said that Third World countries such as Bangladesh simply cannot afford the huge sum of money necessary to build a scientific research establishment of any consequence. It is better, so the argument runs, to utilise the fruits of research work done elsewhere. This may sound attractive and cheaper, but is of value only in the short-term.

The development of an indigenous knowledge bank, a reservoir of technological skills, through the creation of a well-funded and efficiently administered research programme, has now become imperative. The government may well be the biggest source of investment funds, but the entrepreneurial class has a crucial role to play in such a development since it will be the principal beneficiaries of the end-product of research.

Equally important, the research work would naturally aim to develop technological skills appropriate to the special needs of a rural, developing economy.

At present, considerable amount of research work is going on at various universities around the country. However, the effort is taking place in virtual isolation due to lack of funds and exposure. Lack of a sound marketing policy has meant that results have not been sufficiently communicated to industry.

What is required at present is a joint effort by research scientists, businessmen and government agencies to put science on the national agenda. While it is vital for the private sector to set up funds for research, it is important for scientists to develop a sense of entrepreneurship and market their work to industry. For its part, industry should also develop a scout mentality and seek out local innovations. As well as funding general research work, industry should look to establish a close working relationship with research institutions, particularly the universities.

The media's role is a highly significant one here. It needs to shake out of its current inertia and provide greater exposure to national scientists and scientific activity. It is necessary not only to bring public awareness to the need for scientific research, but also to arouse popular interest in science in general.

In the final analysis, science and technology remain the most viable vehicle of economic development. To paraphrase Nobel-laureate Professor Salam, the developing world cannot afford not to invest in science.

## Killing the Proverbial Goose?

This piece of news from Brahmanbaria has little in it which is new. It entices one to paraphrase Tolstoy's observation about happy homes being very boringly uniform and unhappy ones being different in so many ways — albeit conversely. All our sad tales are so familiar and uniformly dispiriting and going on and on for so long!

The news is about potters of Nabinagar, Sarail, Kasba and Sadar upazilas of the district leaving their centuries-old ancestral profession. This has been going on for many years and throughout Bangladesh. But that does not rob it of newsworthiness by any measure if only because it underscores for the umpteenth time the social and cultural disaster we are living for every moment of our existence — and because it registers one further stage of our decay as a society. Society can be this foolish only if it has lost its ways to care for itself. And this society — our society — is said to be highly organised with all kinds of associations and collectives and institutions of age-old wisdom and endurance — all of it having at its apex a supreme thing called a state nannied, as is usual in the civilised world — by a government. When we look at the withering potters and dwindling fishermen and ungreening environment, a serious suspicion creeps in as to whether all this is a fable to lullaby the grown up children such as we into a sense of carefree well-being that masks all idea of what's truly happening to us.

Look at any one of the water pitchers — so much celebrated in our songs and poems — and there will be no need for any elaboration. The wheels turn lakhs of them every year. Look at the workmanship, the finish, the shape. The functional as well as aesthetic elements have been honed and married to each other by millions upon millions of skilled hands over thousands of generations — and the stamp of all that is on every piece of this particular kind of water vessel called the *kalosh*. It is only the top that is done on the wheel. The bottom half is just joined, in a pronouncedly visible seam, to it by an incredibly delicate day-long hand-hammering. The vessel must not only be perfectly waterproof — water neither to get in nor to go out except through the mouth — but it has also to have such strength as to hold and carry at least 15 litres of water and not give in. On top of it the bottom half has to be microscopically porous so that through constant evaporation the water inside keeps refreshingly cool.

It's not an item we can do without. Indeed, each and every item that comes out of our potter's villages are household necessities required by the 20 million-and-odd families excepting the few urban ones perched high above and buying everything abroad. And still the men and women behind and around the potter's wheel must die or quit to save their souls. We are almost literally killing the proverbial goose of the golden eggs. How and why?

In this age of environment consciousness let us remind ourselves that only our poor potter's wares are supremely biodegenerative — the greatest virtue for any commodity — and very amiably hygienic. And after all that must our poor man and his working family perish. Only because he is very badly placed socially as well as economically — an unbeatable illustration of all — in cannibalistic exploitation at the deprived level of our society.

Potters leaving their wheels and going out to beg — is possibly the direst of omens. Shall we not heed? And in time?

THE repeal of the apartheid bills now being debated by South African MPs has produced a buzzword in parliamentary circles. "Community rights" has replaced the term "group rights".

At the opening of the debate in what is expected to be the last white-dominated parliament the official argument is that "majoritarian rule" — as Constitutional Minister Gerrit Viljoen has named it — is not the only route to a non-racial democracy.

The community issue was first raised by the Solidarity Party, the majority in the House of (Indian) Delegates, on the eve of President F.W. de Klerk's opening of Parliament February 1. It argued a Bill of Rights would not give enough protection to minorities — not as races, but as cultural groups.

One demand, for instance, is an entrenched right for the children to be taught Hindi and other Indian languages at school.

The government, on the other hand, argues that a new constitution must safeguard different communities that have "shared values and lifestyles." It used this argument to explain its opposition to the idea of a constituent assembly that the African National Congress (ANC) wants created as the body to draw up a post-apartheid constitution.

An election campaign for such an assembly would, according to Viljoen, lead to every party taking castiron positions to win votes and the constitution would be more or less dictated by the majority party, thus excluding other parties and groups from making meaningful contributions. "Democracy doesn't consist of majorities alone," he says.

## New Idea in South Africa: Separate Communities

Arthur Maimane writes from Johannesburg

The debate is now going on in the South African Parliament on the repeal of the Acts which entrench apartheid. One development that has emerged is an apparent change in government thinking whereby the concept of group areas is now to be replaced by ideas for the protection and separation of communities. The new constitution, it argues, must safeguard different communities that have "shared values and lifestyles."



GERRIT VILJOEN  
Majoritarian rule

Foreign Minister P. Botha is certain that the National Party can be the majority party because it already has "vast support" from African, Coloureds (persons of mixed race) and Indians. He assured

journalists, however, that the true Nationalists would not be swamped by these recruited communities.

The right-wing Conservative Party was lambasted in the joint chamber by Energy Minister Dawie de Villiers for refusing to have anything to do with the reforms, whatever the bait of community protection.

De Villiers said the realities of South Africa are experienced and understood in different and contrasting ways even within the white community. The country in which he lived "and the South Africa inhabited by the Conservative Party are two totally different worlds."

In his own contribution to the communities debate, he said people could "find each other on the basis of common values, standards and norms, a political dispensation where minorities and majorities are not determined on the basis of race and colour, but by virtue of common values."

Minority rights would be protected "and the abuse of power by the majority (would

be) prevented through non-racial, but nonetheless powerful and incontrovertible constitutional democratic measures."

The unanswered question so far is who these minorities are — or will be in the non-racial future. The National and Solidarity parties insist that "community rights" — as de Klerk termed it — is not an ideal that is simply another name for "group rights" or plain, old-fashioned apartheid.

These communities would not be classified by race — repeal of the Population Registration Act will see to that — but they would define themselves by their shared values. As de Klerk told parliament, "certain human needs may continue to be met in a community context without coercion, without discrimination and without apartheid."

Another unanswered question is whether the final Bill of Human Rights — the government and ANC have their separate models, which are said not to differ too much — will outlaw discrimination by any community that insists its val-

ues and standards are quite different after the scrapping of the Group Areas Acts.

Labour Party leader Allan Hendrikse said at a press briefing that the government was pushing this line to mollify voters it could lose to the Conservative Party which is the official opposition and is bitterly against any reforms to end apartheid. People looking for such protection, he said, "are the same people giving a poor reflection of those norms and standards" — like the Conservative Party did when it walked out on de Klerk after he had announced the repeal of the Acts.

Hendrikse said he did not wish to live among these people because he had little respect for their values and lifestyles. The Nationalists and Solidarity also sound a similar note on their proposals for "broadening input into the government" during the negotiations for a post-apartheid South Africa.

Solidarity wants the present Cabinet dissolved and replaced by one that represents all par-

ties prepared to negotiate the new constitution — a "super-cabinet" including Africans, even though they still have no vote.

When he opened parliament, de Klerk put it differently, declaring that "consideration may be given to certain transitional arrangements on the various legislative and executive levels to give the leaders of the negotiating parties a voice in the formulation of important policy decisions."

Pik Botha insists that there was "no need to persuade the National Party to change" and introduce the current reforms, which have made "the prospects better than ever before" for a consensus on the non-racial new constitution.

The party, he says, has known for years that apartheid was doomed. It was "not realised overnight." But, he claims, plans to reform the country were slowed down by international sanctions that reduced economic growth, increased unemployment and contributed to the soaring crime rate.

A warning that white communities may not welcome sharing their values with other race groups came out of a statement to parliament by Louis Pienaar, Minister of National Education. He said they would have to make financial sacrifices to fund post-apartheid South Africa and the size of classes in previously all-white schools. — GEMINI NEWS

ARTHUR MAIMANE made his name as one of the talented group of journalists who ran Drum Magazine in Johannesburg in the Fifties and Sixties. In Britain, he worked for BBC World Service.

## Asians Wanted, but Not Really

Ian McCrone writes from Queenstown, New Zealand

Much of the resentment comes from the fear that once Asians take over, New Zealanders will be priced out

GOVERNMENT policies aimed at securing big investments and rich migrants from Asia are now causing doubt and unease among New Zealand's citizens.

On one hand, New Zealanders need the wealth and skills Asians can offer. On the other, they resent what they see as foreigners "buying up" their homeland at bargain prices.

This fear that once new Asian owners take over, New Zealanders will be priced out of facilities they have come to regard as their "heritage" is responsible for much resentment.

There is also general envy of the way foreigners can produce cash to buy properties. New Zealanders cannot afford because of the high interest rates they would have to pay on money borrowed to finance a deal.

A third cause of irritation (to all but the sellers) is the way Asian investment in select city housing areas and tourist resorts pushes up property prices beyond the reach of most local buyers.

Only in recent years has New Zealand admitted, let alone encouraged migrants from Asia. Since 1984, when the Labour Party came to power, investment barriers have been scrapped. Efforts to attract wealthy and skilled overseas Chinese have supplemented the traditional intake of new blood from old Britain.

The strains have now started to show, and can be illustrated by a series of recent incidents in Queenstown, this small scenic tourist resort town in the South Island's southern lakes region.

The local district council happily approves new multi-million-dollar golf course developments, one designed by New Zealand's best-known

golfer, Bob Charles, for foreign financiers. It is awake to the potential of tourism.

But it finds it can do nothing with central bureaucracy to help a Taiwan businesswoman — who has just bought a big Queenstown tourist hotel — get permanent residence in New Zealand.

She had the cash qualifications for admission — the equivalent of US\$147,500 to cover "settling-in costs." She also had expansive plans to extend the hotel, and publicise New Zealand in Taiwan. But government immigration officials in Wellington rejected her on the ground she lacked business experience.

This attitude was echoed at Cabinet level about the same time. Just before the general elections last October, the Minister of Conservation, Dr. Peter Tapsell, vetoed the sale of a top-line state-owned golf course at Wairakei, near Lake Taupo, to Japanese interests.

His colleagues in the Labour government had earlier approved the deal. It provoked a public outcry from golfers fearing they would no longer

be able to afford the green fees, from Maoris (ever alert to their land rights) and from the public at large, alarmed at a growing number of land sales to foreigners.

The Japanese are getting the greatest amount of criticism. Old animosities die hard.

Older generations of New Zealanders remember the threat of invasion the Japanese represented in World War II, although submarine activity in New Zealand waters and a few floatplane reconnaissance flights were as far as they got.

Last November, a group

representing more than 700 New Zealanders interned during the war nearly half-a-century ago, sent the Japanese government a US \$20,000 compensation claim for each prisoner or his surviving family.

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