

# Season for Sure Crops: Cold is Gold

## Legitimising Corruption!

It is surprising that it is the Home Minister Abdul Matin Chowdhury, rather than the Finance Minister Saifur Rahman, who should announce that the government would provide "all sorts of facilities" to those who would invest what the Minister himself termed as black money in setting up industries. Again, this policy statement was made during an open dialogue with representatives of different chambers of commerce and industries, instead of at the Jatiya Sangsad. We are, indeed, all for increased consultation between the authorities and the private sector — but we have said so in these columns many times — but when it comes to a minister making a major policy statement, the place to do so is undoubtedly the parliament.

There is little doubt that a section in the business community would welcome Mr Chowdhury's announcement, some for personal reasons, without assessing its broad national implications. True, we are badly in need of massive funds from domestic as well as external sources, for the establishment of new industries as well as for salvaging the sick ones. However, both the government and the private sector should ask themselves whether all the legitimate avenues have been explored to put the country's industrial sector on its feet again, say, by liberalising the credit facilities, eliminating bureaucratic bottlenecks and streamlining investment procedures. Unless these steps have been taken, the infusion of large funds, regardless of their origin and colour, into the industrial sector can hardly lead to a great leap forward into a new era.

Again, what is, after all, black money? To put it bluntly, it is money earned through illegal means, including smuggling which was specifically mentioned by the Home Minister. There are also various categories of black money which has been earned or accumulated through means ranging from tax evasion to malpractices in trade, from kickbacks to blackmarketing. Judging by press reports, it is hardly clear if the Home Minister would close his eyes to the source of black money provided it is invested in industries. In fact, Mr Chowdhury has gone to the extent of asking for proposals from holders of black money as to how they would like their ill-gotten funds to be invested.

The announcement raises other questions of ethical considerations. How will the move be viewed by that respected section of business community which has toiled and worked hard, often incurring huge losses, but without resorting to any irregular means? At this stage, won't this section regard itself as foolish losers compared to the so-called holders of black money? Secondly, what will be the impact of the announcement, if implemented, on the much publicised drive against corruption? Will it not be interpreted as a case of legitimising corruption, past, present and future?

May be the matter should not be closed that quickly, one way or the other. The authorities should look at the situation carefully and introduce some innovative measures to generate funds, especially from Bangladeshis living abroad, for our industrialisation programme. But such measures should be open and above board, involving no compromise with corruption.

## Do Come Again

Pandit Ravi Shankar, the whole world knows him, has said in his parting address on the conclusion of a five-day tour of Bangladesh, that this was his fatherland—doubly. His father hailed from Kalia in Jessore in the last quarter of the last century. Panditji, he is indeed our very own Ravishankar Chattopahyaya, however says it is more important to him that Bangladesh, Brahmanbaria to be precise, is the land of the other father, Ustad Alauddin Khan who groomed him into what the world knows him to be. The nonpareil sitarist says his trip here is a true pilgrimage.

We wish that he come on this particularly valued pilgrimage rather often if only because he, the person, is a shrine to us not only for his achievements in music and yeoman service in placing subcontinental music on a very elevated niche in the edifice of world music but more because of his invaluable support of our Liberation War. He has promised to play to a big unrestricted audience of all kinds of people, if necessary at the stadium — and we are sure all of our people will be eagerly looking forward to it. But there is another aspect to this wonderful offer from the great man. It is equally as effective a slap on the cheek of the culture ministry which never deigned to feel that every citizen had a right to Ravi Shankar's music, not only because his is the very epitome of the very best in our music, but because he has been invited by government at the expense of the tax-payers' money. The whole business of handling his visit smacked of bad taste and indiscretion — selling gate upwards of Tk 300 — or in other words keeping out the truly music starved people.

It is futile to comment meaningfully on his music in a paragraph. Let it suffice for the moment to say that this is the most meditative of extant subcontinental music on the instruments, specially the plucked ones. But even as Shiva does the cosmic dance and Krishna is up to his leela eternally, Ravi Shankar relieves his nirvana-inducing meditation with the playful mirthy innovations of blossoming laykari. The meditative temper comes from his guru who joined the Veena alaap to serve as the prologue of recitals on lesser instruments such as sitar and sorode. This elevates the artist to the state of a godly trance — and as it is with the gods — he chooses to indulge in play that interests those nearer the more mundane states of existence. Ravi has often been reviled for giving in to charming audience with devices and deviations unbecoming for taalim and the true temper of his performance as a whole. Some detractors would like to call his way about music as *tantravadi* as if that were a trifle composed to the haloed 'gayaki-ang'. These are nit-picking of the most meaninglessly mean kind. Ravi Shankar's music is sanctified above all, by integrity that comes only to artists on his plain. Do come again, our dear soul-brother.

**B**ANGLADESH is situated on the edges between tropical and subtropical weather. The hot and humid weather from June to August is followed by gradual lessening of the temperature as well as wetness of the weather. By November, it is cool and dry. December-January period is cold and sunny, while February continues to be cold particularly in the northern part. The warm but dry weather starts up in March. December-January cold could be gold as well.

Our disaster-ridden monsoon climate is blamed for the continuing lack of adequate growth of the agriculture sector. If the crops are even partly lost in one out of every three years, why farmers are going to invest and increase the yield? Indeed this is good logic. But at the same time, we forget that from November to April, half the year, is practically trouble free with abundant sunshine, dry and cool for most of this period. It is ideal for crops which require low temperature at the growing stage followed by warm sunshine during the ripening period.

What is mostly lacking is water. If there is irrigation, winter cultivation is the best option available to promote agricultural growth. Unlike the rainy season when rice and jute are the only two crops that could be grown, winter and spring times offer opportunities for wide-ranging crop diversification all over Bangladesh.

Winter is prolonged in the

northern part of Rajshahi division. Combined with ground water irrigation, it is possible to promote the cultivation of temperate horticulture crops provided appropriate export linkages with European and Middle-East markets are established. Such high value crops can increase the gross value of output, for example, in the Thakurgaon district by five to ten fold. And, this is pronounced manifestation of agricultural growth — to say the least.

### High Value Crops

Strawberry, asparagus and mushroom are three among many others of such high value horticulture crops whose export volume could be substantial in fresh, frozen and processed forms. Strawberry preserves and canned mushroom have readymade markets all round the year. However, export of these high value food items in the fresh form might fetch a good return from the European markets in winter when they are rare and tend to become delicacies during year-end celebrations. Indeed the local market for these delicacies would be very small but no harm in promoting local sales as well. Mushroom in particular is a high protein food, can be produced cheaply and is least demanding on land — the most scarce input in Bangladesh. Therefore from amongst the very small landed farmers, such mushroom growers can be promoted. In areas like Dinajpur and Srimangal where winter is colder, such specialised mushroom cultivation can be

organised. I have mentioned only three horticulture crops but there are many others which are also better known to us and the local market demand is also considerable. Many newspapers in Dhaka have come out with reports on winter vegetables. It was reported in one newspaper that with only 25 taka which is much less than a dollar, one can get a bagful of such winter vegetables including potato. The reports unfortunately are consumer oriented which is obvious since they are the readers. Little known however is the fact or the realisation that while the urban consumers are enjoying the varieties of winter vegetables, farmers for their hard

work are getting poor returns. This is because the harvest period is so much concentrated that within a period of 2 to 4 weeks, bulk of the output of any particular kind of vegetable arrives at the market. At the same time the products are highly perishable and adequate cold storage or outside markets are not available to boost the prices. Immediate post-harvest collapse of the prices are inevitable.

### Business Approach

To realise the gold from the vegetables of cool temperate climate is indeed a difficult though not impossible task. But ad hoc bureaucratic prescription must be avoided and reliance, instead, be on a thorough-going business approach. The typical government approach, would be for the Ministry of Agriculture to prepare a proposal for assistance to farmers consisting of extension know-how, credit, irrigation and other physical inputs like fertiliser, pesticides and seeds. The project design would inevitably stop short of market development involving

inputs and strive to obtain higher yields. It would set the necessary stage for the accelerated phase of development through introduction of new crops like mushroom, asparagus, strawberry etc., and better quality of other such crops which are already known to farmers.

Direct assistance to wholesalers and traders buying directly from the farmers should be designed through better transport arrangements and shortage facilities. Vegetables also may be encouraged to go in for, organising contract farming. Where NGOs are active, they may link up farmers with such exporters. Easy credit is one instrument of development which can bolster marketing abroad. But first of all, markets must be found. Association of vegetable exporters could be organised and regular dialogue established with Export Promotion Bureau for facilitating all arrangements. Foreign market exploration is another vital field where our trade offices abroad can provide invaluable assistance. Why not promote foreign trips for such exporters? It is a good way to start.

### Export Growth

Once through investment in market infrastructure, building up of marketing institutions and putting in place an appropriate incentive structure for exporters in particular have been accomplished, vegetable and similar other exports should grow at a rapid pace. Very soon the next stage would arrive for export of more processed products, like frozen fruits and vegetables. Canning would be last to come when

big time operators, the multi-nationals like Campbell, Del Monte etc., should be encouraged to enter into joint venture agreement with local counterparts.

It is necessary to appreciate the particular sequence of development. Unless the pattern is clearly foreseen through entrepreneurial vision, development cannot proceed. It is not the World Bank's project preparation or appraisal mission who could initiate the process. Such vision must be entirely of local origin.

The agriculture sector plan and the schemes thereunder are primarily concerned with cereal production, rice in particular. Expand irrigation for the additional acreage under rice and encourage modern varieties for higher yields of rice; these two in a nutshell sum up our archaic strategy for agriculture growth.

Time has come to appreciate that self-sufficiency through rice and wheat is not the relevant target any longer. One ton of vegetable or other horticulture product exported can buy much more than a ton of rice from Thailand or Vietnam. Let us concentrate on a strategy that maximize the gross value of production from land employing more labour and fetching yet more returns to the farmers.

And, in this strategy cold seems to be the gold. As the days of misty dawn appear all over Bangladesh, the season for intensive agriculture would then automatically set in. It would then be the season of sure crops — the vagaries of nature left far behind along with the rains.

## From LDC to NIC by Shahed Latif

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Consequently, returns to farmers are minimized and incentives to achieve higher yields are dissipated. Also, oversupply causes wastage. It has been estimated that of the total production of fruits and vegetables, one-fourth to one-third is a total loss. At the same time

assistance to wholesalers and retailers; although this is the area where improvements must be made first.

For high value perishable farm products, development must begin from the downstream end of marketing so that wastage which is so high can be minimized. This can be done through simultaneous actions on two fronts: (i) invest in cold storage, sorting, grading and packaging; and (ii) assist traders in finding export markets. What will happen as a result is better return to farmers from the existing levels of production due to reduction of wastage as well as expanded market abroad. This should generate the essential incentives for the farmers to invest

# Plan to Put Hong Kong Vietnamese in Vanuatu

Evelyn Hogan writes from Canberra

**A** bizarre plan to resettle thousands of Vietnamese refugees living in Hong Kong on the island of Santo Espiritu in Vanuatu is being floated by a Southern Californian Congressman and a developer.

Republican Dana Rohrabacher says he has a promise from the newly elected Prime Minister of Vanuatu, Maxime Carlot, that the plan will be brought before the Vanuatu parliament in Port Vila within 60 days.

Developer Frank Jao, of Orange County, says he has offered to put forward a good development plan. He adds: "A lot of work would have to be done. We don't want the refugees to think they are being shipped to a wild island as an alternative."

The office of the Representative for the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in Canberra says it finds the suggestion "quite extraordinary". Henry Domzalaki, deputy regional representative for Australia and the South Pacific,

*American developers are floating a plan to resettle Vietnamese refugees in Hong Kong in the South Pacific republic of Vanuatu. The idea is to put them on Espiritu Santo island, scene of a rebellion by the locals in 1980. But the islanders are hardly likely to welcome such a plan and it would not be a permanent solution to the problem anyway.*

says the UN in principle welcomes any international burden-sharing to meet the plight of refugees.

But he points out that for those deemed to be genuine refugees there are enough resettlement places. Of those in the camps in Hong Kong who have applied only 30 per cent have been granted refugee status.

Domzalaki wonders whether Vanuatu is being asked to take some of the 70 per cent of non bona fide refugees. If the offer is interpreted as genuine damage may have been done.

Some months ago a false rumour went through the

Hong Kong camps that some of the thousands of non-refugees were to be taken to Kuwait to help with the rebuilding there.

At that time many were considering voluntary repatriation and the pull of Kuwaiti petrodollars caused many to change their minds.

Talk of Vanuatu providing a refuge for the Vietnamese is not new. The suspicion is that what is being offered is not permanent resettlement, but is part of a plan to use the refugees as cheap labour in Vanuatu's duty free zone. They would find themselves in Vanuatu with out any over-seeing being carried on by the UN.

The UNHCR points out that there can be no such thing as a temporary solution for the refugees. They already have temporary settlement in Hong Kong. What is needed is a permanent solution.

There are also dangers for the people of Vanuatu. If the UN does not oversee the operation the resettled may include criminals.

Santo was the island that rebelled against rule from Port Vila in 1980 before New Hebrides became independent as Vanuatu. The promoters of this plan may be able to grease a few politicians' palms to try to get their way, but the islanders are likely to be as



happy about thousands of Vietnamese coming there as people in Fiji have turned out to be with the Indians in that country.

Papua New Guinea government asked Vanuatu to take 400 fellow Melanesians from among people of West Papua or Irian Jaya (part of Indonesia) who had been granted refugee status by the UNHCR. About 11,000 West Papuans are living in camps along the Irian Jaya border after escaping from intense Indonesian military activity in 1984.

Not only did Vanuatu not take any of these refugees, but in 1988 it expelled five families of the West Papuan Black Brothers rock group after jailing five of the men and excluding the children from Vanuatu schools. Five months later the Black Brothers and their families were rescued and allowed to settle in Australia.

It is most unlikely that the Vanuatu parliament will approve the resettlement of 500, much less thousands, of Vietnamese on Santo. If they do they could expect to be used as cheap labour and at worst they might find themselves in the middle of another Santo rebellion.

— GEMINI NEWS

# Asia Fighting Democratic Decay

*Asia's restored democracies face threats of reversal as the new governments struggle to achieve economic success and promote equity, reports Kunda Dixit of IPS from Manila*

**A**s more Asian countries edged toward political pluralism in the last few years, in many, democracy has failed to live up to popular expectations and faces prospects of reversal in 1992.

Although free elections were held in many of these countries last year, there are doubts whether ballots can liberate the masses from poverty. Except for setbacks in China, Burma, North Korea and Thailand, most Asian countries took steps toward multiparty systems.

In the Philippines, which started a trend in 1986 with its 'people power' uprising that overthrew a dictator, democracy has neither erased economic disparities nor nurtured sustained growth as the country gets ready to choose another president in May.

Nepal and Bangladesh became the two newest Asian countries to revert to parliamentary democracy in 1991.

But as in the Philippines, disillusionment has begun to set in as the new, fragile elected governments fumble in their efforts to rescue economies ravaged by years of

autocratic plunder.

The short-term result of Nepal's democratic revolution will be that the country's poor remain as poor as ever, but Nepalis will be freer to complain about their poverty," said Jan Sharma, editor of The Independent newspaper in Kathmandu.

Last year, Bangladesh returned to democracy after 14 years of coups, assassinations and military rule. A rambunctious new parliament has replaced the regimented house presided over by ousted strongman Hussain Mohammad Ershad.

In neighbouring Pakistan, which emerged from over a decade of martial law with astonishingly free elections in 1988, political infighting has reached frightening and bizarre proportions. Last month, government goons were accused of gang-raping a close friend of opposition leader Benazir Bhutto.

Communal conflict and po-

litical assassinations continue to tear apart nations with long traditions of multi-party rule like Sri Lanka and India. They have become sorry showcases of Western-style democracy.

Through the years, East Asia's economic sprinters like Malaysia, Singapore, Taiwan and South Korea have traded some political freedoms for strict social discipline, and proudly displayed this as the ideal formula for rapid economic growth.

But newly affluent people no longer seem satisfied with semi-democracy and are clamouring for greater say in who should make decisions on their behalf. In Singapore, voters in elections in August

showed they wanted more political choice.

Hong Kong's elections for the legislative council in September proved that the people of the British colony want political reforms before the territory reverts to Chinese rule in 1997. And the Taiwanese went to the polls in December in the freest ever parliamentary polls in 40 years.

Indonesia is readying for parliamentary elections this year under a regime which will screen candidates. President Suharto came to power in 1966 and is the world's longest-ruling leader.

In China and Burma, democracy remains sup-

pressed after it flowered briefly in 1988 and 1989. The gerontocracy in Beijing, nervous about what is happening in Moscow, is struggling to save communism's last bastion. The Chinese recipe is to bring swift economic reforms without compromising political dogma.

Burma's military rulers found themselves in the international spotlight once more when detained opposition leader Aung Sang Suu Kyi was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. Defying international condemnation, the junta has refused to give up power even though Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy (NLD) swept elections in 1989.

In neighbouring Thailand, the military takeover in February 1991 set back a trend toward civilian rule in the coup-prone South-east Asian monarchy. A new constitution passed in December ensures that the Thai military will continue to have crucial clout.

The region's leaders have learnt that the best way to shore up pluralism is to open up their economies. Across Asia, young democracies last year took bolder steps to privatise and deregulate.

Even socialist India, the champion of the South and stalwart of the Non-aligned Movement, swallowed the bitter pill last year — it turned to the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and Western creditors to rescue it from bankruptcy.

In the Philippines, where the fad of bloodlessly throwing off greedy tyrants first caught on in 1989, commentators warn of democratic decay and economic ruin in the new year.

"Philippine democracy is in deep trouble," says Amanda Dornila, editor of the Manila Chronicle. "Under a democratic system the market-oriented Philippine economy is not delivering the goods."

The Philippines is a good guide for where the pitfalls of reversal lie: the failure of a new democratic government to ensure equity and an erosion of the people's faith in the democratic process.

## To the Editor...

Letters for publication in these columns should be addressed to the Editor and legibly written or typed with double space. For reasons of space, short letters are preferred, and all are subject to editing and cuts. Pseudonyms are accepted. However, all communications must bear the writer's real name, signature and address.

### Kindergartens and tuition fees

Sir, With the reemergence of English in our national life although not yet officially, a number of Kindergartens and English-medium schools are being set up almost in every corner of the metropolitan city. The less we talk about the standard of education imparted in these schools, the better.

These schools are generally set up as business ventures and the main motive of the owners/sponsors is to earn money.

They go on increasing the tuition and other fees every year and that sometimes by 20% to 30%. Many of these schools, specially located in Dhanmondi, have also a tendency to demand, directly or indirectly, donation from the parents for getting their sons/daughters admitted to these schools. Any casual survey will indicate that during the past five years such schools have at least doubled the tuition and other fees, although there is a clear government instruction that no school can enhance the tuition and other

fees without prior approval from the Education Ministry. Normally, Education Ministry does not allow to enhance tuition and other fees before passage of four/five years.

Therefore, I would like to draw the attention of the Minister for Education to this matter and urge to immediately check this illegal practice.

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### Drug Rules

Sir, It is strange and astonishing to note that, while including the Pharmacy graduates in the list of competent technical staff/qualified persons of Drug Rule intentionally or unintentionally the term 'competent technical staff' was replaced by 'only Pharmacy

graduates' as per Pharmacy Ordinance -1976, debarring the science graduates with chemistry/bio-chemistry/applied chemistry/ micro-biology.

For the practice of Pharmacy, registration may be necessary for those who had studied Pharmacy and have experience in the subject; but a registration for a technical staff who is engaged in the manufacture of drugs and medicines as registered pharmacist, Grade A (Drug Control Ordinance 1982) is a strange proposition. Nowhere in the world this practice is prevailing. It is also strange that at present in Bangladesh a qualified expert to manufacture medicine is a person who has graduation in Pharmacy only, because only he/she can be registered as Registered Pharmacist and Drug

Administration will include his/her name in the manufacturing licence as per Drug (Control) Ordinance 1982.

Another discrimination worth mentioning is that up to 1976 all the scientists and science graduates working in pharmaceutical industries for three years or more got recognition as technical experts/competent experts to manufacture medicine. But those science graduates who are working successfully and satisfactorily in the pharmaceutical industry for the last 15 years, since 1976 are not recognised as competent technical persons to manufacture medicines as per Drug Ordinance. As such they are not recognised officially by Drug Licensing authority no matter what skill, potentiality and ability they may possess. Every worker desires

recognition of his work. Recognition makes a man alive mentally, socially and spiritually. The Drug Ordinance has closed the door of hopes and aspiration for them.

Experienced graduate scientists who were recognised as technical persons by the Drug Rules previously have been debarred by Pharmacy Ordinance 1976 and Drug (Control) Ordinance 1982.

We, therefore, request the Government to modify the Pharmacy Ordinance, 1976 and Drug (Control) Ordinance, 1982 in line with the Drug Rule, 1945 with necessary amendments.

Md. Jamal Uddin  
Action Committee  
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Applied Chemistry,  
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