

Progress in Farming

One principal factor for the dismemberment and death of Jinnah's Pakistan was supplied by academics — economists to be precise — when they as an organised learned group pressed for the recognition of the fact that Pakistan was a nation of two economies.

Pakistan duly lost her colony because it did not care for it — but what have we independent Bengalees done for that economic wisdom over the last two decades? We have not only failed to industrialise our little patch of a country, we have not done famously with our agriculture either. That our cereal production has been very impressively taking on the challenge of our booming population is however in no way indicative of any great strides made in our agriculture either in the matter of technological progress or in terms of organisation, financing and marketing. The facts are chillingly opposite to what should have been achieved over the last two decades of independence.

The failures in a sector in which all of the population is very deeply involved has resulted in very large-scale social imbalances making ghastly scars on our body politic that would be hard to heal even over double the time it took to take the injury. One big illustration of this are the two faces of the same coin: influx into the towns of very large chunks of the rural masses and the pervasive pauperisation of the village people resulting in concentration of landholdings into fewer hands bidding a good-bye to intensive cultivation by the small farmer that had so far seen us through very bad times indeed.

With this as a backdrop, one is at a loss as to how to take the Prime Minister's award or the President's Award for Agricultural Development to a bevy of farming successfals. The President was evidently not on hand for the occasion on Saturday and the highminded stuff the PM doled out by way of promising good for farming was rather abstruse beyond the scope of a quick and short comment, and was clearly not meant to benefit the farmers present. While, welcoming all kinds of incentives to good work in any field, one can hardly obviate the fact that it is one thing to handsomely reward individual achievers and quite another if the areas of activity represented by these few persons should as a whole be dwindling as a result of the policies pursued by the award-givers. More money is going to the villages now, if not to the true tiller of the soil. More knowledge — in the shape of more agriculture specialists — is travelling to the villages if not to the working of the fields and husbanding of the animals in the farmyard and from cattle to poultry. There is a visible result also, conspicuous in the city market stalls — better vegetables and fruits and fatter magurs or cat-fish. But this is only peripherally good if not altogether deceptive.

Whatever may the western press make of the production and business in South-east Asia, agriculture is the last hope for all mankind. The nations that will make their soil and water yield more and more in a regenerative cycle will win the day. The man who farms and the fisherman that braves the seas have a kind of knowledge of their business that has to be heeded — and total agriculture must be a matter of two-way growth of knowledge and application. The agriculture specialist may please not go to the villages only to order about and teach, he must go there to learn too and participate.

The *bhadralok*, concentrating all powers and privileges of the land in his hands, has far as yet to get over the shame that once was the 'farming connection' and has yet to prove himself farm-friendly. He has something incorrigibly in him against production of any kind — particularly farming. This attitude must change and a truly modern and scientific, human and democratic outlook take its place before we can work any tome change in our agriculture.

Answer to Severed Marriage

A report carried in this daily on the national page yesterday has drawn the readers' attention to a problem that is personally traumatic and socially evil and therefore highly damaging. One of the reporters has focused on 25 thanas in Dinajpur and the other some rural areas in Kushtia to bring to the fore that registration of marriages in those places is almost an unheard of practice and the cumulative effects of this weigh heavily on the population of those localities. The absence of marriage registrations may not be the only reason for many of the social evils the lower echelon of society is vulnerable to; but the relation between this and divorce, which has recorded an abnormally high incidence in the areas under scrutiny, and polygamy has been established beyond doubt.

The report also rightly mentions that a high registration fee acts as deterrence for marriage registration becoming popular among the rural people, particularly among the poor. There cannot be an iota of doubt that part of the solution to the problem lies in this factor. The question is so important that the small localities brought into sharp focus typify the rural Bangladesh and a significant part of the urban settlements. The best argument for making marriage registration compulsory is that it guarantees the weapon to fight discrimination against women. Different dailies often carry reports on marriage-crazy males going on a marriage spree. This distasteful practice, surprisingly, is given a juicy treatment.

In a country like Bangladesh, polygamy ought to be doubly deplorable. Already burdened with an over-size population, it can ill-afford any practice that even remotely encourages polygamy, child marriage, dowry and other vile incentives to bring an end to a settled marriage. A marriage registration equips a woman with a necessary tool to bring the erring husband to court and the financial stake for violation of the marriage agreement will compel the marriageable bachelors to take a serious look into the matter before they jump for an indiscreet choice. If there is a system to force people to take responsible decisions, its beneficial impacts will be reflected in many areas of family life. Marriage registration provides for an opportunity for such a responsible decision. But more important is to create a social movement against divorce, polygamy and other such evil practices.

DHAKA: Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia is in pardah in the sense that she refuses to meet the press. So much so, she cancelled the BBC phone-in programme at the eleventh hour. But her non-performance is not beyond gaze. It is visible all over Bangladesh, which remains in deep poverty and debt. The law and order situation has worsened as she is about to complete the first two years of her 5-year term.

"She is so inept," says former Prime Minister Moudud Ahmed. Independent observers concede that she has done worse than expected. One leading editor feels that by her subterfuges she has thwarted herself and the country. Even her supporters are embarrassed but they rationalize that "the nation is beset with so many difficulties that no one person can overcome them."

Her own attitude is to ignore criticism and to push problems beneath the carpet. Whenever a ticklish situation arises she first pretends that it does not exist and then takes no cognizance of it. Her government too has developed a see-no-evil and tackle-no-evil behaviour.

This was particularly apparent from the hide-bound stand it took in the wake of retaliation to the demolition of the disputed Babri masjid. Many temples were destroyed and thousands of Hindus were affected. But the government refused to take any official notice of what had happened. The reasoning is bizarre: "By admitting the loss, we would get a bad name in the world," says a top civil servant. Consequently, the government used all its energy in denounc-

ing India in Parliament, without saying a word of condemnation about the retaliation in Bangladesh. Pakistan has at least agreed to rebuild the demolished temples," says a prominent lawyer. "Our government is not even admitting the destruction, much less talking about the restoration." The shirking of responsibility has also come in the way of the rehabilitation of the affected, although some non-official organisations are doing their bit.

Liberal opinion in Bangladesh is worried, not only because the government has been found wanting but also because the fundamentalists have gained ground. The Jamaat-Islami, part of the ruling combination, is gleeful over the thickening of communal atmosphere. Like the RSS in India, it has been relentlessly working for it.

The Muslims, by and large, are opposed to the revival of Islamic chauvinism. But a sense of identity, which has religious contours, has sought to be awakened among them to rub off secular principles that the independence in 1971 had brought along. The never-ending fight between the two ladies — Prime Minister Khaleda Zia and opposition leader Sheikh Hasina — has emancipated secular forces. The demolition of the masjid has come in handy to the communalists to weaken them still further.

"I never thought that we would have the Muslim-Hindu tension again," a senior journalist says while recalling the days of joint resistance to the

Is Dhaka Going Distant from India?

country's separate identity. politicians and officials might be tempted one day to adopt an anti-Indian posture.

That possibility could have been averted if New Delhi had been less overbearing and more understanding. It took India 20 years to transfer the Tin Bigha to Bangladesh when the territory in lieu of it was handed over in the seventies. New Delhi has universally abrogated even ad-hoc water treaty to allow only a trickle from the Ganges in dry months.

The biggest grievance of Dhaka is, however, in respect of economic development. At present its dependence on donor countries, particularly the US, is total. But it hopefully looked at India's 200 million market when it broke away from Pakistan. The suspicion is that New Delhi is cutting into

its limited field by liberal export policy. Rehman Subhan, member of the first Planning Commission of Bangladesh, recalls that India was to help his country put up a fertilizer plant, a sponge iron factory and a few other industrial units to feed the Indian market. "Everything was dropped after the assassination of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman," he says. The efforts made afterwards looked half-hearted.

It is true that New Delhi's enthusiasm waned after

India is still increasing and creating further imbalance of payments, the Bangladeshis are trying to develop links with the ASEAN countries. They prefer Singapore, a free port, to Bombay where they say they face all the hassles and numerous tariffs till they reach it. I wonder how much India would lose if it were to allow the Bangladesh products without any duty.

The demolition of the disputed masjid came at a time when the Khaleda government was hoisted on its own petard, populist slogans proving hollow. Her ministers vied with one another in Parliament in assailing India, using the opportunity for diverting attention from acute economic problems. She probably shied away from speaking in the face of New Delhi's curt words. Instead, she has bemoaned *bandhs* a staple food in Bangladesh. One critic has pointed out to her that her Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) had staged 87 *bandhs* before coming to power.

There is growing realisation that the *bandhs* or hartals cannot take Bangladesh far. But neither Khaleda nor the Chief executives before her ever discouraged the people coming on the streets. Now it is an accepted practice. The Long March to India or the demonstrations before the Indian High Commission are the product of an environment where the unemployed, the disgruntled and other lumpen elements have gained both strength and stature. Their leaders are approached by the

government to buy peace. No doubt, India has been getting the brunt of outbursts. But when the dramas do not yield any result, not lessening the rigours of day-to-day living, they can recoil. Some have begun to wonder where they went wrong.

"We have knowingly and unknowingly played in the hands of Pakistan," say liberal intellectuals. They wonder whether Nawaz Sharif, the Pakistan Prime Minister, should have been 'invited' when the SAARC summit was cancelled. They particularly have in mind his remarks — "I have come to express my solidarity on the demolition of Babri Masjid" — in the visitor's book at Smriti Soudha ironically, commemorating the memory of those who died 20 years ago, protesting and fighting against the Pakistani occupation army.

The Bangladeshis want to be friendly with the Pakistanis but no at the expense of what the liberation from Islamaband stands for. Nor do they want to annoy India. This may be the reason why Khaleda refused to issue a joint statement with Nawaz Sharif to condemn the demolition of masjid.

Still I found more anti-India feeling than before. To my mind comes the words of the first Bangladesh Finance Minister, Tajuddin: "I wish I could die no because relations between India and Bangladesh are so good today that I do not want see them deteriorate." I also recall what Mujib told me: "A Bengali does not forget even those who give him only a glass of water. Here your soldiers laid down their lives for my people. How can they ever forget our sacrifice?"

BETWEEN THE LINES

Kuldip Nayar

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Hewson Gives Flashy Keating a Run for His Money

Bob Holmes writes from Sydney

Ten years of left-wing government in Australia may be at an end. Prime Minister Paul Keating, the abrasive former Treasurer who ousted Bob Hawke from the job in 1991, is finding his opponent tougher than anyone expected. Keating's campaign began to falter and opponent John Hewson started to water down his Thatcherite policies. Gemini News Service raises the curtain on a crucial Australian election.



Although Australia may be amongst the first out of recession, having been one of the first into it, unemployment and its familiar bedfellows of rising crime, a property slump and lack of business confidence have long since taken their toll. Such things were not supposed to happen in a sunny land that dubbed itself 'the Lucky Country.'

Keating, indelibly tainted with economic woes as former Treasurer, recognised his own plight when he challenged Hewson to a second unscheduled TV debate.

The first had produced an uncharacteristically lack-lustre performance by Keating and almost everyone agrees Hewson won. The second round was closer, but Keating still failed to make an impact. Hewson was able to parry most of the trades and may have emerged less tarnished from the slanging match. For the first time, the Leader of the

Opposition inched ahead in the polls as 'preferred prime minister.'

The transformation in the Liberal-National Party Coalition fortunes is remarkable. Late last year it trailed so badly a snap pre-Christmas election could not be ruled out.

Hewson's urbane manner and Thatcherite economic philosophy made little headway in the chill of recession. The medicine the doctor (of economics) prescribed, seemed so unpalatable the patient would almost certainly have refused to swallow it.

Besides the GST, the opposition talked about eliminating people from the dole after nine months out of work while simultaneously increasing tax on high-income earners.

To his credit, Hewson recognised that this was political suicide, and after much lobbying from his colleagues he has sugared the pill. He has given enough ground on the dreaded GST and dole cuts to

halt comparisons with Scrooge. And it is apparent that what critics deemed as a desperate climb-down was a shrewd modification.

The erudite 46-year-old deserves credit for displaying a willingness to listen to both the electorate and his own advisers. His moderately interventionist stance is now not so far removed from Keating's own One-Nation package.

Hewson is very much his own man. He comes across as headstrong and even arrogant by the matey standards of Australia. He had marked himself out as a man not for turning. Now he has turned.

He is still regarded as less sympathetic to the poor, elderly and out-of-work and, with the recession showing no sign of abating, this is not a healthy image.

Also, whereas Keating's matey demeanour and saloon vocabulary endeared him to the blue-collar voters, the perception that Hewson has deserted his own working class roots for the more salubrious Sydney suburbs and better-heeled cronies has cast doubt on his

integrity.

And although Keating has been a fully-paid-up member of the Labor Party since his teens, Hewson is a Johnny-come-lately to the political scene, having made a fortune in merchant banking before entering the Canberra political scene as recently as 1987.

Keating is only a year his opponent's senior, but his experience in the rough-and-tumble of politics can make Hewson still seem wet behind the ears — as evidenced by Keating's masterminding of the coup that ousted his predecessor Bob Hawke in 1991.

On the other hand, Keating's credentials as a battler for the little man are far from impeccable. The boy from Bankstown in Sydney's West is himself independently wealthy, has a penchant for Italian suits, antique clocks, fast cars, slicked-back hair, loud ties, and even louder music. He is not the ideal Identikit prime minister most Australians would have envisaged.

Among his faux pas was a claim that Australia has never

produced great leaders, and he once shook his Labor colleagues by telling them that it was 'private enterprise that brings home the bacon.' Yet he is still perceived to be rooting for the underdog, against the toffs, and inevitably, the Poms (the British).

His master stroke may well have been to first touch, and then distance himself from Queen Elizabeth at the beginning of her 'annus horribilis.' A Roman Catholic of Connemara descent, Keating's republican leanings are natural, but seldom have they seemed so timely.

He has picked up support among the growing number of ethnic and minority voters, for whom loyalty to Britain means nothing, while becoming a cult figure for the young, Left and the irreverent of all persuasions. Yet in doing so, his One-Nation programme has not undermined his links with business leaders.

Keating is rumoured to employ researchers who scour libraries for the weak points of his opponents. Now that Hewson has stolen so many of his political clothes, Keating needs something even his researchers may be stretched to unearth.

— GEMINI NEWS
About the Author: BOB HOLMES is a British freelance sports and travel writer. He wrote the best-selling *Match of My Life*, a collection of great football matches.

OPINION

Bangladesh — as Seen by Others

Abu Taher Mojumder

I am a regular reader of SM Ali's 'My World'. The column has a speciality of its own in that it does not only admit readers in general to an intimacy with the writer and his range of experiences but also throws light on the working of his mind. The pervading personal flavour mellows down the harshness of the social, economic, political and personal concerns which often abound in it and, at the same time, makes the alert readers aware of these in a leisurely way. The cut and dry treatment of such issues in formal essays and research papers is seldom found to interfere with his informal approach. He is analytical and informative without appearing to be so; circumspective but with an air of a detached passerby. All this is possibly because of an abiding sanity of approach and wisdom which are a rich harvest of his age and experience.

No, I should not be misunderstood to be embarking upon a mission of adulation, for, at this stage of his life, fame and achievement, all hardly needs it. My intention is merely to sincerely appreciate him and draw attention of fellow-readers to my response to his column.

As usual, I was reading 'My World' on Friday March 5. It began with a provocatively personal observation which excluded literary flavour and emotional sensitivity. Ali has delineated his experiences and ordeals at Kuala Lumpur where he had spent a week recently. The light he has thrown on the sad plight of Bangladeshi job-seekers in Malaysia will profoundly and keenly touch everybody's heart to the quick. He has thrown light on the concerted reckless exploita-

tion of gullible but desperately helpless job-seekers and also on the unpardonable apathy of the law-enforcing agencies of the country. He has also thrown light on the changing shades of international relations, customs and practices.

However, I was particularly struck by the last part of the column since it immediately reminded me of an experience of my own, although of a slightly different nature. Ali was 'mystified ... by the depth of ignorance' about his 'nationality, country and sometimes religion and race ... shown even by some luxury hotels' where he 'stayed in different parts of the world.' It is indeed a sad commentary on our failure (failure of our foreign missions) to be more accurate in focus attention on our country abroad, making it better known by upholding its culture and tradition and not depending on the publicity of occasional natural disasters.

My concern was not, however, with myself, but with my country — Bangladesh. It was in November of 1990, I was then carrying on research at the University of North Florida, Jacksonville, Florida, USA as a Fulbright Research Fellow. I was invited by the Department of Government, Suffolk University, Boston, Massachusetts, to give two talks — one on the culture of Bangladesh and another on politics in Bangladesh. At Boston, I was a guest of a friend Professor Mawdudur Rahman of the Department of Accounting and Business Law (he was Professor of Accounting) at Suffolk University and formerly of the

Institute of Business Administration, Dhaka University. The chairpersons and other teachers present were exceedingly hospitable, friendly, cooperative and stimulatingly curious and asked me many things about Bangladesh. I was very much impressed by their curiosity about Bangladeshi culture and politics and thought that the audience whom I would address would also be inspiringly curious. We had an enjoyable lunch together in a very cordial atmosphere and continued our discussion with interest. I said, 'From the point of view of size Bangladesh is not a big country. You must have seen the map of ...'. 'No, we haven't seen any map of Bangladesh.'

We only know India. In fact, none of us has any idea about Bangladesh.' But there are many Bangladeshi people in Boston and you've at least one colleague from Bangladesh, through in a different Department.' 'But you know ... I was totally stupefied. Then I, rather imperfectly, drew one map of the sub-continent showing all the three countries, including Bangladesh and described as clearly as I could the history of Bangladesh to them. They thanked me very much for my effort to present to them a whole picture of Bangladesh as far as I could. When I went to the lecture room, already equipped with a slide projector and slides for the purpose, I knew that I would have to tell the whole story over again. I enjoyed in introducing my country to those who had little knowledge about it.

The writer is a Professor of English, Jahangirnagar University, Savar, Dhaka.

To the Editor...

Prize of essentials

Sir, Prices of all the essential commodities in the market have shot up too much. During the holy month of Ramadan some people are increasing the price even when their is no shortage of supply.

It is very hard for us, the ordinary citizens, to have a good Ifar or Shehri. Most of us cannot afford to taste chicken now as it costs Tk 100 or 120 a piece. Same is the case with other things like meat, fish etc.

We don't want rich food or luxurious items, we just want simple food at reasonable price. Authorities concerned should do some thing effective.

Zeshan Lalbagh, Dhaka

One-day cricket scoreboard

Sir, In fact in each and every newspaper the scoreboard of one-day cricket and five day Test match are published in the same manner but actually it should not be like that. In

one-day cricket a batsman's striking rate (in batting) is more important than his actual score e. g. if a batsman scored 100 runs off 250 balls and another batsman scored 60 runs off 40 balls, then the latter's achievement is more appreciable than the former's.

As such we request that sports reporters, while supplying the one-day scores, must mention the number of balls one played.

Fazle, Sabik and Nazia, Dhaka

Local employees of foreign missions

Sir, It is understood that locals serving in various foreign missions and agencies are facing some problems in paying their income tax to the government. Bangladesh nationals working in these organisations are being paid only a 'consolidated salary'. As a result, under the present rule, they are to pay income tax on the total amount of their consolidated salary. But in reality,

they are actually meeting house rent, medical and conveyance expenses from the consolidated amount they receive as salary. In the present income tax return form, there are separate clauses for showing pay and allowances and, as per rule, the incumbent is allowed to enjoy rebates on allowances up to certain fixed amount. Since there is no mention of the exact amount of allowances in their consolidated salary, they are, therefore, not entitled to rebate benefits on allowances.

Under the circumstances, I would honestly request the Income Tax authority to kindly make provisions so that Bangladesh nationals in the local foreign missions and agencies can show the actual amount they spend from their consolidated salary towards house rent, medical expenses, conveyance, book-purchase and other expenses in their yearly income tax return statements and enjoy rebate benefits as per rule.

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