

Problems Mar Food Production

We take pride, justifiably indeed, in our achievement in the area of food grain production. In fiscal '91-92, output of rice was 2.2 per cent higher than in the preceding year while wheat exceeded the mark by 6.1 per cent. The food gap is getting narrower with the country now exploring market for limited export of rice. Maybe the day is not far off when we would become self-sufficient in overall food grain production.

At the same time, we must not forget that Bangladesh's agricultural growth rate is one of the lowest in Asia. As the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) statistics would show, the annual average growth of agricultural production in Bangladesh during the decade ending in 1991, comes to only 2 per cent as against 7 per cent for Malaysia, Asia's leader in this field. Countries in the subcontinent also did better than us. Pakistan scored an annual average growth rate of more than 5 per cent while India's exceeded 4 per cent.

However, it looks like that in our anxiety to attain autarky in food, we are neglecting secondary crops of daily necessity. We now import such items as lentil — our 'dal' and onion. Many of us would have forgotten that a decade ago, Bangladesh used to export chilli but now we are on the way to becoming a net importer of the item. It is indeed worrisome to contemplate a situation in which we would end up spending most of the money we save in food imports, in getting these agricultural products from outside the country. Even now, we spend hundreds of crore of taka in importing these items.

We feel that an evaluation of the findings of the recent joint FAO-World Bank mission on the state of agricultural research in the country should take into consideration the above aspect of farm production also. The mission, as an agency report tells us, spent a month in the country in February this year.

The mission found that our agricultural research system was more than adequate for the country's needs. The research system, the mission notes, is exceptionally large for a developing country like Bangladesh, with about 1600 graduate scientists engaged in the work. The main costs of research in this country in agriculture and the allied fields of fisheries, livestock and forestry, the mission remarks, are staff salaries and operational expenses.

As expected, on performance score, the mission takes a rather dim view. The research system's overall output to date, the mission says, has been disappointing. And this, despite the proliferation of research organisations in the country. It seems, we have as many as ten institutions in this country, doing research in soil, crops, livestock, fisheries and forestry! Of course, we don't mean to say that our researchers have just been sitting idle. They do have achievements to their credit, especially in the area of food grain production. However, we do agree with the FAO-World Bank team that the overall performance should have been better. There is clearly a need for improved accountability of how efficiently resources are utilised and the staff managed.

As we hinted earlier, there is ground to consider the progress in research to date as rather lopsided, with overwhelming accent on food grain, to the neglect of essential secondary crops. With so many institutions on the ground, research should spread over a broader spectrum. Researchers should now increasingly apply their time to help the country attain a balanced growth in agriculture, forestry, livestock and fisheries. We have to ensure optimal use of our limited land resources.

A Case for Whales

The annual meeting of the International Whaling Commission (IWC) held in Kyoto, Japan recently has, happily, voted in favour of continuation of the seven-year-old ban on commercial whale-hunting by a margin of 18-to-6 vote. The bad news is that Norway has planned to carry out its threat of resuming whaling in defiance of the IWC ban. The other whaling nation, Iceland, although has quit the IWC, is yet to resume the hunt. Japan, another whaling nation that like Norway supports the lifting of the moratorium, has not made any threat to pull out of the IWC binding, but will have to make an effort to take the reversal in its strides.

No doubt, the decision to give the moratorium a new lease of life reflects the international communities' growing concern for environment. The fact that despite the moratorium whale population's protection has not been simple and easy demanded the moratorium to exist. The other consideration — mostly scientific — is that the claim of an estimated 86,700 minke whales in the northeastern Atlantic and another 760,000 in Antarctic seas cannot be called dispute-free. If the figure is disputed, at least there is no controversy over the 14,700 whales Japan and Norway have killed since the moratorium begun in 1985 through the loophole in the 1946 convention, under Article VIII of which special hunting permission for scientific purposes is granted to nations.

Of the whales, blue and white species in particular are threatened with extinction. Only 800 blue whales and 200 white whales are left now. No question of hunting down these whales arises. The argument in favour of hunting the minke whale, as put forward by Norway and its allies, is that the number has grown to such a level where it can sustain or even replenish the loss of 300 to 800 whales a year. This claim is vigorously contradicted by environmentalists who put forward counterargument that whaling nations are more guided by political and economic considerations than ecological ones. They do not appear to be off target.

Another popular Norwegian argument is that minke whales eat too much of biomass, crustacea, krill and fish in the northeast Atlantic causing depletion of certain marine resources affecting the balanced relations among the various species in the ocean. This seems to be a naive rationale, since nature has in itself the mechanism to keep the balance. Human interference has only been responsible for upsetting the balance. It is therefore difficult to understand how the sea life will be worse off if men stopped killing a particular marine species such as whale. Better it would be if the French proposal for creating circumpolar sanctuary for whales were translated into reality with support from all other countries.

Rohingya Problem: Solution Lies in Myanmar

by Chapal Bashar

THE memorandum of understanding (MOU) signed between Bangladesh and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) on May 12 paved the way for smooth repatriation of Rohingyas to their homeland Myanmar. The MOU, that reflects the eagerness of the two sides to expedite the repatriation of nearly quarter of a million Myanmar refugees, will undoubtedly help the ill-fated Rohingyas to return home. However, to complete the repatriation process, much still depends on Yangon which is yet to allow UNHCR's presence in Myanmar to supervise the rehabilitation of refugees.

The broad-based MOU, signed by UNHCR Chief Sadako Ogata and Bangladesh Foreign Secretary Reaz Rahman, spelled out a formula to accelerate the 'safe and voluntary' return of the Rohingyas refugees to Myanmar.

Over 240,000, out of estimated 265,000 Rohingyas, who entered Bangladesh since summer of 1991, are living in 20 makeshift camps along Cox's Bazar-Teknaf region. The Rohingyas crossed the border to evade persecution by Myanmar troops.

According to the MOU, Bangladesh Government would allow free access to UNHCR officials and independent interview of refugees in the transit camps to determine the voluntary character of their decision

to return. Both sides also agreed to persuade the Myanmar authorities to take back the refugees. The MOU stipulates that the UNHCR would assist Bangladesh in the smooth repatriation of refugees who opt to return on the basis of their own judgement of the situation in their country. It also added that the two sides shall cooperate with each other to prevent any attempt by any side to interfere with the exercise of freedom of option by the refugees.

For ensuring voluntary repatriation, the MOU says, 'A refugee wishing to return to Myanmar, can do so at any time, and none can prevent him from exercising this right, while no refugee would be forced or coerced to leave Bangladesh. The UNHCR would assist those who would like to return voluntarily.'

Other terms of the accord incorporates provisions for safety and security of the refugees, maintenance of law and order in the camps and motivation of refugees to return home.

It is clear that the MOU emphasised much on 'voluntary' repatriation of refugees as well as avoidance of any coercion in this regard. This very aspect has been stressed much since Bangladesh and UNHCR experienced an undesirable discord on it which almost stalled the Rohingyas repatriation in December.

The repatriation began in September last year following an agreement between Dhaka and Yangon signed earlier in April. But UNHCR withdrew from the process alleging 'coercive repatriation' of the refugees. However, around 24,000 refugees were repatriated so far while the process still remains very slow. It is slow, mainly because many of the refugees are reluctant to go back until the human right condition in Myanmar improved. Bangladesh denied the

joint effort on solving the refugee problem which Bangladesh has been facing over two years. Both Bangladesh and UNHCR believe that the UN presence in Myanmar is a must for creating a congenial atmosphere for the return of the refugees.

Soon after signing the MOU in Dhaka, Foreign Secretary Reaz Rahman told newsmen that Bangladesh seeks UN presence inside Myanmar territory for the safe and voluntary return of the refugees to their homes.

BEHIND THE HEADLINES

charges of coercion from the very beginning and Foreign Minister Mostafizur Rahman went to New York in January this year to clarify Dhaka's position in this regard to the United Nations. His discussion with UN Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali and others helped to dispel the misunderstanding with UNHCR. Mostafiz also met with US State Department officials in Washington and talked on the issue.

And finally, with the signing of the recent accord, Dhaka and UNHCR have reached an understanding to put their

At the press conference on the eve of her departure last Saturday, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees Sadako Ogata expressed the same view saying that the need of the moment is a UN presence in Myanmar. She, however, mentioned that a UN technical mission is already in that country to discuss the modalities of UNHCR's participation in the repatriation process.

Resettlement of refugees in their homes is undoubtedly a big question. Observers maintain that after the repatriation,

the settlement of Rohingyas in their original homes should also be ensured under close supervision of UN agencies. Otherwise, the problem would remain, which might cause the influx to recur.

This is for the second time in 15 years that Bangladesh had to face the same Rohingya influx problem. During 1978-79, nearly 300,000 Rohingyas entered into Bangladesh territory to save themselves from the atrocities of Myanmar troops. With the assistance from the friendly countries and international organisations, Bangladesh could deal with the situation then and the refugees were repatriated.

The present Myanmar refugee problem started with their arrival in groups since the summer of 1991 and soon their number swelled to 265,000. They brought with them the harrowing tales of murder, torture, arson, rape, and forced conscription by Myanmar soldiers.

The policy pursued by the Myanmar regime was primarily aimed at evicting the Rohingyas Muslims from Arakan region that has been their homeland since the 7th century. Arakan which was an independent Muslim kingdom until 1784, is now one of the 14 provinces of Myanmar (Burma). The total population of Arakan is approximately four million. Rohingyas — the major ethnic community of Arakan — constitute 70 per cent of the population while

the rest are Maghs (Rakhaine) and hill tribes. The term Rohingya is derived from Rohang — the ancient name of Arakan. The Rohingyas claim to be the descendants of Arabs, Moors, Pathans, Moghuls and Bengalees and speak a local dialect known also as Rohingya, a mixture of Arabic, Persian, Urdu and Bengali. Persian was the official language of Arakan during the Muslim rule.

According to historians, Burmese king Bodawphaya invaded and captured Arakan in 1784 and later in 1823 it came under British rule. Arakan became a part of Burma in 1948 when the country gained independence.

In 1982, the Burmese regime enacted a citizenship law which made Rohingyas foreigners and stateless people. Since then the Rohingyas have been subjected to religious and political discriminations by the Myanmar rulers, which resulted in the influx of hundreds of thousands of refugees to Bangladesh.

While Bangladesh, her friends and allies and international bodies are putting in utmost efforts to bring an end to the Rohingyas refugee problem, there is no question that its permanent solution lies only in Myanmar. And for such a solution, Myanmar should have a democratic atmosphere, one that would be congenial to ensure human rights to all her citizens.

North Korea: Nuclear Threat or Western Target?

by K. R. Panikkar

FOR the last several months the US, Japan and South Korea, commendably assisted by Western media, have been calling for North Korea's blood for allegedly producing and selling 'weapons of mass destruction' and diverting fissile material from its nuclear plants for making 'the bomb'. Labelling that country as 'the new Iraq' the Economist, for instance, has judged that it is 'next in line for nuclear prevention and deserving of a bloody nose'. Even the Russians have joined the conspiracy: in mid-February their intelligence service came up with the story that back in December 1992 senior Russian scientists had been intercepted at an airport while trying to leave for North Korea to help that country's weapons programme.

This campaign has now reached a new peak following North Korea's withdrawal from the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) on 12 March and its subsequent non-compliance with the Vienna-based International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) demand to be allowed access to suspected nuclear sites at Yongbyon. Western leaders and media commentators are now clamouring for the imposition of strict sanctions on North Korea. Some have even suggested that Pyongyang's alleged bomb facilities should be taken out with an air strike should ongoing diplomatic efforts fail to bend President Kim Il Sung's will.

Nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction are held in such dread and revulsion that a state alleged to be making them readily invites all-round condemnation. North Korea is more vulnerable in this respect than most other states given the memory of the Korean War, its continuing espousal of the now discredited communist ideology and its near-total isolation. Nevertheless the fact remains that there is another side to this controversy and it needs to be told.

Let us begin with the NPT itself. It sanctifies the right of states already possessing nuclear weapons (the nuclear-weapon states) to continue to have them while it denies others (the non-nuclear-weapon states) the right to receive, manufacture or otherwise acquire such weapons or devices.

In a community of equal sovereign states, it is blatantly discriminatory to bestow upon some members the right to possess certain types of weapons and deny that right to others. Such a presumption amounts to institutionalising 'technological apartheid' in the international community. Indeed the NPT is an unequal treaty designed to protect and preserve the monopoly of the nuclear-weapon states.

Under Article VI, Parties to the treaty undertook to pursue negotiations in good faith on effective measures relating to the cessation of the nuclear arms race at an early date and to nuclear disarmament. That has not happened. Not only have the nuclear-weapon states

not complied with this commitment, they have disdainfully indulged in vertical proliferation. The US and Soviet Union, for example, increased their stockpiles of nuclear warheads tenfold over the next 20 years (1968-1988).

The foregoing flaws — the inequality conferred on Parties to the treaty and the bad faith shown by the nuclear-weapon states — make the treaty unworthy of acceptance. Very rightly states like India continue to resist pressures to sign it.

(What is required is a treaty for the destruction of all existing nuclear weapons and a total ban on their manufacture to be enforced by strict international verification.)

A state which has become a Party to the NPT nevertheless retains the inalienable right to withdraw from it. Article X reads: Each Party shall in exercising its national sovereignty have the right to withdraw from the treaty if it decided that extraordinary events, related to the subject-matter of this treaty, have jeopardised the supreme interests of its country. It shall give notice of such withdrawal to all other Parties to the treaty and to the

United Nations Security Council three months in advance.

So, although North Korea has been condemned for its withdrawal from the NPT, it was within its rights to do so. We may recall that some time ago the US and Britain withdrew from the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), a step they were entitled to take. North Korea's withdrawal from the NPT is similar in nature.

But the question remains: have there been extraordinary events threatening to jeopardise North Korea's supreme national interests to justify its withdrawal from the NPT? North Korea says so.

North Korea signed the NPT in December 1985. That

North Korea has become the latest subject of Western attack following its withdrawal from the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. The recent events expose the double standards in Western treatment of states that have or may have nuclear capability.

commitment became binding following the conclusion of the mandatory Safeguards Agreement with the IAEA in January 1992. The timing of the Safeguards Agreement is significant in that by that time Iraq has been brought under an unprecedentedly intrusive inspection regime. So it was unlikely to have signed the Safeguards Agreement if it has a surreptitious 'bomb project' to hide.

North Korea's good faith in signing the Safeguards Agreement was again evident when it promptly provided the IAEA with the required report on the nuclear material subject to safeguards and a list of its nuclear facilities and their design information.

Subsequently, between May 1992 and February 1993, the IAEA conducted six ad hoc inspections of nuclear facilities in North Korea. North Korean officials say those inspections went off smoothly and the inspectors even thanked them for their assistance and co-operation.

But the potential for conflict was also brewing in the meantime. Since 1991, US and Japanese sources have been spreading stories of secret 'bomb-making' sites near Yongbyon, north of Pyongyang.

North Korea rejected these arguments as a crude fabrication invented to gain access to Yongbyon.

North Korean officials say that they have patiently explained to the inspectors the characteristics and mode of operation of their nuclear facilities. They also add that their calculations agree with the amount of plutonium declared. They accuse the inspectors of failing to tell them where they had gone wrong in their calculations and of stubbornly sticking to IAEA figures without explaining how they were arrived at.

We cannot say which set of calculations is right, the subject-matter being highly technical. But the impartiality of the IAEA and its inspectors can be judged from the record of their performance in Iraq and other places. In Iraq the inspectors more often than not carried out their investigation based on intelligence information provided by the US. Frequently some of the inspectors reported on their findings to US government agencies even before communicating with their Vienna headquarters. It is widely believed that those inspectors were espionage agents of the US operating under the cloak of the

concerned were either incompetent or they had connived at the covert bomb programme.

Given this record of performing their tasks at the behest of the US government or conniving at illegal nuclear activities of certain governments, North Korea's accusations of bad faith and lack of impartiality on the part of some of the IAEA inspectors cannot be dismissed as an invention.

North Korea insists that the Yongbyon facilities are military installations which have nothing to do with nuclear activities. It claims that the real motive behind the IAEA demand is to collect intelligence information on North Korea's military secrets and pass it on to the US and South Korea.

Since a state of war exists between North and South Korea — there is an armistice, but no peace treaty — and the US is also a co-belligerent, it will prejudice the supreme national interests of North Korea if IAEA inspectors are let into the sensitive military facilities at Yongbyon. So, North Korea claims, it is justified in withdrawing from the NPT since the Safeguards Agreement is being used as cover for espionage purposes.

North Korea also fears that the demand to be let into the

IAEA.

The IAEA inspectors' record in South Africa too has come to cast serious doubts on their credibility and impartiality. So far these inspectors are believed to have conducted over 100 inspections of nuclear facilities under Safeguards arrangements in that country. There have been no reports of the inspectors raising suspicions of clandestine 'bomb' activities by South Africa nor of discovering discrepancies in the amount of accountable plutonium.

But President de Klerk has recently admitted that his government had in fact fabricated several nuclear weapons, which have since been dismantled. The fact that the fissile material for those bombs could have only come from the country's nuclear facilities goes to show that the IAEA inspectors

Yongbyon sites is likely to be the first of other demands to come later. Given the degree of ill-will towards North Korea, the IAEA inspectors' ultimate aim must be to gain the right to roam at will throughout the country ostensibly for the purpose of unearthing nuclear secrets.

Incidentally, the US too has signed a Safeguards Agreement with the IAEA. But the US government retains sole authority to decide which of its nuclear facilities are eligible for IAEA inspections. Moreover, at any time the US government can remove a nuclear facility from the list of those eligible for IAEA inspections should the facility become associated with US national security.

Since the US arrogates to itself the sole right to decide for itself on the basis of national security which of its facilities can be inspected by the IAEA, is it fair to deny that right to any other sovereign state? One is hard put to find a more appropriate situation to which the Orwellian truism, 'All are equal, but some are more equal than others', applies so well.

The London Times claims to have obtained evidence of North Korea's secret nuclear plant. One Jonathan Power writing in another Malaysian daily brands North Korea a predatory state, a source of threat to the peace and security of East Asia. At the same time the claims that Israel is a peace-loving state entitled to its stockpile of nuclear warheads and the means of launching them.

Power's accusations are particularly preposterous considering that North Korea's population is half that of South Korea and its GNP is only one-fourteenth of that of the South. Having lost the political and military support of the erstwhile Soviet Union, it is illogical to argue that North Korea is in a position to threaten anyone. On the contrary, it must be feeling quite insecure in the face of the assault mounted against it by the West.

— Third World Network Features

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To the Editor...

Knowledge of English: Some more action please

Sir, The Education Minister, Jamiruddin Sircar, has done something which even a few months earlier would seem impossible. He inaugurated an 'English medium college in Dhaka. Not only that, he has set up a committee, a Ways and Means Committee, which would look into the possibility of introducing English as a compulsory subject at the degree level. Bravo!

One thing is certain. Sudden imposition of English at the degree level may not really improve the situation much, unless those who would be taking the graduation course in that language are groomed from previous level i.e., the higher secondary level. I had written a letter back in 1987 which was published in the newspapers under the caption 'Money and English'. However, money is not the only consideration why anyone should learn English. Reading books in English, people of our country will benefit not only

intellectually but also gain considerable knowledge about life and sciences for which books are not readily available in Bangla.

In the fifties and sixties there were schools in this country, e.g., St. Gregory's in Dhaka and St. Placid's in Chittagong where there were two streams, English medium and Bangla medium. To the best of my knowledge, it caused no problems. Also, the Chittagong school had a third choice to the promotees to class IX. They could choose to sit for senior Cambridge 'O' levels if they so desired. Why can't we have the same now? If we have SSC in the English medium, then lacs of Taka will be saved which the University of London is getting now in the form of fees, which I daresay, is exorbitant. Those who take 'O' and 'A' level examinations, some 700 students or so in June and January, are paying over 100,000 pound sterling yearly!

The syllabi which are pursued in the English medium schools are not always in conformity with our traditions, beliefs and even needs. What is

required to be done now is to get several panels of teachers (school and college) who would be asked to sit down on a 'time and money' contract, or preferably on a voluntary basis (few committed takers, less lobbying), and translate the existing Bangla course books into English. But, all these translated works should be vetted by teachers or exponents of the English language. Otherwise, incorrectly translated books will undermine the whole effort.

In any democratic society, the choice of education or, for that matter, the choice of medium of instruction should be left to the parents and their children. More and more facilities and choices should be made available by the government or at least the private sector should be allowed to do so. I wouldn't mind if there were Sanskrit, Arabic, Urdu or French medium schools in the country, if one wanted to study in any of them, it would be his or her choice. When it comes to getting a job she would have to fulfil the requirements.

When there are private uni-

versities (English medium) in the country, then there should be no barriers to English medium schools and colleges preparing students for SSC and HSC. Besides, the re-introduction of proper English medium schools (Govt. as well as private) will help the poorer sections of our community who would otherwise not be able to take advantage of education in the English medium.

In the light of Mr. Sircar's bold steps, I would suggest that he take further steps to allow English medium schools (for SSC) and colleges (for HSC) in the country. And to add some professionals, who are proficient in English, to the recently formed committee so that the work of the committee becomes more meaningful with participation from experts outside the secretariat.

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Bosnia and General Philippe Morillon

Sir, In the midst of barbaric and shameful killing of inno-

cent Muslim men, women and children with the help of the Belgrade government, there is a silver lining. The UN Commander in Bosnia, the French General Philippe Morillon has shown his humanism and courage, within the bound framework of his mandate.

Many a times General Morillon has put his own life in danger, by remaining at the side of besieged Bosnian

Politics of production

Sir, The successive governments have continued to preach, in all the possible media, regarding their politics of production in agriculture, industry, education and so on. The Bangladesh politics can be referred as three distinct regimes viz AL, BNP and JP. The fact remains that the pro-

Item

	74-75	80-81	89-90	91-92
Steel pipe	2,664 tons	10,770 tons	6,447 tons	2,027 tons
Electric cable	480	2,151	4,306	2,488
Electric fan	15,114 nos	42,352 nos	32,500 nos	35,289 nos
Motor cycle	1,504	3,005	8,513	7,782 nos
Steel ingot	76,412 tons	133,315 tons	75,028 tons	36,384 tons
M S rod	2,058	9005	4,019	796
Bicycle	17,228 nos	6,201	3,817 nos	2,591 nos

Muslims. He refused to leave a town until its people were evacuated.

The role of the OIC Muslim countries is most saddening. The petro dollar countries could have at least stopped the supply of oil to the European countries. This alone could have brought in some significant change in the minds of the European powers. Shahabuddin Mahtab Siddheswari Road, Dhaka

paganda machinery of the government is doing well though the government statistics of three terminal years of three regimes as well as of the present depict otherwise.

Let the govt. agencies, PRDs of various agencies, stop fooling the nation.

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