Founder-Editor: Late S. M. Ali

Dhaka, Wednesday, November 24, 1993

Paddy Procurement Drive Bogged Down

The government's procurement programme has been launched from the middle of this month. The procurement price for the paddy has been fixed this season at two hundred taka a maund which is less by ten taka as compared to last year. Yet, reports are pouring in from the main growing areas that the farmers are getting only around seventy per cent of even the reduced procurement price.

Aman crop accounts for more than fifty per cent of the country's total yield of rice. This time the government plans to procure only about three lakh tons which is not even three per cent of the total expected yield. Apparently, this level of procurement can hardly influence the price. But this is not all that true.

As a matter of seasonal fluctuations, paddy prices would fall immediately after harvesting. However, it is the small and marginal farmers who are hurt most from this price slump. Maybe, they are net purchasers of foodgrains. However, it is also they who are forced to sell off part of a meagre harvest at this time of the year to pay for urgent but postponed household needs and to meet pressing obligations. Notwithstanding the relatively small quantity, an active government procurement programme provides them with a ready outlet for selling their produce and can also help prop the price up, even if temporarily. Failure to get a fair price for their paddy at this time only pushes them deeper into poverty during the remainder of the year.

Talking to The Daily Star earlier this month, Food Minister Lt Gen (rtd) Mir Shawkat Ali had maintained that the laws of economics demanded that rice prices would come down because production had been increasing steadily. He had also dismissed the idea that higher government rates for rice would help the farmers to get better prices. Experiences showed that the middlemen were the sole beneficiaries of higher government prices for the crop, he had added.

The Minister has a point. Nor is this the occasion to raise questions about the government's policy perspective on medium-term impact of continuous slide in rice prices, on one side of the equation and rising cost of inputs, on the other. In lowering the procurement price, the government has denied the farmer the benefit of the prevailing rate of inflation. There is logic behind this too. Although cost of living has risen, albeit at a historically low rate, rice prices have actually fallen. In fact, it is the slide in rice prices which has largely helped contain inflation at its present low level. Low rice prices benefit the vast majority of the population anyway.

Presumably, the procurement price fixed by the government would not, in any way, upset the price balance, as far as the consumer is concerned. The issue now is to ensure the benefit of even a low procurement price to the small and marginal farmers as they sell their paddy at this time of the year. Available reports indicated that these people who need it most, are not drawing any advantage from the government's procurement programme.

Ninety per cent of the quantity targeted for procurement would be lifted from the surplus rice growing areas. However, it is said that the procurement programme cannot be fully activated in these regions as the government godowns still remains filled up with rice from the last crop. Even worse, the government is reported to be selling its stocks in these areas now to release storage space. In the process, the market price is being depressed further while the middlemen reap the benefit. On the other hand, plenty of storage space is said to be lying unused in the deficit areas.

It's not that this sort of mismatch is occurring for the first time. In fact, this is well-nigh an annual feature. Perhaps, there is still time to do something about it. And, hopefully the government would plan better the next time around.

Towards more Mathematics

Healthy politics and dynamic economy are two pillars of a modern-day high-performing society on condition that the two issues form a rich and congenial cultural base. But without being fed on generous helpings of the so-called STR — the scientific and technological revolution — no society can move an inch towards meaningful and sustainable growth.

The best way to gauge the progress of a society's imbibing and practising STR is to look for the place the mathematician and his discipline - mathematics - have in the society's scheme of things, political, social and professional. We do not ever come across notices or advertisements offering provisions for mathematicians. The question that could quite baffle the nation's wunderkind on the televised quizz programmes is: what is a mathematician supposed to do? The entire gamut of the various kinds of this nation's leadership is utterly wanting in their knowledge of what use can be a mathematician to a society. The practitioners of only one discipline — economies — has come to achieve a certain degree of socio-political - largely governmental - clout. And unlike the essayist economists of the old school, the new economics people have their intellectual feet firmly planted in mathematics. Saving this solitary case, society does not seem to employ mathematical skill and knowledge to any use, knowingly. Mathematics has thus been confined to become a closed circuit thing learnt only to get a teaching job to groom other future teachers ad infinitum. In the absence of any social, scientific and technological application the subject as well as its masters are a pitiable lot more than half way down to petrification. This is not to say study of pure mathematics hasn't rewards of its of own or that society doesn't benefit from it. Einstein didn't care much for mathematics, physics was his life. He had to learn its value dearly when balked by the daunting chasm that separated the 1915 General Theory from the decade-old Special Theory of Relativity. But for Marcel Grossman's development of Tensor calculus specifically to bale out Einstein, the great man would have had simply no way.

Of the myriads of man's inventions none has been so wondrous and so fetching as mathematics. The queen of sciences is hardly a science by itself but lends scientificity to all of the vast array of sciences. We do not know of the mathematical acumen of the creator but His self-proclaimed regent so far happens to be the only repository of mathematical power of connecting things and discovering relationships of a most intangible mathematical kind that allows this created phenomenon to comprehend and act upon creation itself.

Our congratulations to the Bangladesh Mathematical Society on the successful conclusion at Rajshahi of their three-day ninth annual conference.

US Interest in an Independent Kashmir Looks Ominous T HAT Washington considers, Jammu and Kash. New Delhi has received several such messages in the last three, four years, more or less synchronising with the New Delhi has received several such messages in the last three, four years, more or less synchronising with the Presuming the resolution is passed — most members will

HAT Washington considers Jammu and Kashmir a disputed territory is nothing new. New Delhi has received several such messages in the last three, four years, more or less synchronising with the advent of militancy in the valley. What is new is America's observation that it does not recognise China's control over the territory which Pakistan gave away from Kashmir 30 years ago.

For a long time, the J and K represented the area that India has: the valley, Jammu and the Ladakh. The portion under Pakistan, the Azad Kashmir. etc., was regarded as separate, seldom mentioned part of the disputed territory. John Mallot was the first US official who said unequivocally nearly a year ago that Jammu and Kashmir meant the entire region of Jammu and Kashmir. Thus, he challenged the integration of Hunza, Gilgit and Baltistan. parts of the erstwhile state of Jammu and Kashmir, with Pakistan.

in the midst of heat gener ated by the US Assistant Secretary of State, Robin Raphel leguivalent to joint secretary at the Centre), challenging the accession of J and K to India. Washington has pointed out to New Delhi in a communication that Jammu and Kashmir includes not only the area under the control of Pakistan but also China, meaning thereby the Aksai Chin and the neighbouring portion. It is not an off-the-cuff remark, which can be re-interpreted, as US Under-Secretary of State Department Peter Tarnoff has done in the case of the press briefing by his junior. Raphel. America's statement is in black and white.

EW governments in

North America have a

habit of promising deci-

sive action in their "first hun-

dred days." The new Liberal

government in Canada has set

an unbeatable record in this

field. Within one day of being

sworn into office, the

government of Jean Chretien

had cancelled the largest

defence contract in many years,

the \$4.8 billion purchase of 43

protests from a Montreal firm,

which said thousands of jobs

would be lost. There was even a

complaint from Prime Minister

John Major in Britain, where

the Westland helicopter

an election promise, he said,

and every day he delayed the

cancellation he would be

wasting \$1 million of taxpayers'

money. The EH-101 helicopters

had become an election symbol.

Critics of the deal pointed out

that much of the expenditure

was on anti-submarine

equipment, no longer needed

with the ending of the Cold

War. Chretien said the money

would be sued to fund part of a

\$6 billion programme to rebuild

Kim Campbell, Conservative

Prime Minister from June to

October, had tried to

compromise during the election

campaign by reducing the

purchase from 50 to 43 he-

licopters and claiming she was

saving \$1 billion. She only

By this single move the

Liberals have projected an

image of a brisk, businesslike

government intent on changing

succeeded in looking fatuous.

Canada's decaying cities.

Chretien stood firm. It was

company would lose business.

There were shouts of

military helicopters.

when Mallot first questioned the merger of certain J and K portions with Pakistan, there was no reaction by Islamabad. It probably did not take the statement seriously. Now that Raphel has said during her visit to Islamabad that "no past event could determine the future of Kashmir," it should be clear that America has some different ideas. Still, Pakistan is intriguingly silent. Maybe, it

asked for a clarification when

Raphel was in Islamabad a few

days ago. Whatever the expla-

comfort to Pakistan.

on Kashmir

nation, if any, must be of little

For China, the import of America's pronouncement must be shattering. The Aksai Chin area is Beijing's lifeline with Lahsa. Its loss may amount to the absence of a reliable landcontact between China and Tibet. Perhaps, America has been encouraged to make the statement because it has come to know from the personal papers of General Ayub Khan, Pakistan's first martial law administrator, that the transfer of territory to China was dependent on permanent settlement

Ayub's papers reveal that it was understood that "any agreement that might be reached between China and Pakistan would be of a provisional nature on the location and alignment actually existing between the two countries pending the settlement of the Kashmir dispute. On 3 May, 1962, Pakistan and China formally announced their intention

of defining the boundary between China's Sinkiang and the 'contiguous areas, defence of which is under actual control of Pakistan'."

over the territory which Pakistan gave away from Kashmir 30 years ago.

continue to retain

terpretation.

But the point to consider is

why America is interested in

reviving the erstwhile state of

Jammu and Kashmir as it ex-

isted in August 1947 when the

British left the subcontinent. As

it is, the J and K is divided

among India, Pakistan and

China and it is probably not

economically viable. Washing-

ton wants its integration so that

it can stand on its own legs

This is the most charitable in

Washington, not being confi

dent on it for defence and de-

But there is more to it

By including the Aksai Chin area in the agenda for Kashmir settlement, Washington may be wanting to put pressure on China for accepting Tibet's autonomy. The Dalai Lama has already watered down his demand by proposing that Tibet's autonomy will be minus Defence and Foreign Affairs, the two subjects which Beijing will

velopment. Its strategy must be to have its presence at a place, sharing borders with India, China, Pakistan and the Russian republics. America has hardly any reliable foothold in

the departure of Stevenson, the

Sheikh's references to India's

"over lordship" were so numer-

ous and so strident that even

his close friend, Jawaharlal

Nehru, became suspicious of

A new angle of Kashmiris

him and kept him under deten-

wishes, which has been intro-

duced to the problem, also re-

flects America's thinking. It is

an open secret that given a

choice, the people in the valley

will opt for independence. Nei-

ther the UN resolutions, which

speak about a plebiscite, nor

pendence. America wants to in-

tion for 14 years.

the region.

Indeed, America has played the card of independence before. Within three years of J and K's accession to India, Adlains described by the Card of independence before. Within three years of J and K's accession to India, Adlains described by the Democrats presidential candidate, discussed the proposal with Sheikh Abdullah, then the prime minister of J and K. After

BETWEEN THE LINES

Kuldip Nayar writes from New Delhi

advent of militancy in the valley. What is new is America's observation that it does not recognise China's control

troduce the third option.

Washington brought in the association of Kashmiris for the first time early this year at a US-funded seminar at the institute of Peace, where some Indian scholars were present. Raphel has repeated it, although Tarnoff has somewhat backtracked by characterising it as a "practical measure." Undoubtedly, the Kashmiris have to be in the picture. No settlement makes any sense if they are kept out.

It is, however, pertinent to recall that Raphel, before taking up her assignment in Washington, spent several days in Srinagar, talking to various Kashmiri leaders, some representing the militants. More recently, one US official specially sought permission of the government to meet Abdul Gani Lone at the All India Institute of Medical Sciences in New Delhi. He is now a JKLF ideologue, supporting the demand for an independent Kashmir.

Both India and Pakistan should be wary of what America is aiming at. It may create more complication than the ones exist today. For its own finger in the pie, it can create a situation that may destabilise the entire

True, Islamabad is busy internationalising the Kashmir problem and gathering support for its resolution on sending a team to Kashmir for assessing the violation of human rights in the valley. But that does not take into account Washington's mechanisations.

passed - most members will abstain - how does it help Pakistan in its basic purpose of solving Kashmir? It cannot achieve anything despite india. Many Indian human rights organisations have themselves pointed out the violations. Pakistan has itself quoted from the reports to strengthen its case. By establishing the Human Rights Commission, however weak and wanting in terms of reference. New Delhi has constituted a forum to counter the argument that it is oblivious to the violations. It has also given America a four-volume report, detailing the action taken against the erring members of security forces. The point is not whether all

members of security forces.

The point is not whether all this is convincing or not. But it means that New Delhi is now joining issue. The accusations and explanations may delay the discussion on Kashmir. Ultimately, Pakistan will have to sit across with India to sort out the problem. When Prime Minister Narasimha Rao took the initiative to discuss J and K, Islamabad should have asked for the dates.

Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto may have probably gone straight for the talks. But the caretaker government at Islami abad has put her in a tight spot by making public Pakistan's intentions to move the resolution. Were she to abandon it, she would be regarded as a person who was trying to be soft to India. Willy-nilly, she will have to pursue the course the caretaker government has already chalked out for her. In the process, the talks have got stalled. One hopes that they will take place before long. America's in-

dent about its future relations the Shimla Agreement, which team to Kashmir for assess the settlement of the mir dispute. On 3 May, wanting to help create a new lindia and Pakistan, suggests the valley. But that does anywhere the status of inde-

Canada's Liberals Quick Off the Mark

Having decimated the Conservatives in an election that left them only two seats in Parliament, the new Liberal Prime Minister Jean Chretien, has swiftly gone to work. On his first day he cancelled an order for 43 helicopters, then he formed a cabinet that gives Ottawa a totally different political look. Gemini News Service reports on the new faces that will be running Canada.

The great divide

Liberals dominate Canada, except in three provinces. Bloc Quebecols holds 54 seats in Quebec. Reform Party holds 52 - all but one in



The new parliament

Liberal 1777 seets

Progressive Conservative 2 seets
2 seets

Progressive New Prime Minister

JEAN CHRETIEN
Hew Prime Minister

direction after nine years of Tory rule — and changing in the direction of addressing people's needs. During the campaign Chretien stuck to the theme of creating jobs, a winning line in a country with unemployment above 11 per cent. Campbell plugged away on

the more austere theme of reducing the budget deficit.

The Liberals came out of the October 25 election holding 177 seats' out of 295, while the Conservatives were almost eliminated: Campbell lost her own seat, and only two Tories survived. The more right-wing

Reform Party, preaching even more budget cutting, took their place with 52 MPs.

In choosing his Cabinet, Chretien has lined up a strong team to face the Reform MPs from Western Canada. He has filled the economic posts with three men on the right of his party.

As Finance Minister he appointed Paul Martin, a Montreal businessman who made a fortune out of a steamship company. A Toronto businessman, Roy Maclaren, whom he put in charge of international trade, is a convinced free trader and will steer Canada into the North American Free Trade Agreement without much complaint.

Finally, he appointed a newly elected MP. Art Eggleton to the critical job of President of the Treasury Board, where decisions are made on how to reduce the budget deficit, this year running close to .\$40 billion. Eggleton is an accountant by profession and was a successful Mayor of Toronto, and should be able to stand up to the tough questioning from Reform Party MPs.

Equally, Chretien has made strategic use of his small contingent of 19 Liberals from Quebec to counter the ranks of 54 Bloc Quebecois MPs whose primary aim is to prepare their province to become a sovereign state, apart from the rest of Canada.

He appointed a former top public servant, Marcel Masse, who has been Cabinet Secretary and also President of the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), to take charge of inter-governmental relations. Masse will try to work out administrative changes that satisfy Quebec nationalism, rather than venture into constitutional amendments, which were the undoing of the previous Tory government of Brian Mulroney.

Another former CIDA president, Michel Dupuy, is Heritage Minister, a post in which he will have to deal with the sensitive subject of culture and communications. Paul Martin is in charge of regional development in Quebec, and since he also holds the money-bags as Finance Minister he can move decisively. Andre Ouellet, a lawyer with a long interest in intentional affairs, is the new external affairs Minister. His

other job. as Chretien's senior lieutenant in Quebec, may cut his travel abroad.

terest is, however, ominous.

An interesting innovation is to have three junior minsters in charge, under Ouellet, of international relations Christine Stewart, who years ago founded her own nongovernmental organisation linked to central America, has Africa and Latin America for her parish. Raymond Chan, a pro-Democracy Chinese-Canadian from British Columbia, has Asia. Doug Peters, senior economist with a Toronto bank. is to watch relations with the World Bank and other international financial

By appointing eight secretaries of state or junior minsters. Chretien has been able to cut the Cabinet to 23 members, and by removing other privileges, including limousines, has given his government a lean look, which will appeal to the Reformers. This has meant room for only four women, out of a total of 36 Liberal women MPs, in the Cabinet; but the lively Sheila Copps (who in opposition was a member of the so-called ratpack that harassed the Tories) is Deputy Prime Minister. She also will give prominence to post-Rio activities as Environment Minister, with support from Paul Martin, another committed environmentalist.

The Liberal cabinet under Jean Chretien, once called "yesterday's man" for his long service in parliament, has swiftly invigorated the Canadian political scene. — Gemini News

Lathe Dallan.

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.

Literacy

Sir, Your feature on the notable efforts of Women's Voluntary Association in Basabo was interesting reading (Oct. 13th) Even at the age of 70. Saleha Khatun is carrying out a vital job under adverse conditions. It is through such people rather than through organised programmes that Bangladesh will one day be rid of its scourge of illiteracy. 'Nijera Shikhi' (a nonprofit company) has been set up to help such efforts towards mass education for children and adults. It should be a matter of national pride that we make Bangladesh a literate nation by our own efforts, rather than depend on the benevolence of other nations and cultures for such a basic human need and right. We can teach ourselves — hence the name 'Nijera Shikhi

Raffat Binte Rashid writes that the WVA's adult literacy work is "not very successful". This is a common experience of voluntary workers. But it need not be so: It is in this area that 'Nijra Shikhi' can help. We offer a new easy system for learning Bangla. It is fast interesting and effective. 'Nijera Shikhi' identifies the traditional teaching methods as being a major cause of Bangladesh's high illiteracy rate.

Anyone who is doing or who would like to do voluntary work in basic literacy for adults or children can write to us and we

will be glad to share with them a highly successful and cost-efficient way of doing it. Let's all be committed to "Education For All."

John Hastings Nijera Shikhi, PO Box, 8059, Dhaka 1216.

Last laugh was Lara's

Sir, Through your esteemed daily, I would like to congratulate the West Indies cricket team on their recent victory in the Pepsi-Cola Champion's Cricket Trophy in Sharjah. They majestically defeated the world champions, Pakistan. This time by a wide margin of six wickets.

From the very beginning of the tournament, the West Indies dominated the entire league, except for their final league match against Pakistan, thanks to Saeed Anwar's magnificent century. The Trinidadian opener, Phil Simmons batted with great consistency (92, 25, 81, 90 n.o. and 42) in each match; the Leeward Islander, Artherton (1 n.o. 84, 63, 44) and the Jamaican, Adams (81 n.o. and 18 n.o.) for once proved their consistency in getting runs and the Antiguan - Richardson, their able and popular Captain gave a captain's knock of 69 not out in the inaugural match and Hooper contributed with a knock of 47 on one occasion. The two new Bowlers, Kenny Benjamin from Antigua fetched nine wickets and Andy Cummins from Barbados six and the veteran from Guyana, Roger Harper fetched four and Hooper six while the Jamaican veteran, Walsh two although, the Antiguan, Ambrose fetched only five wickets from three matches. So, that puts a seal to the team's present balance.

The jewel in the Carribean crown is the little man from Trinidad, (Santa Cruz to be precise) Brian Charles Lara and a lot was being expected from him and he really did disappoint his fans by getting a highest score of only 42 runs in the last league match against Shri Lanka (the others being 5, 14 and 14 respectively). Deep in my heart, I felt that he was saving his best innings of the tournament for the final match. However, not in my wildest dreams did I imagine that it would be too grand.

Pakistan entered the final without their pace-head Wasim Akram, best ever batsman Javed Miandad and greatest spinner Abdul Qadir. Nevertheless, they threw a magnificent target of 284. thanks to a murderous century from Basit Ali (127 from only 79 balls with 12 boundaries and 5 towering sixes). The West Indies lost their veteran, Desmond Haynes when the score was only 29. But then, the tough get going when the going gets tough. Lara blasted out with Simmons and Artherton and for a while with Hooper before leaving, after making his career best of 153 from only 143 balls with 21 boundaries; reaching his century in only 96 balls.

Lara's knock was the third highest West Indies individual knock in a one-dayer, the first two being hit by Master Blaster Richards (189 NO and 187 NO), surpassing that of 152 not out by Haynes. Haynes knocked these runs on his one-day debut against Australia in St. John's in 1978.

A true cricketer carves out his best innings when it is needed the most. Lara has done this more than once for his team. Although, Lara was shadowed by other thunderous displays in the tournament, his 153 in the final, eclipsed all achievements by everybody and it helped the West Indies to enter the CAB Hero Cup in India with a success of 68.52 per cent from August 92. Ironically, the World Champs managed to get a rate of only 43.75 per cent within that period! There is a saying, "he who laughs last, is the one who lasts". Lara did not laugh throughout the tournament, but it was he who had the final laugh. Bravo Brian

Asrarul Islam Chowdhury, Department of Economics; Jahangimagar University

Charles Lara!

Who is responsible?

Sir, How many more killings do we have to count in the days to come? Will there be no end to this political inferno? Three persons, including a doctor were gunned down and many were injured in the recent carnage of terrorists at the Chittagong Medical College Hospital's canteen, which reveals the fact that day by day almost all the educational institutions are becoming hostage to the hostility of political terrorism.

Nevertheless, the police have played their role; arriving at the

scene after the safe exit of the culprits and arresting a few, but letting the main criminals go free. The politicians have played their role too; condemning the act, accusing the rivals and vowing to uproot the evils. But we, the citizens, have also got to play our role; to reconcile with terrorism and to accept the fact that terrorism has become a part of our violent, vulnerable and vacillating democracy. Well. is it necessary to seek the an swer to the query: who is responsible?

Md Jalaluddin Iqbal Mohammadpur, Dhaka

Dealing with the vagrants

Sir, Bhabaghurey Niyantran

is an administrative duty and liability of government that they will perform as may be required and there can be little objection to that from any quarter. But . the system, as followed, to deal with the vagrants detained in the vagrant home is not very sound, in as much as their cases are reviewed and examined by a magistrate sitting in a court only once a week viz. on Wednesdays. This obviously causes hardship to persons detained in the 'home'. When the magistrate sits to consider the cases, applicants or visitors on behalf of the detainees have no scope to move the matter or make their submission, because the court sits inside the 'home' and outsiders have no access there and hence, there is every chance of justice being affected.

When the court rises, the relevant parties are informed of the orders passed, when any person present on behalf of the party is present in the court and such a system is prevalent everywhere excepting this court. In the compound of the vagrant home or near about, there is no place where the applicants or visitors on behalf of the detainees can

Such people are to roam about outside the home, on the roads and are exposed to hard-ship that knows no bound.

Sufferers have bitter experience. Once such a vagrant is arrested and put inside the VH, they have to undergo a complex process to get their cases adjudicated and disposed of. Result, obviously, is that such unfortunate people are detained for longer periods than necessary.

When such people are arrested, the police before sending them to the VH can verify the information available to contact the relevant people over telephone so that genuine innocent persons may be treated leniently and such persons' sufferings may be minimised. The resident-in-charge of the VH has to make sure that persons waiting outside for information about detainees may get the required information without much delay and difficulty.

Accordingly, it seems there are rooms for improvement in the management of the centre by ensuring that the magisterial duty is performed for some specific hours daily; allowing applicants or visitors on behalf of detainees to move matters when the court sits; arranging for waiting rooms for them; and supplying information about court decisions and minimising the length of the process of release of the detainees from the 'home'.

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