

## Charge Them with Perjury

We are gratified by the Election Commission (EC) verdict vacating the seats of three MPs — Mahmudul Hasan, Poritosh Chakrabarty and Ebadur Rahman — for having defected from the political party from which they got elected. While we express satisfaction at the outcome, we cannot but register our amazement at some of the things that transpired at the EC hearing.

Why didn't EC call for testimony of the persons most concerned — namely the defecting MPs. They should have been made to repeat under oath, what they had submitted in writing, that they did not join BNP, and were still members of the JP, a plea that their lawyers took. After recording their testimonies, the EC should have called the ruling party leaders, including its chairperson, to testify as to whether or not the said MPs had actually joined the BNP.

We are not satisfied just by the vacation of the seats of these MPs. We think there is a prima facie case for a charge of perjury against the three former MPs. A conscious and deliberate attempt was made to mislead the EC by denying something they did in public view. We also question the stance of defence lawyers, one of whom is a BNP leader and himself an MP, and wonder how could they take a plea which is so contrary to facts. The EC is a quasi-judicial body, and lying to it is an offence which should not go unpunished. We think that the three former MPs and their lawyers tried to make a mockery of the EC hearing and of the judicial process. We strongly suggest that the EC should charge them with perjury, and show the existing and prospective MPs that no one should try to make a fool of the EC.

## Failing Laws

Terrorism has many faces. Of them the one that is manifested through violence resorted to by outlawed political parties in the name of annihilating bourgeois classes has posed a serious challenge to the administration in a wide area of the country's south-west. According to a report, 302 people were done to death by these self-righteous terrorist groups in just seven months. Chuadanga, Meherpur, Kushtia, Magura, Jhenaidah, Jessore, Pabna and Satkhira together make a large pasture for the outlawed parties — such as the Purba Bangla Communist Party, Biplobi Communist Party and Sarbahara Party — to operate in the fashion of the Naxalites.

That 43 people were murdered each month on an average by the activists of the clandestine parties is a testimony to their power and reach; and, conversely, the incapacity of the law enforcers to deal with them. These well-armed groups kill, exact revenge and collect tolls almost with impunity. What is strange is that most often their killings — unless it is a killing spree like the one resorted to in a village of Satkhira recently or an armed clash between two groups or parties — hardly make stirring news.

There is perhaps no need for a comment that theirs is an ideological deviation beyond repair and virtually they have turned to common banditry. Establishing the dictatorship of the proletariat is far removed from their sight. Whatever it is, the fact remains that it is a clear indication of precipitous dip in the law and order situation. And this is what compels us to separately comment on such a development in addition to the dangerous drift in Dinajpur. Incompetence in establishing the rule of law has no excuse and its spin-offs bode ill for both government and society. Alarm bells have been sounded. The government should respond in right earnest to the call of the time.

## Sad Lives in Sarajevo

Even by Bosnia's standard, the mortar attacks on marketplace teeming with people are a despicable and cowardly act. The Serbs did it once on February 5, 1994, leaving 68 civilians dead and 200 others wounded. The latest such shell fires have killed 37 and wounded scores in the same area of Sarajevo. This has come at a time when the war in former Yugoslavia is recording a lull and some people are picking up the threads of diplomatic peace initiative.

The Serbs have denied their involvement in the attack; rather they accused the Bosnian government of shelling its own people just to foil the peace process. We never knew the Serbs were so eager for peace and the Bosnian government has any advantage to press for it at the moment. If we believe a neutral third party, it gives us an opposing view. According to US Assistant Secretary of State Richard Holbrooke, the new chief of the US mediating team, "rebel Bosnian Serbs are the chief stumbling block to peace". And if any tactical advantage is enjoyed right now by any party, it is Croatia not Bosnia.

So, there is no reason for the Bosnian government to cold-shoulder any serious peace effort. The immediate concern for Bosnia is how it will protect Gorazde when the last of the British troops have left. Clearly the Serbs are waiting for a vicious attack. The UN Security Council's mandate, on the one hand, is providing more power to the UNPROFOR and the NATO forces, but on the other, it is too specific to protect civilian lives or retaliate for civilian casualties. That distinction should go now. Otherwise, the Serb forces stationed around Sarajevo will continue to make the lives of the citizens of Sarajevo miserable. The NATO must be ready to pounce on the Serb violators from air if they try to shell the capital again. Better it would be if their artillery can be forced to withdraw or — in case of defiance — destroyed. Will the UN and NATO jointly take the responsibility of that necessary job?

HERE is a global shortage of cereals at present and this includes rice and wheat. World food security reserves were never so low during the last twenty years. However, there is nothing new about such downturns in food production. Such crisis of a global scale last occurred in mid seventies and now it has recurred again twenty years later. In Bangladesh, the decline in boro '95 and before that aman '94 were induced by drought, a natural calamity not infrequent in our part of the world. The drought affected Bangladesh; however, adjoining eastern parts of India still enjoyed bumper crops. The state of West Bengal, in particular, should have been affected as well. Nobody seems to know why?

Regardless of the downturn in output during past two cropping seasons, growth rate in Bangladesh agriculture started to slow down since 1992 and it is necessary to find an adequate explanation for the emerging stagnation. Statistically, the stagnation is now well established. But it is not enough. Why this stagnation — we must find out.

During the ten-year period prior to 1992, rice production increased by as much as 40 per cent, implying a long term annual growth rate of 3.5 per cent which is well above the population growth rate of just above 2 per cent per annum. As a result, increasing per capita availability of food consistently improved the nutritional situation in the country. Clearly, there were more food to eat and near self-sufficiency in foodgrain production was achieved. Attention therefore moved to quality rice through modern processing so that beyond the ten-year period, we may achieve not only self-sufficiency, but generate surplus for export. However,

# Why Stagnation in Agriculture

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such self-sufficiency was more of a fiction than reality. After 1992, the notable performance of agriculture could not be sustained. The sectoral growth rate started to slow down, regardless of weather conditions.

### Three Factors

The favourable performance of agriculture during the ten-year period of the recent past was induced by three factors: rapidly expanding use of HYV rice seeds, chemical fertilizers for growth of crops and shallow tubewell irrigation. Of the three, shallow tubewell holds the key to the explanation of past performance as well as recent stagnation in agriculture. During 1980s, shallow tubewell irrigation increased by as much as 30 per cent per annum: from 227,000 hectares in 1981 to 1.8 million hectares ten years later and shallow tubewells accounted for 55 per cent of irrigation, up from 14 per cent only in 1980.

More tubewells mean more boro rice. The incremental paddy output was overwhelmingly boro. In 1992, boro rice, which is invariably irrigated, accounted for 37 per cent of the record harvest of 18.25 million tons compared with 20 per cent in the early 1980s. The phenomenal increase in boro cultivation also meant less aus. As boro increased, around 1.3 million hectares were taken away from aus cultivation.

Our agriculture is practically all rice. Rice accounts for one-quarter of GDP and

three-fourths of the cropped area. As boro production increased at a break-neck speed, due to yet more rapid rates of growth of shallow tubewell irrigation, the national economy as a whole achieved, by Bangladesh standards, a significant rate of performance.

### Water Table

However, there were limits to growth through shallow tubewell irrigation. By 1992, high density of such wells at many places led to draw-down of the ground water ta-

use. So the growth faltered immediately. The stagnation in agriculture was bound to emerge. Moreover, the growth was dependent on one single crop — irrigated boro rice. At the same time, an extra hectare under boro meant a hectare less of rabi crops followed by aus. The crop substitution was possible because of high yields of irrigated boro. It is preferable to the combination of low yielding rabi crops, that is pulses and oil seeds plus aus paddy. However, the fact remains



## Window on Asia

Shafiqul Islam

bles. Water was there no doubt, but beyond the reach of the shallow wells. In the meantime, deep tubewells, where supply of water would have posed no problem, fell out of favour and rapid expansion of surface water irrigation, although feasible, was largely ignored.

The scope of further expanding shallow tubewell irrigation is indeed very limited at present. In several areas, water tables have gone down so much that shallow tubewells are rendered useless. The agriculture growth of the recent past were directly related to spread of irrigation which reached its limits given the technology in

that boro is not an unmixed blessing. Gains are more no doubt but losses are there too. I have a feeling that with expansion of boro in relatively higher reaches of the floodplains, cultivation of a wide variety of rabi crops and aus were lost in increasing proportions. Over the years, gains from boro in terms of agriculture growth were being moderated with greater intensity.

### Important Determinant

The farm-gate price received by farmers during the immediate post-harvest period is an important determinant of farm level initiatives for increasing the pro-

duction. According to FAO reports, "the structure of rice markets has evolved substantially over the past two decades. Twenty years ago, farmers marketed only 15 per cent of their production; today, they market more than 50 per cent". Therefore role of price incentives to sustain growth of agriculture have substantially increased. At the same time, it is on record that during the three years, 1992 to 1994, critical farm-gate prices of paddy, immediately after the harvest often fell below cost of production. Definitely, unfavourable price structures were also responsible for stagnation in agriculture.

Fertilizers, as we know, is an important factor behind increasing yield of paddy. However, rising fertilizer prices due to withdrawal of subsidies combined with unfavourable post-harvest prices received by farmers for his produce obviously reinforced recent trends toward stagnating agriculture. Farmers' expectations from increasing fertilizer application were not realized due to lack of balanced use of three key fertilizer types as well as critical lack of trace elements in the soil. Perhaps due to ignorance, farmers tend to use more of urea instead of phosphate or potash fertilizers. As a result, expected yield gains cannot be realized. This is borne out by the fact that the incremental production was accounted for by expansion of the land under irrigated boro cultivation and not through gains in

yield or productivity.

### Quality of Seeds

Another important factor, I think, must have been the quality of HYV rice seeds. As we all know, when the emphasis is on quantity, quality is bound to suffer. In the three-year period from 1989 to 1991, the irrigated area expanded by almost 7 lakh hectares, which is more than the total irrigated area added during the previous eight years. Moreover all these irrigated areas were devoted to one single crop, HYV boro. But the rapid increase in demand for quality HYV rice seeds were not fulfilled — there was no complimentary programme for augmenting supplies of such critical inputs. Unfortunately, private sector quality seed production and marketing is yet to develop and complement the progress already achieved in irrigation. Under the circumstances, deceleration of growth in production cannot be prevented and it is bound to emerge with increasing strength without any remedial action programme.

Now it is the third year in succession that we are falling behind; in addition, the decline has been further reinforced by natural factors and in the current year, the shortfall in domestic cereal production is already substantial. However, the rains have come and we may recover some of the lost grounds in the coming aman season provided there are no major flood disasters. But this is not the answer to the falling growth trends that have already set in for the last three years. Unfortunately, we are yet to see the necessary plans and programmes for getting rid of the stagnation in agriculture. Believe me, a bumper aman harvest next time is definitely not, repeat not the answer.

# Kashmir Murder Sets back Separatists

Rahul Bedi writer from New Delhi

Moderate Kashmiri separatists say their cause has been damaged by the murder of a Norwegian tourist, kidnapped by a militant group. But people in the north Indian state complain the problem of kidnappings and killings has only received international attention after the killing of a Westerner.

KASHMIRI separatists are reeling under reflected bad publicity of the recent murder of a Norwegian tourist by a militant group.

They fear the beheading of Hans Christian Ostro by militants in the northern Indian state has robbed the struggle for independence of whatever legitimacy and support it enjoyed at home and abroad.

The murder, carried out by Al Faran, a group described as a "loose cannon," has also shocked other militant groups.

Most have condemned the killing and urged Al Faran to release four other Western hostages kidnapped at the same time as Ostro in an attempt to gain the release of 15 of their jailed comrades.

In a rare move, the All-Party Hurriyat Conference, comprised of 30 Kashmiri political and social groups, organised a day-long strike across the Kashmir Valley to protest the killing.

Ever since the armed struggle for Kashmir independence began nearly six years ago, strikes have been routinely organised to protest against the Indian government. But a Kashmiri leader who declined to be named for reasons of safety, said the Hurriyat's attempt to distance itself from the Al Faran and its condemnation of the kidnapping as un-Islamic does little to maintain the Hurriyat's credibility or ac-

ceptability. He said that after the brutal killing of the Norwegian, few people distinguished between Kashmir's militant groups.

"Most people are convinced that all militants were little better than murderous criminals," he said.

A cross-section of public opinion in India, meanwhile, says it took the brutal killing of a Westerner to catapult the 48-year-old Kashmiri dispute onto the international stage.

But the deaths of around 13,000 people, many of whom have suffered similar fates as Ostro, has not resulted in Western countries unilaterally condemning terrorism in Kashmir.

The Kashmir dispute also got a hearing in the United Nations Security Council after the Norwegian's death. The council expressed concern over the "re-appearance" of kidnapping in the disputed state — and act considered to be terrorism and roundly condemned by the international community.

But the Security Council failed to offer condolences to

the families of four Kashmiris also executed by other militant groups on 13 August, the day the 27-year-old Norwegian's decapitated torso was recovered by police.

In recent years, kidnapping has diminished as a tool of Kashmiri militants fighting their civil war, but it has never stopped.

When the UN Security Council head referred to the "re-appearance" of kidnapping in Kashmir he appeared to mean the taking of Western hostages and not the approximately 2,000 locals who, over the years, have been abducted by various militant groups.

Meanwhile, India and Pakistan have continued their war of words over the hostage issue.

Pakistan forcibly occupied a third of Kashmir after independence in 1947 and lays claim to the rest.

India accuses Pakistan of arming and training Muslim militants in Kashmir and backing the Al Faran group. Denying the allegation,

Pakistan says it provides diplomatic and "moral support" to Kashmir's separatist struggle.

Recently, Pakistan warned India against dragging the hostage issue towards war. The neighbours have fought two of their three wars over Kashmir since independence 48 years ago.

"Pakistan desires peace, but India's recent action and deadly escalation of the situation in Kashmir compels us to state our position clearly," said Aseef Ali, Pakistan's Foreign Minister.

Indian intelligence and security officials, meanwhile, say the killing of Ostro has chilling ramifications.

They claim Al Faran guerrillas have become "loose cannons" and are refusing to obey their "handlers" from Pakistan's Inter Services Intelligence (ISI), whom they accuse of "running" Kashmir's civil war.

Indian intelligence officials say Al Faran is a "front" for the Pakistan-backed and controlled Harkat-ul-Ansar group operating in Kashmir,

whose members are either Pakistani or mercenary Afghans.

"It is an outfit of soldiers of fortune," said K Padmanabhi, India's Home Secretary.

Controlled by the ISI, Harkat is a well-armed group which operates with a fixed agenda of mixing Kashmir's cause.

It kidnapped two Britons in Kashmir in June, 1994, and four other Westerners in Delhi soon after — gaining their objective of international publicity before releasing them.

But Indian intelligence officials say the killing of Ostro is an indication that the ISI lost control of Harkat and they fear for the four hostages.

They say that while the ISI has a fixed agenda of

"Internationalising" Kashmir's struggle, Harkat activists — posing as the Al Faran — are now obsessed with obtaining the release of their jailed comrades.

As evidence of Pakistan's involvement in Kashmir, federal Home Ministry officials point to the "Hero's welcome" given recently in Pakistan to Mast Gul, an Afghan mercenary.

Gul was responsible for burning down Chara-e-Sharif, a 500-year-old Muslim shrine in Kashmir, after a fire-fight with the Indian security forces in May.

In recent weeks, public meetings, rallies and interviews on Pakistan's state-owned television have hailed Gul as the "hero" of Chara-e-Sharif.

Reports from Pakistan's capital Islamabad say Gul has been telling his audiences in Pakistan that he wants to recruit fighters for Kashmir. "If you are not fighting in Kashmir, you are not a Muslim," he said in several speeches across Pakistan.

— GEMINI NEWS  
RAHUL BEDI is a New Delhi-based freelance journalist.

## To the Editor...

### Methods of learning English

Sir, The main objective of learning English is to read, write and speak in English. The method of teaching English which is followed by the schools and colleges of our country, to my mind, does not help implement that objective. In schools and colleges, only the definitions and uses of some grammar are taught in addition to the transformation of sentences. No emphasis is laid on the discussion of various kinds of sentences and the formation of sentences. As a result, students naturally fall into difficulties and remain ignorant about the intricacies of learning the language properly.

It is my opinion that if the teachers teach the various kinds of sentences and their formation and in which situation what appropriate sentence should be applied, the students would be highly benefited. There is no doubt that it would help improve their knowledge in English.

Mahmuda Khatun Shaihi  
Sublee Bagan Lane, Sirajganj

### Of banks and banking

Sir, It was a pleasure for me to attend the seminar at BIBM titled "Impact of Ancillary Business on Profitability of Banks" and also I had a good opportunity to learn something.

Mr Mahabubur Rahman, Deputy Governor of Bangladesh Bank inaugurated the seminar on 20-8-95. He addressed the guests and said "this is the time for

bankers to reassess earning income through new concept of the banking system." This will add to the profitability of bank business. He also cited examples of some other foreign banks and said that the fair banking business will develop the economic stability to an anticipated level. "Particularly, this seminar was very important for the banks," he added.

The second session was inaugurated by Mr L R Sarker, Managing Director, Prime Bank Limited. I think for the first time I was listening to a valuable speech delivered by a renowned banker. He mentioned that the private banking system should be charged with modification. Further, he added that a new concept should be adopted for income generation for the middle class and the poorer section of the people. This will be helpful for them. Again he "told that they introduced "consumers loan scheme" and also mentioned that some other new schemes will be introduced very shortly. "Our objective will be for future generation," he asserted.

Obaidul Kabir Chowdhury  
AVP, National Bank Ltd, Dhaka

### Police's role in Dinajpur

Sir, It is learnt that in Dinajpur town at least seven persons were killed and over hundred injured when on August 27, police opened fire on the people who demonstrated in the town against the death of a young girl in

police custody. The gruesome killing of seven people has shaken the conscience of people of the country. All Bangla and English dailies carried the news of the incident in Dinajpur in their front pages. So far my knowledge goes, it is the first such event in the history of Dinajpur where such a number of people were killed in a single day.

It has been alleged that a group of miscreants backed by plain clothes police attacked Dinajpur Press Club, and raided the offices of the Daily Teesta, Protidin, Daily Uttarbanga and weekly Deshbarta damaging property.

As a resident of Dinajpur I condemn the police role and at the same time I would like to draw the attention of Minister of Home Affairs to look into the cause of the whole affair — the death of a girl in police custody — and bring the real culprits to book.

Md Mustafizur Rahman  
Rayer Bazar, Dhaka

### Cardphone for Dhaka University

Sir, Dhaka University has more than twenty thousand students and eighty per cent of them are from outside Dhaka. They face too much inconvenience in case of emergency without card-phone telephone facilities in the halls. The Dhaka Medical College (DMC) has two card-phone for just one thousand students on the campus. And in the CA hostel at Gopibag one cardphone has been installed for only 240 students.

I strongly urge the T&T authority to install at least two cardphones in the Teacher Student Centre of Dhaka University.  
Luful Islam Titu  
Dhaka University

### English-medium education

Sir, Bangladesh History and Current Affairs may be made compulsory in the higher classes in all types of schools.

2) English conversation class may be held once a week in all classes.

3) 'O' and 'A' level students must be computer literate, to the extent of being able to use word processor and print a document. A central Govt subsidised agency may distribute, install, and maintain one PC in each school (including SSC/HSC candidates). The entry-level PC for school may be mass-assembled. There will be no typewriters in future in the corporate sector.

4) The admission/monthly fees in English medium schools may be rationalised and lowered, so that the middle class may afford it. At present hardly one percent of the families can afford such education.

5) Screen the teaching staff to upgrade quality.

6) The Directorate of Inspection of English medium educational institutions may be strengthened. These schools should be made to pay VAT, which should not be reimbursed to the students/guardians.

A guardian  
Dhaka

## Art Buchwald's COLUMN

### The Fight of the Century

SOME people are calling it the fight of the century. Two evenly matched gladiators went at it toe to toe for 89 seconds in Las Vegas while millions who had paid \$50 per TV set cheered.

No one could say they didn't get their money's worth. They heard a top-rated version of the "Star-Spangled Banner" and saw innumerable shots of Mike Tyson's other fights and interviews with the world's leading prize-fight experts. They received a PR tour of Las Vegas and studied the electric magic of Don King's hair.

Like most Americans who believe boxing is the most honest sport in this country, I gathered with eight other fans in Harvey Weinstein's living room. Harvey shelled out the 50 bucks, but we bought the beer and pretzels.

There was excitement and anticipation the likes of which I have never seen at Harvey's. After all, Tyson wasn't fighting a bum. He was fighting the great Peter McNeely, the Irish tiger — boxing's IRA terrorist, the man with the Golden Jaw.

We had a pool. If McNeely fell down more than twice in the first round, I won. If he was able to get up and his managers could stop the fight, Davidson won. If McNeely had a press conference at ringside while the referee was declaring Tyson the winner, Weinstein won.

The introductions in the ring were done. The referee made Tyson swear on a Bible that the fight was for real, and if Mike had a date afterward he would be home by 10 o'clock. The two men looked at each other with hatred and disgust. Tyson had never met McNeely before, but he felt the young man wanted to knock him out and make a name for himself. McNeely hated Tyson because he was getting \$25 million, which is more than McNeely could make in a month. The men went to their respective corners, and the bell rang.

Now this is the bad part of the story. Mrs Weinstein, trying to be a good hostess, made a large bowl of popcorn with butter and salt on it. I reached over to get a handful and when I looked up the fight was over.

"What happened?" I asked.  
Weinstein said, "I don't know. I was sneezing."  
Davidson said, "I was trying to put my chair in a better position, so I didn't see anything."

No one in the room claimed to have seen the finish. The consensus of the group was the fight was one we could all tell our grandchildren about.

Yokel came up with an idea to improve it. "Why doesn't everyone just send a \$50 check to Mike Tyson and skip the fight? That way he'd get his purse and we could get to bed a lot earlier."

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