

# FOCUS

## The Fish Fortnight: Contradiction with the Dal-Bhat Slogan?

ON the occasion of the Fish Fortnight the Fisheries Minister surprisingly revealed that the growth of the sub-sector increased to 8.5 per cent in the current fiscal year from only 2.5 per cent in 1991 which was expected to exceed not above 5 per cent. The Minister must have had an updated information and we can be happy with that. If this is true it is an impressive gain for a (sub) sector which has been subject to adversity since the early 60s. The 1960s can be noted as the decade for its development efforts like HYV agriculture. The introduction of HYV agriculture was justified by the idea of Food Autarky-increasing population would require increasing food. Although the proverb Bangales Lives on Fish and Rice contained the essence of Bangali material culture, the intricate tools of planning process was unable to accommodate the aphorism of the Bangali life. Thus fish is removed and only rice (the staple food) was planned to keep in the diet of the majority Bangales. The strategy of food production easily lent to the ideas of big water control projects for irrigation and flood control. The combined effect of HYV and Flood Control/Irrigation projects and consequent irretrievable loss to many aquatic resource, cropping pattern and many life support system of the stakeholders only recently hit the conscience of the social scientists.

flood control and irrigation projects (destruction of fish breeding grounds by altering the water movement). Against this backdrop, the news of dramatic growth only

by Rashed un Nabi

**Fish cultivation in the pond has a slow impact on poverty alleviation if poverty alleviation concerns the fishermen. The pond owners are neither poor nor fishermen and their increased income through increased production does not benefit the poor people. That means fish cultivation generates income and does not help much in generating employment.**

in 2-3 years is more than encouraging. It is nothing unexpected either because a huge amount of investment has been made during the last five year plan for fisheries development, both through private and public sector: The Second Aquaculture Development Project in the haors in the Northwest, the Third Fisheries Project in the west and Fisheries Extension Project in the NorthWest region of the country were implemented during this period. The projects had considerable production focus. Beside this, fish farming in the ponds by the farmers or business enterprise witnessed a sharp rise along with the brackishwater shrimp farming. All of these

Fish in the water is the direct victim of HYV cultivation (chemical fertiliser and pesticide) and

endeavours might have contributed to the rapid growth of the sub-sector. It is difficult to discover from the speech of Fisheries Minister whether the growth

and public sectors should jointly endeavour to promote fisheries through fish cultivation. On the other hand, the text signed by the President emphasises the understand-

message of the Fisheries Minister in between the two state heads that the present government links improvement of the fisheries with the poverty alleviation effort.

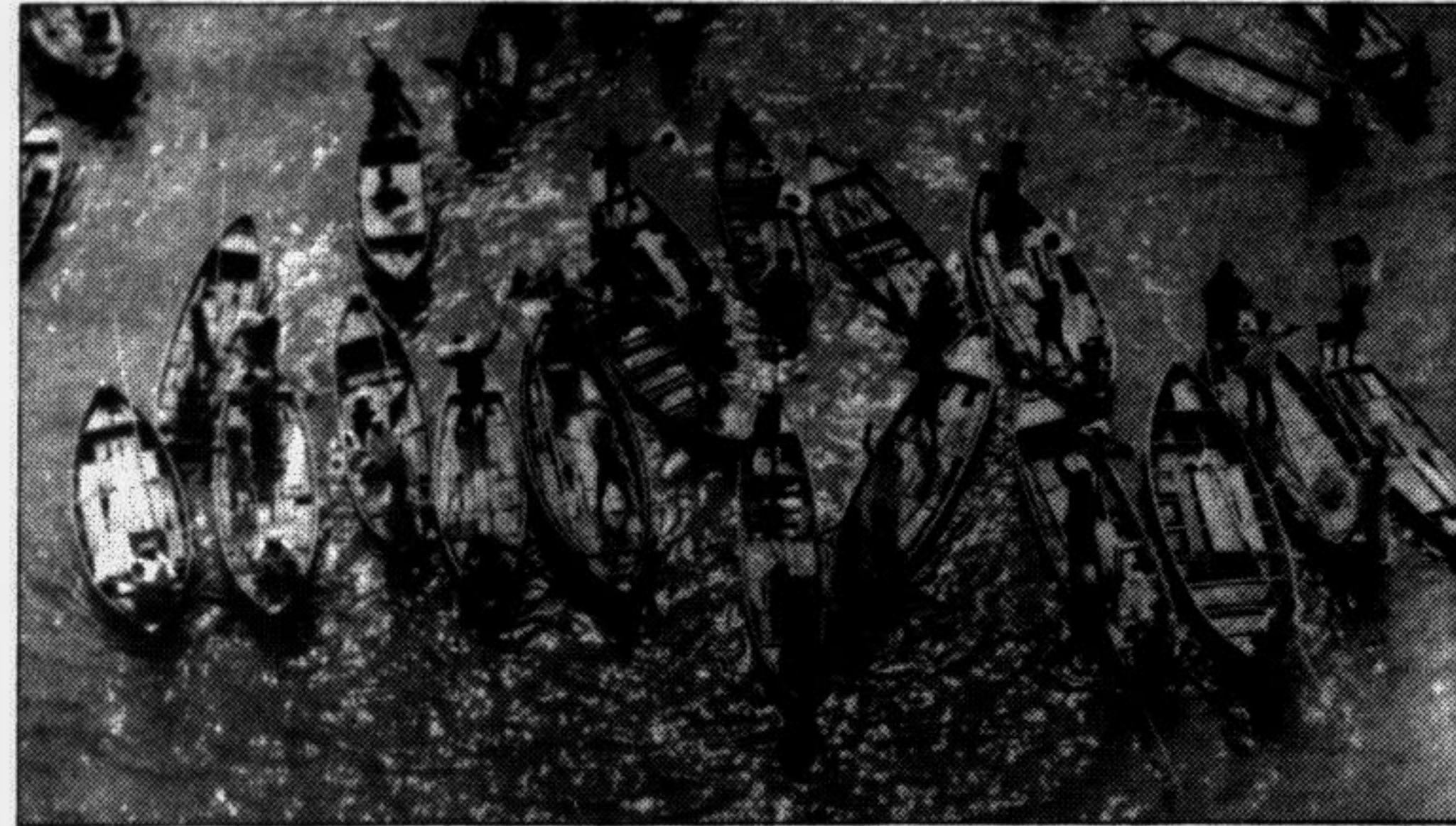
not help much in generating employment.

The slogan of this year's Fisheries Fortnight that increasing fish cultivation can bring about prosperity round the year is thus a fragmentary view and should not have been qualified as the slogan of the fortnight. The increasing emphasis on fish cultivation will tend to divert the attention from the necessity of conservation of natural water sources, the need for a holistic water management approach, and in the long run, will affect the fish population. Cultivation methodically chooses carp species and rule out the opportunity of keeping up species diversity. Again this chosen carp species are commercially expensive which the poor can never afford. As a result, it leaves an insignificant or negative impact on the nutritional status of the majority rural and urban poor.

It is unlikely that advocacy for fish culture overlooking capture fisheries will ever yield an impact on the poverty situation of the poor who live on capture fishery. Improvement of fisheries can not be attained unless the poor are adequately targeted, the strategy is directed towards them and the institution is capable enough to get by the strategy.

We therefore should appreciate the message of our state head but unfortunately can not appreciate the message of our constitutional head. Let us hope that it was not due to a contradiction with her Dal-Bhat slogan.

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The fishing boats wait for their turn: Fishy mess or too little fish?

was mainly contributed by freshwater capture fisheries or closed water pond cultivation or whether it is attributed to the mushroom of shrimp farms: It is not desirable either.

On the same occasion, the dailies brought out supplements containing the message of the Prime Minister and the President. It is interesting to note the difference between the text of the messages of the Prime Minister and the President. The PM has underscored the importance of fish in nutritional balance of the diet and in growth of the economy at fishing therefore the private

ing Bangladesh as a riverine country and increase in fish production will require decisive management of water resources. It further refers that bulk of the population living on fishing can be supported well through amelioration of capture fisheries. It adds that the livelihood of the rural poor can be supported through fish culture combining with the effort of conservation, but her message asserts that aquaculture is the best way to improve the production. It goes on saying that about 1 crore people directly and indirectly depend on value of natural resources. We further know from the

Equality (CRE), the so-called equal opportunities policy and the "tolerant" British public will prevent the persecution of Bengali people. When Hitler went for the Jews, friendly neighbours turned their backs or became informers. Few stood up for them. The problem was that the rise of Hitler was not curtailed. But then, in many ways, the manner of his rise was unexpected. With the likes of Fini, we have ample warning.

The apathy shown by the so-called community leaders, and also Bengali people, goes deeper than events like February's demonstration. When the Trade Union Congress (TUC) organised a mass demonstration in Tower Hamlets (where more than forty thousand Bengali people reside) following the attack on a Bengali youth, Quddos Ali, the same question arose: where are all our community activists and our people?

To the great sadness of this writer, when Desh Bikash, a Bengali Charity organisation, organised a seminar on racism last year, even the invited speakers (some of whom are councillors) failed to turn up. That day, in Covent Garden, West London, a few miles from Tower Hamlets, the scene of a big celebration — an event of less importance was packed full of Bengali people. The event was a beauty contest!

It is hard to accept the ignorance theory as an explanation for this apathy. Community activists and Bengali people are very aware but complacent. One needs to see the turnout of Bengali people at the Bollywood film-stars show in London. There, far away from any real threat to the right-wingers, hordes of Bengali people lol, listening to the, sometimes, slack lyrics. Most of them care little for the ideals put forward by the show. All they are there for is to see the half-naked actress.

## 'Charles Sahib' Plans to Follow the Bandit Queen

by DK Joshi New Delhi

NOTORIOUS criminal Charles Gurumukh Sobhraj wants to make a killing. Not from terrorising tourists — as he used to do — but from his autobiography and from film rights on his life of cold-blooded homicide.

Sobhraj, now 51, is about to be released on bail from prison in Delhi. Even while behind bars he has negotiated with Hollywood producers for a film of his life. He also plans to tour India to publicise his autobiography.

Sobhraj will be following in the footsteps of 'Bandit Queen' Phoolan Devi who earned an estimated Rs 10 million from her biography and a sensational Indian film which told the story of her gang-rape, her subsequent murderous revenge and her life as a bandit up to the point of her capture.

Sobhraj became infamous for a series of attacks on young foreign back-packers with little money. He has tried to put a gloss on the killings by telling his biographers Richard Neville and Julie Clarke, that he was employed by a Beijing-backed, Hong Kong-based heroin syndicate and that his victims were drug couriers who had stepped out of line and had to be punished.

There is absolutely no evidence for such a claim, which adds a cruel twist to the crimes by shifting some of the blame on to the victims.

Nor can it explain his other crimes, such as the overdosing of 60 French tourist with sedatives in their hotel, or the jewel robbery which involved the seduction

CELLULAR phones may not be carcinogenic, but they're not as safe as Dhaka's businessmen think. All you need to listen in is a receiver, and there you are, an unbelieving eavesdropper to a world of top secret deals, sinister conspiracies, and illicit affairs.

"Rahim Shaheb" — a Dhaka businessman — may say, "I have so and so in my pockets. Listen to this..." A sampling of such business calls (and there are certainly other kinds) provides interesting insights into the Deshi Corporate Scene. There are all kinds of businessmen, for example. There are the Dhaka types, the Koreans and other foreigner types, the big bosses of so-and-so corporation, and the most interesting of them all, the up-and-coming MBA types. These are the suave sophisticated English-speaking young men, who drop impressive buzz words like "management style" and "restructuring".

Now we come to calls of the other kind — the extramarital affairs. Plans are made for weekend get-aways, foreign trips, and even home visits. Reliable sources say that the best time to tune in to extramarital frequencies is Thursday evenings, when couples make plans for the weekend. Names are dropped with



abandon, so that if you know anyone who's anyone in Dhaka, you're bound to recognize at least some of the people. In a city starved of entertainment, cellular eavesdropping can become a hip pastime. Just get together a group of friends and huddle around a receiver. "Hey we have Rahim Shaheb and Mr Kyu Kyu on the line again. They finally cracked the million dollar deal. Does this mean Peraz is out of the picture?" Eavesdropping is wrong, of course. But sociologists could do some interesting research on Dhaka's current trends in business practices, extramarital rendezvous, and the cellular phone cross-section itself. Who are these people, what are they like, and do their activities foreshadow more widespread wickedness in Dhaka's future?

## Where Are All Our 'Community Activists'?

by RA Shafi Choudhury

I have a confession to make and also a question to ask. The confession is — I really am ignorant. Ignorant because I have been residing in England for five years, yet I do not know how many Bengali welfare organisations exist here and, worse still, how many community leaders we have. Except, perhaps, for seeing community leaders' photographs all over the Bengali newspapers lecturing their countrymen on how long they and their ancestors have been working for the wellbeing of the community and why the community should listen to them. And this is precisely where my question arises: Where do the so-called community leaders hide when it comes to the real issues?

I have been asking myself this question for quite some time, and it occurred to my mind, again, at the last major demonstration by anti-racist organisations in this country. Let me tell you the whole episode.

On February 15 this year, members of many organisations, including the Anti-Nazi League, Anti-Racist Alliance, Militant Labour, Youth Against-Racism in Europe, and even student unions of British Universities assembled outside the Queen Elizabeth II Conference hall in London to demonstrate against the Italian Fascist leader, Gianfranco Fini. Gianfranco Fini is the leader of the former Italian Social Movement (MSI) now renamed Alleanza Nazionale (National Alliance). With the forced exit of former Italian Premier Silvio Berlusconi, Fini has been thrust into reckoning to lead the government. There lay the root of the February demonstration.

Fini joined the MSI, the legacy of the infamous Benito Mussolini, in 1967. He was involved in violent right-wing activities for the party until he gained a semblance of re-

spectability after being voted in as the Secretary of the MSI Youth Front, in 1977. In 1983, he was elected into the Italian Parliament and in 1987, with the support of Mussolini devotees 'Georgio Almirante, he was selected as party leader. He openly maintained his fascist stance, proudly calling Mussolini "the greatest statesman that ever lived". This position he maintained until Berlusconi's forced departure suddenly created a vacuum.

In his bid to fill this vacuum, the wily Fini decided to change his party's image to something more voter-friendly. His first act, to this end, was to change its name because it was inextricably linked to Mussolini and Fascism. Overnight, MSI became National Alliance. At the same time, he jettisoned his fascist stance, swearing

that he had given up fascism for food. Even then, he remained unrepentant for his past actions. "Fascism," he declared "was not a mistake. It was just a historical phase which we had to pass through".

Having so speedily changed names and pretended to change political conviction, Fini's next aim was to acquire respectability in the eyes of the international community. There lay the reason for his trip to Britain. Here, he addressed the Royal Institute of International Affairs, and met with many influential members of the Conservative Party and Italian residents in Britain.

Apart from the fact that his political conversion is a clear case of opportunism,

the National Alliance still remains essentially the MSI. The same pro-Mussolini members remain. The party retains its links with fascist groups all over the continent, and continues to organise attacks against immigrants in Italy.

However, although Bengali people tend to be the greatest victims of racist attacks all over England, the so-called community leaders of ours, to the great frustration of activists, rarely seem to participate in the fight against racism. In spite of the large spread of organisations that made up the anti-Fini demonstration (about 500 people in all, no doubt reduced to this number by the last minute change of venue by the Royal Institute in its bid to shake off the demonstrators) there was only a handful of Bengali faces present.

Lessons from history should warn us against the dangers posed by the likes of Gianfranco Fini. In pre-Hitler Germany, Jews enjoyed a much more privileged and prosperous lifestyle than Bengali people in Britain today. Yet, it took just one despot to change all that.

Let no Bengali person rest complacent in the belief that the atrocities that took place in Germany in the 40s cannot be repeated in 90s Britain. Fifty years is but a short time in history and many of those who committed crimes against the Jews are still alive. Worse, the sentiments that created the holocaust still fester in the hearts of the likes of Gianfranco Fini.

Bengali people cannot afford to stand with folded arms, complacent in the mistaken belief that the Commission for Racial



Where are the Bangladeshi Community Activists?

## European NGOs Arrive in China with Call for Bigger Role in Peacemaking

WOMEN who crossed Siberia on a special train to lobby the UN Conference on Women issued a declaration on Tuesday calling for a bigger role for women in peace making.

The 'Beijing Express Declaration' was issued by women's groups from Eastern Europe and the former Soviet republics who arrived in Beijing on a special train Monday night from Warsaw.

The United Nations Development Programme organized their trip and raised money from businesses to bring 300 women to the Non-Governmental Forum. The forum, starting Wednesday, will try to lobby the UN-sponsored conference, which begins Monday.

The UNDP held workshops during the trip to help women from newly formed NGOs learn how to lobby the UN conference.

One of the most important results of the trip was the declaration on involving women in preventing and stopping wars, said Leueen Miller, a UN Development Programme worker.

The declaration called for more participation by women in peace talks, arguing "the present system of peace making and negotiations, dominated by senior men at governmental levels, has patently failed and is now discredited."

It called on the United Nations to step into conflicts at an earlier point and try to prevent wars.

It also called for including women in committees that bring war criminals to trial in order to ensure that soldiers who rape women are punished.

"Women are natural negotiators, and it seems absolutely senseless not to include women," said Ms Miller said at a press conference.

The train arrived Monday night in Beijing after an eight-day trip on the trans-Siberia railway through Belarus, Russia, Mongolia and northern China.

Most of the passengers were women from the former Soviet republics, former Yugoslavia, Turkey, Poland and Romania.

"I was in this train the women of all nationalities, from the countries which are in conflict, discussing together, singing together, laughing together," said Nani Chanishvili of the International Society of Women of Georgia for Peace.

Their aim, she said is "for peace, for development, for some future for our children."

## Pope Meets US Woman Heading Delegation to Beijing

by Frances d'Emilio

The American law professor leading the Vatican's battle at the Beijing women's conference said Tuesday she will work to build a consensus at the UN gathering, where the US position is expected to clash with the pontiff's.

A day before the Vatican delegates were due to depart for China to attend the Sept. 4-15 UN World Conference on Women, Pope John Paul II shook hands and chatted with delegation head Mary Ann Glendon and some of the rest of the 22-member delegation, which includes eight Americans.

"It's so important to have a good success at the conference," John Paul told them.

In a written message he gave to Ms Glendon, a Harvard University comparative law expert who is the first woman to ever lead a

Vatican delegation to an international forum, John Paul said he hopes the conference will help women achieve "equality, development and peace, through full respect for their equal dignity and for their inalienable human rights, so that they can make their full contribution to the good of society."

For weeks, John Paul has been making clear that the Vatican will aggressively wage its campaign against abortion, forced sterilization, contraceptive use and other women's issues during the Beijing forum.

Last week, his spokesman, Joaquin Navarro, said the Vatican and the US delegations sharply differed over what should be in the final conference document just as the two sides did a year ago at a UN conference on population.

Among the issues separating them are abortion and birth control.

"I'm prepared for dialogue, for cooperation, for trying to shape a consensus," Ms Glendon told reporters before the delegates met with the pope.

The pope asked another US woman in the delegation, Sheri Rickert, who works with the Vatican at its UN mission, what she thought of the draft document.

"It has many problems," Ms Rickert said.

John Paul replied: "It has many problems but many challenges."

## Charles Gurumukh Sobhraj: Making crime pay

ment, forgery, fraud, and murder.

In Thailand he was known as the "Bikini Killer", after the bodies of several women clad in swimsuits were found floating in the Gulf of Thailand. Arrested in Delhi in 1977, he was subsequently given a seven-year sentence for culpable homicide.

Other incidents of which he likes to boast include an escape from Delhi's maximum security Tihar jail, timed to coincide with his release after serving his homicide sentence.

Sobhraj did not want to be extradited to Thailand where he knew he could face execution, and the jailbreak enabled him to be re-arrested. He had a special position in Tihar. Prisoners called him "Charles Sahib" and officers entertained him in their rooms.

Never short of money, Sobhraj meticulously planned his escape. He drugged six armed guards with a concoction of grapes, sweets and 800 sleeping tablets, and walked to freedom.

women, he is a voracious reader and regards himself as an intellectual and a writer. His preference is for books on law, philosophy, psychology, management - and for crime thrillers.

He reportedly helped Dr Kiran Bedi, former Inspector-General of Prisons, to write a book on jail reforms and is presently writing her biography.

His reading has made him something of an authority on prisoners' rights and he has filed several court petitions about alleged ill-treatment of inmates.

He says he plans to bring his wife Chantal, who runs a porcelain business in Paris, and his two children, to India where he wants to settle down.

First he will have to charm the Indian authorities - who are awaiting a detailed report from Interpol on his activities around the world - into granting him sanctuary - Gemini News

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