

# Aftermath of the Election: Dialogue or Deluge?

by M M Rezaul Karim

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A MIDST great apprehension, fear and mistrust, the parliamentary election of Bangladesh of the 15th February went off, leaving in its trail much death, destruction and seeds for further violence in future. The election is still not over, polls in a large number of centres are yet to be held.

This was a unique election so far held in this country. Neither the ruling party nor the opposition felt happy about it. The BNP was unhappy for its inability to persuade the principal opposition parties to take part in the election. They merely fulfilled their constitutional obligation. The opposition having been unable to secure their demand resorted to obstruct the election, thereby causing violence, bloodshed and destruction. The people, in general, plunged in agony and now remain in serious apprehension for the future.

The turnout of voters has been low, as it was anticipated. The general public in our country have traditionally been shy in exercising their right to franchise. Fear of being targets of violence and of public humiliation acted as further deterrent. There have been allegations of rigging, which the Election Commission were to investigate on receipt of complaints. Cases of excessive casting of votes in many centres were also due to be investigated by the Election Commission, but were later shelved due to lack of legal sanctions.

It appears inevitable that following completion of the election process, a new government will be formed soon. The opposition has already termed the election as illegal and invalid. It does not take

much imagination for anyone to assume that they would also likewise declare the new parliament and the government coming as it does as a sequel to the election, also to be illegal and invalid. The opposition, and for that matter any citizen, has every right to express his or her opinion about the legal complexion of a political entity.

Nevertheless, whether the new parliament and government would have legal validity or not could be decided only by the court of law. This case involves constitutional law and only the Supreme Court as the highest body of the judiciary and guardian of the constitution is competent to pronounce judgement or opinion on it. It would, therefore, be rational to expect the opposition to challenge it in the Court. A favourable ruling by the Court will not only bolster strength of the opposition demand but may also render their movement almost superfluous.

Without prejudicing merit of the case and pre-supposing views of the learned judges, one may assume that on the point of law the BNP would feel quite comfortable, whereas the opposition would rest its case more on political grounds. An unfavourable ruling, on the other hand, will endorse legitimacy of the two institutions, thereby denying legal umbrage and sapping vitality of the opposition movement. The risk involved will, therefore, be taken or not depends upon the strength and

courage of the opposition's conviction of the legitimacy of their demand.

The other courses of action open to the opposition are two — one is violent and the other is non-violent. Unfortunately, the opposition has already announced some programmes of action which cannot be conducive to peace. On the contrary, it portends political turmoil, death, destruction and mammoth economic loss that characterised the long period that ended with the holding of the polls on the 15th instant.

A violent method evidently is a dialogue through which a negotiated settlement between the two sides about the nature and timing of a caretaker government could be arrived at. The agreed formula has to be incorporated as a bill to be passed as an amendment to the constitution in the sixth Parliament. The ancillary issues could perhaps simultaneously be solved, once discussion ensues. Since both the ruling party and the opposition came very close to an agreement during the last stage of their back-stage pre-election parleys, it may not be too much to expect that the small differences existing between the two would be bridged, given goodwill and sincerity of purpose on both sides.

Cynics would no doubt question this hope, in view of the sad experience of the dismal failure of the protracted pre-election negotiations. It is a legitimate question, but the answer is not too far to seek.

The inability of the government to amend the constitution then does no longer exist now that the new Parliament would have requisite strength to do so.

Firstly, this would impart legal and constitutional support for the action to be taken on the formation of a caretaker government. Secondly, suspension of non-violent movement during the parleys would create an atmosphere congenial to the success of such talks. Finally, the people in general and the business community, in particular, are directly against continued violence and loss. They would deeply appreciate the opposition efforts to shun a negative policy in favour of a positive one towards achieving a peaceful settlement.

A violent movement, on the other hand, is expected to breed further violence and to create a vicious cycle with a multiplier effect. As trust begets trust, violence also begets violence. The attitude of both sides will harden and the nation will again go downhill, with the accompanying agony, devastations and shame. In the process, the misery of the people will intensify and the democratic process in the country is likely to receive a fatal blow.

There exist glorious illustrations in history substantiating strength and success of peaceful movements to achieve a desired goal. In our region, the non-cooperation movement initiated by Mahatma Gandhi unleashed the forces

that ultimately led the British to quit their cherished colony of two hundred years and to yield independence to the people of the Indian subcontinent. Only the other day, the decades of pacific movement by Nelson Mandela was crowned with success by dismantling the prolonged scourge of apartheid and winning victory for his people.

We do not even have to go far and much beyond in the past. We have a case in point in our own land itself. The history of the movement for Bangladesh spearheaded by Bangabandhu till his courting of arrest and voluntary loss of freedom on the infamous night of the 25th March of 1971 was nothing other than a glorious history of sustained but peaceful movement for freedom and independence for his people. His famous non-cooperation movement in March, 1971 by making a resounding call for non-violent methods of operation reverberated the whole land, promptly stopped the wheels of administration altogether and rendered the entire nation paralysed. His strategy was well-conceived, highly commendable and most effective.

The alternative methods of arson, destruction and resort to force would have been gladly met and at that time more than matched by the existing regime and become counter-productive, for the initiator.

It is true that the people of Bangladesh had to take up arms ultimately and wage a bloody war of liberation to

reach their desired goal. One must not, however, forget that our valiant sons and daughters were obliged to do so only after the barbaric military crackdown took place on innocent and unarmed people by the Pakistani regime on the 25th March. It was a reaction and answer to brutal killings, torture and rape of unsuspecting and peace-loving people as well as to indiscriminate destruction of private and public property of national heritage. Our reaction then was part of a premeditated and well-calculated action plan. It would at best have been contemplated by a few as a matter of contingency. In any case, one cannot draw a parallel to that in our current political situation. It would be most unfair and a travesty of truth to suggest that the present regime in Bangladesh acted in a manner remotely close to the actions of the Pakistani regime as a sequel to which the present opposition was left with no alternative than to resort to a non-violent method and plan of action.

The people of Bangladesh want peace, prosperity and freedom. Without political stability, no economic progress, the crying need of our poor people, can be achieved. They fervently and humbly appeal to the two leaders following the auspicious Eid, to draw lessons from its spirit of peace, friendship and universal brotherhood so as to soften their stand and agree to work for a negotiated settlement. Is it too much to expect from the daughter of Bangabandhu to shun violence and do what her illustrious father had preached and practised, for the sake of peace, democracy and common good of the people?

## Wonder Maize Fails The Test of Time

Pamphil Kweyuh writes from Kyonyweni, Kenya

THE promotion of a drought-resistant form of maize in arid areas of Kenya and elsewhere in Africa is looking increasingly like an attempt to solve the wrong problem. Despite the introduction of the new 'maize variety', crop failure in the arid lands remains as threatening as ever.

The trouble is that maize, introduced in colonial times, is inherently less drought-resistant than the millet and sorghum it replaced.

Mutua Wa Kyondo, an 80-year-old farmer in Kyonyweni, Machakos, about 120 kilometres southeast of Nairobi, remembers days when drought was not so devastating, because "we had hardy crops such as millet. We also gathered wild fruits and vegetables from the bushes, which were abundant."

But to grow the maize and beans that came with the colonialists, fertilizers, modern farm implements and pesticides were needed. Says retired village teacher Charles Maleli: "We thought we were embracing modernity. Slowly, a form of dependency was created."

Wa Kyondo says: "It did not take long before we realised that we had made mistakes. These crops were not suitable to our land and they failed." The new crops required more water and sucked more nutrients from the soil.

By the time of the famine in 1963, the year of inde-

pendence, the response of Jomo Kenyatta's government was not to fall back on traditional crops but to initiate research into maize.

The new variety, *Katumani*, developed by the Kenya Agriculture Research Institute, was launched in 1971 and touted as an answer to drought and irregular rain, a constant problem for the seven million people in the country's arid and semi-arid areas.

But the warmth of the initial reactions was short-lived. "Drought continued and so did hunger," recalls Wa Kyondo. "No substantive increase in production of maize has been recorded since we were offered *Katumani*."

Several droughts have occurred in the last decade, including the 1991-93 disaster.

The director of the National Dryland Research Institute, David Muthoka, says: "The local area under *Katumani* has reached 33,000 hectares." It is also cultivated in South Africa, Sudan, Ethiopia, Somalia, Uganda, Tanzania, Namibia and Botswana.

Muthoka agrees that *Katumani* has partially replaced traditional crops, but says that most farmers "went for complementarity rather than replacement". He also emphasises that any loss in diversity must be assessed in the light of the benefits of increased harvests. /PANOS

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## Letter from Harvard

### The Importance of Being Nurul Haq

THE other day, while contemplating the snow and the bitter cold and dreaming of Dhaka, I was awakened rudely from my reverie by the ringing of the telephone. It was my old friend, pollster par excellence, campaign advisor to the high and the mighty, and those who aspire to those lofty positions, B J Surevite. I said "B J this is a pleasant surprise, what are you doing in this part of the world? Shouldn't you be in Dhaka, walking the corridors of power, strategising for your political clients? This is after all the 'end game' in more ways than one for the political seasons?"

He said, "O R I am here in Boston to present my paper entitled 'The Importance of Being Nurul Haq' at the annual International Pollster/Campaign advisor convention."

"Why that's great. Come over and have dinner with us."

"I would love to, but things are pretty hectic here. With the US presidential elections coming up in November this year, political advising is hot! hot! hot, and even though I say so myself, I've created quite a stir. Both the Dole (Senator Robert Dole is the main Republican challenger) campaign which is currently in the doldrums-hal ha! — and the Clinton people want me to talk to them. How about coffee at Harvard Square — is that quaint little cafe 'The Greenhouse' still there? — B J and I go back a long way — we were fellow undergraduates at the College in the late seventies."

"B J it's great to see you." "Same to you. O R Boy! this place hasn't changed a bit in twenty years. I think I'll have a double cappuccino and some fries — that's the power combo right now, you get your caffeine and your fat in one go. So how goes it 'el professor' — how is the old alma mater treating you? Are the students just as obnoxious know-it-alls as we were?"

"Things are going well, B

J. But tell me more about this paper of yours, it seems really intriguing."

"Well, it all came out of a focus group I was running for my 'Man', Mr Son of the Soil. We went into one of the villages in his constituency to gauge voter reaction to his recent stand on the political impasse."

"What stand was that B J? I thought your 'Man' as you call him was all sound and fury signifying nothing. It got a lot of media exposure but didn't have any constructive suggestions — it was a masterpiece of rhetoric with no substance. I especially liked the phrase 'power to the people and the people to

tended. The women particularly liked the meeting, it was one of the few occasions that they could go out of the confines of the bari. But no one could remember anything about the meeting except some slogan about 'Power to the people and the people to Power'."

"With this kind of explosive information, I was in a big fix. I could hardly go back to SOS and say, old chum, no one knows you or what you are about. Especially since I had a nice fat consulting contract. Then in a flash of inspiration, almost like an Epiphany, it came to me. I would wipe the slate clean, start from scratch, begin afresh" — B J



REFLECTIONS  
by Dr Omar Rahman

power."

"Well, actually O R, that speech was my doing — quite a nifty little slogan — anyway to get back to the focus group, I had my people ask these villagers what they thought of my candidate Mr Son of the Soil? To our utter dismay and shock, none of them had heard of him, leave alone his stand on the political crisis. This was a monumental crisis — here I am running a national high profile campaign for Son of the Soil (or SOS as I call him affectionately) and no one has even heard of him. I was very puzzled about this because just a month earlier, SOS had a large public meeting with thousands of people from this area attending. So we asked the respondents whether they had attended the meeting and they said yes they had, and that they had a great time. Some kind gentlemen had given each head of the household Taka 5 for each household member who attended."

has an inordinate fondness for the turn of the phrase. He paused dramatically.

I supplied the required cue, "What did you do?"

"Well, I decided we should ask these potential voters some basic questions about politics and the political process. We asked them the following: (i) Who is the Prime Minister of the country? (ii) Who is the major opposition leader of the country? (iii) What is the major crisis facing the country and what do you think should be done about it?"

"The responses were fascinating (given your academic bent, I should point out that this was a non-random selected sample — however, not unlike most of the other polls that are run in Bangladesh).

"The majority of people in the village answered that the Prime Minister of the country was Nurul Haq — who we later found out was the local Union Council Chairman.

Most people said the major opposition leader was Moazzam Miah — who we later found out had narrowly lost the last Union Council Chairmanship election. Finally when asked about the major crisis in the country, most people had no idea what we were talking about. Some respondents thought that we were asking about when a tube-well promised by some politician from Dhaka was going to be in place. As I mentioned earlier, almost no one remembered Mr Son of the Soil specifically, except to note that maybe he was the one who had promised them their tube well which had not yet materialised."

"This is fascinating stuff. Of course this is not exactly hard evidence, but certainly suggests that all is not well. What do you make of it? It seems to suggest the political process has become completely divorced from the people, and that politics has assumed the character of a charade, a farce which unfortunately may yet end in national tragedy. But anyway B J what did you tell your Mah? I'm sure you must have put some spin on it to make it look more appealing — you Spinmeister."

"How well you know me, O R I came up with a brilliant — even though I say so myself — strategy to exploit this phenomenon of unconcern about national politics on part of the rank and file. I said to SOS, my man, you've got to stop being a national politician and become a local politician. What these people care about is their tube-wells, their access to credit, fertilizer subsidies, their health-care clinics — things that make a difference in their lives. They don't give a fig about the great affairs of state, the constitutional crises, foreign policy. YOU'VE GOT TO BECOME NURUL HAQ. Oh! look at the time. I meeting with the Dole people — to run. Catch you later O R."

## Tandur Stove

### A Scientific Breakthrough to Help Save Eco-system

by SMS Joya

WITH the double purpose of saving fuel as well as the environment Bangladesh Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (BCSIR) has developed a new type of tandur stove. In Bangladesh, only 17 per cent of the people use commercial fuel whereas 80 per cent use traditional fuel such as firewood, leaves, cow-dung, rice husk, straw etc. Consequently, larger portion of traditional fuel is being used up every year resulting in deforestation and concentration of toxic gases," says Dr Hasan R Khan, principal scientific officer (PSO) of the Institute of Fuel Research and Development (IFRD).

According to Dr Khan, who has pioneered the project, the country is estimated to hold only 9 per cent of land to be forested where the normal requirement is 25 per cent. On the other hand, the traditional three-stone stove used vastly in this country is very wasteful with its incomplete combustion of biogas fuel that emits toxic combustion-products like CO<sub>2</sub>, CO, and polycyclic organic matters. The last three pollutants are known to cause serious damage to the respiratory system of the user as well as cause cancer, cataract etc.

Working on traditional up-draft stoves at first, Dr Khan observed certain disadvantages that also threaten the environment. Firstly, the traditional stoves were comparatively too deep with the gap between the fuel-bed and utensils leading to low efficiency (5-15 per cent only). Secondly, the vacuum created due to the distance let the flame and heat escape causing a heat-loss of 85-95 per cent. Thirdly, the fuel used did not burn entirely due to inadequate access of oxygen that caused incomplete combustion and formed toxic gases.

In 1983, Dr Khan began his research with the traditional up-draft stoves where he found the efficiency to be only 20 per cent and consumed 90 minutes to cook 1 kg of rice only. Experimentally, he invented an improved stove that assisted in saving time down to 80 minutes but the earthen body cracked in 15 minutes. Then he experimented with a cement structure but this one also cracked up after one year. Another disadvantage of the cement stove was immobility. The manufacturing costs being too high, Tk 718 and Tk 110 respectively, and durability low, these models were rejected.

He then built the body out of tin-drums, for Tk 70 only, which started to corrode after three months. It was again rejected. The next chance was on iron-crust body but with at high cost of Tk 700, again made the stove too expensive for low-income users. Finally, he moulded the body in clay. This had all the advantages: it lasted long, lessened the gap between the stones and grate, reduced the loss of energy; the opening below the grate let in adequate oxygen needed for complete combustion and helped save more than 50 per cent of fuel.

Dr Khan, who has a doctoral degree in petroleum from Romania, was approached by the Eindhoven University of Technology, in the Netherlands for a post-doctorate fellowship to work on clean combustion of



wood and development of a down-draft stove that manifested clean combustion. In the Netherlands, he worked with scientists who designed down-draft stoves and were experts in clean combustion. He helped them reduce carbon monoxide emission at 0.0665 per cent. The fellowship was financed by European Economic Community (EEC).

After his return to Bangladesh, he started working on different types of down-draft stoves that were smokeless (actually the smoke is let out through a chimney), used less fuel (mainly wood) and consumed very little time. Noticing the fact that water is mainly used in cooking, he developed the down-draft double-mouth stove with a chimney and no stones, with the advantages of allowing two dishes to be cooked at the same time. These stoves block the smoke and prevent heat from flowing into the room as in traditional three-stone stoves.

"The fuel is burnt vigorously at the bottom of the first mouth and food is cooked in the direct heat. There is a chimney across the second mouth to provide the necessary draft, which induces air to flow towards the chimney via the second mouth," says Dr Khan.

What happens is that the water is boiled on the first mouth (suppose, for cooking rice) then it is shifted to the next mouth where it continues to simmer and rice is put to get cooked. At the same time, another dish gets cooked on the first mouth. The process saves 50 per cent of fuel, requires less energy and emits less pollutants in the very little time consumed.

He then developed another model with a single mouth and a tin-made oven instead of a second mouth. It can be used in cooking and baking at the same time. He then developed the improved down-draft tandur stove that yields higher efficiency and lower concentration of harmful gases. This improved design is based on the down-draft principle.

"The principle of the operation of the stove in contrast to that of conventional design is that the flow of air is in the same direction as the volatiles and fuel. It has a chimney that provides the necessary draft and induces air to flow downward through the fuel-bed where the fuel burns vigorously

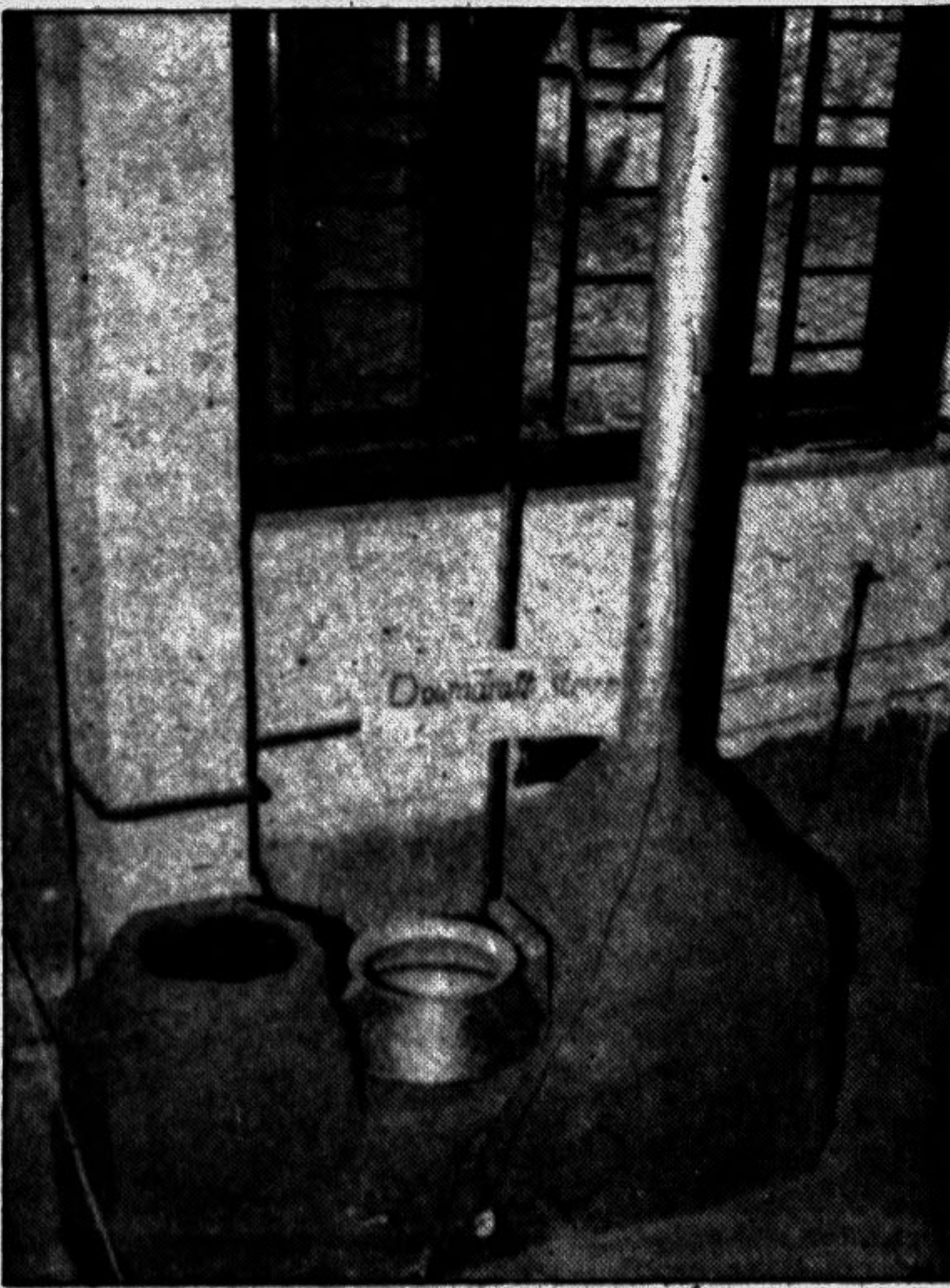
resulting in much higher temperature (950-1100°C) than in conventional burning (550-750°C)," explains Dr Khan.

The PSO is now working for even further development. The principle of down-draft burning for application in cooking devices was introduced by Mr Piet Verhaart of Eindhoven University of Technology. The work was financed by EEC, Brussels, Belgium, for the project called 'The development of improved cookstoves adapted to conditions in Bangladesh.'

In order to make the improved stove available to people, especially in rural areas, the government of Bangladesh commissioned the project (1987-91) for fuel saving. The project trained 3,961 persons to construct, repair and supervise 1,33,841 cookstoves in 33 districts. Apart from this, various governmental, semi-governmental and non-governmental institutions helped create 110 training courses for 3,155 people. The courses were provided by the scientists of IFRD. Now, the trainees are appointed in different areas of the country. Also, the scientists of IFRD are constructing industrial stoves for large establishments and restaurants.

Recently, the government commissioned the Improved Cook-stove Development Project and appointed 35 supervisors in 35 districts. The IFRD, BCSIR, as well as the individual district supervisors, are providing training for the interested groups.

A study by BCSIR shows that in contrast to the traditional stove, the down-draft tandur oven saves 65.7 per cent of fuel and 16.6 per cent of time. In Bangladesh, 8,200 crore pounds of biomass fuel are being used every year. The introduction of down-draft stoves can save 4,100 crore pounds of fuel. The large amount of biomass fuel that is wasted in the country leading to a fuel crisis can be checked through the use of the improved cookstoves. Moreover, environmentally, it makes more sense.



TOM and JERRY

