

No Looking Back

It may not be as powerful or unalterable as the oracle of Delphi but an official and public green signal or 'all systems go' sort of thing from the highest executive office of the country as regards urban amelioration of Dhaka City is extremely important and encouraging. After having put up with a sickening existence plentifully comprising filth, stink, undesirable want and excess of water, mosquito and the twice told tale of government's noncooperation with the mayor, Dhakaites deserve to be delighted over the new Prime Minister's directive to fuse together all the utility bodies for concerted and effective performance.

Barely five days into her assumption of the Prime Minister's office, Sheikh Hasina continued her impressive touch of being switched on to almost all the major challenges before her government when she instructed the Mayor to sit with all the utility bodies and derive some ways for co-ordination and cooperation in order to ensure better service to the city dwellers. The words she used in the meeting with the Dhaka City Corporation commissioners to remind the public representatives of their responsibilities ring true and anybody with a minimum sense of duty would need no more pep-talk to go about the business at hand.

The necessity for bringing the utility bodies under one superstructure is not an entirely new idea. In fact much ink has already been spilt and it would not be too irrelevant in this connection to recall a particular Roundtable organised by The Daily Star which recommended the setting up of such a coordinating body. But the issue has remained untouched for a variety of reasons. The reports of the city mayor being at the loggerheads with the past regime and the simultaneous political turbulence that actually demanded the mayor to utilise his energies in bolstering the party image must have contributed to the fact that the city dwellers are not any better off for the current mayor being halfway through his tenure. Almost nothing has been done so far to improve the urban system. We would expect our city mayor to bury his party identity to work overtime in the remaining part of his tenure for a past that will recommend his future.

Because his will not be a mandate on the performance of the party; it will be a mandate based on the success or the failure of the highest urban manager.

Carnage at Kalapur

The inconceivable has happened. A campful of Ansars, the most peaceable, almost docile, of all uniformed people, on Thursday let loose a reign of terror on Kalapur and adjacent Gazipur villages in Srimangal. Seventy villagers have received wounds, some of them grievous — and the victims include children and women. Houses have been demolished and a bazar has been looted. All residents of these villages, who could stand up and run have left their homes and fled to neighbouring villages.

The question of enquiries and punishing the true culprit must wait and the first job is to close all 183 of them — and this should be done by none other than the DG of Ansar himself rushing to the spot. This in fact we expect to have already been done at the time of writing this. The second job is for the minister in charge to at once go to those villages, restore confidence in them as free citizens of this land and compensate for their wounds and broken houses and shops.

The members of the Ansar camp in Kalapur have evidently not got the message that a new and different set of people do now man the helms of the state and that these are not akin to those that condoned the carnage in Halishahar or the horror in Dinajpur. This new set must act in a jiffy to reach that message to all uniformed people that this haughty band in arms are but the servers of these poor rustics and not their lords. If the new government falter or fail in this, God help them.

Punishment must be preceded by fair trial. As things are now known, some very young boys, not even in their teens, were playing marble on the approach road to the camp. Two motorcycle riders from the camp were annoyed by this and gave the boys a good beating and tried to detain them in the camp. Their parents and their neighbours tried to prevent this. The result: a carnage.

The government must ensure this shall not repeat — this *masani* by armed state organs. And we shall be happy if a precedent is set of someone stepping out to take the responsibility and resign — for example in this case the DG of Ansars. The minister in charge has just been indicted. Otherwise it could be him or her.

Tribute to Courage

Life is a tale told by an idiot full of sound and fury signifying nothing. An overwhelming majority of people would resign to the utterly pessimistic view of life — a spark of the existentialist genius of Shakespeare, when they would read the account of the killing of Veronica Guerian, the thirtythree-year old leading Irish journalist. Unidentified assailants fired shots at her as the journalist, known for her exploits as a crime reporter, was waiting in her car for a change in the colour of the traffic lights. The killers who apparently tailed her sped away in a bike.

Although identity of the killers seemed to be the remotest revelation in Prime Minister John Burton's apprising the Parliament of the gruesome murder, it does not set one on a wild goose chase for motive. Veronica paid the costliest price for incurring the wrath of the agents of underworld exposed recently by the crime reporter's investigative journalism.

From the viewpoint of materialistic consideration Veronica's death is a terrible waste. Dying at thirty three has a romantic tinge about it but it certainly does not have the realistic endorsement of our minds. The sad end of Veronica's life can be a deterrent in the determination of the future investigative journalists. But then every sacrifice for a cause has its own way of giving birth to something that keeps the impetus of duelling with danger for the right reason alive in human mind. Courage reincarnates into new being after every destructive consequence following its encounter with the forces of darkness. That is where Veronica's sacrifices are insured of immortality. We hope Veronica's fate of darkness at noon will go a long way in upholding the cause of commitment to truth of journalists world over.

THE centre for Human Resources Development (CHRD) of Jahangirnagar University recently completed a survey on rural households covering 25 villages across Bangladesh. The villages were drawn from the sample basket that the BIDS once had used for the study on modern technology in 1988 and on the basis of which a number of important articles were produced. In a sense, it can be said that the villages and the households were revisited in 1995. The total number of households covered by the study was 500. The present note attempts to throw few of the findings with a view to projecting the changes that pervades rural areas of Bangladesh. The observations however, should be treated with caution since they are based on preliminary results.

The average annual income of the sample households is estimated at Tk 56,480. From the BIDS survey of 1988, it is observed that the same households' annual average income (at 1995 prices) was Tk 45,155. It thus appears that the sample households' income grew by 3.6 per cent per annum over the period 1988-1995. On the other hand, the per capita income of the sample households is estimated at Tk 8,994 (USD 224) which compares with Tk 7,283 (USD 182) of 1988. The annual growth rate of per capita income stands at 3.4 per cent per annum.

Few observations on the

Some Reflections On Rural Income

Pari passu the decline in the share of agricultural sources, the non-agricultural sources of income cropped up to cover the income gap. The rise in the share of non-agricultural income from 38 per cent in 1988 to 42 per cent in 1995 is a clear pointer to this event.

chemistry and the composition of household level income should be in order. Rural households usually draw income mainly from two sources: agricultural and non-agricultural. It appears that 56 per cent of the total household income originates from agricultural sources. This compares with a share of 62 per cent in 1988. Thus there seems to be, in evidence, a dash in the share of agricultural sources to total income of the households. The apparent wane could be explained by a drop in the share of crop activities from 42 per cent in 1988 to 36 per cent in 1995. Over the years, the crop sector marked a slimmer growth rate of only 1.2 per cent per year.

In the fleet of agricultural sources of income, non-crop activities seem to have crawled to the forefront with a growth rate of four per cent per year. More importantly, homestead-based kitchen gardening tends to depict a hefty growth rate of about 14 per cent per annum — and its share to the household income kitty doubled over the years. It is, however, noticeable that agricultural wages do not seem to account for much of rural household income and its share in total income over the years almost stagnated. For example, agricultural wage income accounts

for only five per cent of the total household income as compared to six per cent in 1988 — depicting a negative growth rate.

The major shift in the structure of rural income, as mentioned above, stands with important ramifications and policy conclusions in terms of the conventional wisdom prevailing in the world of agricultural development. The slash in the share of crop activities and a concomitant rise in the share of non-crop ones, seemingly, reject the notion that the ownership of land is the arbor of rural household income. It appears that, over the years, rural households leaned more towards non-land agricultural practices (e.g. fisheries, livestock and poultry etc) to eke out a living. This would not be surprising given the recent emphasis placed by the government on the development of these activities.

The structure of the household income, as discussed above, seems to point at an

other important development in rural economies over the years. *Pari passu* the decline in the share of agricultural sources, the non-agricultural sources of income cropped up to cover the income gap. The rise in the share of non-agricultural income from 38 per cent in 1988 to 42 per cent in 1995 is a clear pointer to this event. Non-agricultural sources of income grew at an annual average rate of six per cent per

year during the period 1988-1995. Second, there have been, in evidence, some structural changes in the domain of rural household income. Activities which require less of land appear to grow into prominence as sources of income. In a regime of land constraint, such a shift warrants policy options that help their development. Availability of credit and extension facilities, at reasonable prices and in appropriate time, should be the potential pockets to poke into.

The survey results further show that the per capita income in the irrigated households is higher than low or non-irrigated households. The irrigated villages also experienced a rise in per capita income much higher than those with no or low irrigation. This points to the necessity of expanding irrigation facilities to cause a rise in per capita income of the rural households.

Conventional wisdom suggests that the availability of irrigation facilities is likely to worsen income distribution via

the process of land and labour markets. Contrasting views are also prevalent to argue that the same might not happen, rather income inequality might improve with irrigation.

It could be gleaned through the survey results that the top 10 per cent of the households in high irrigated villages earn 28 per cent of the total income compared to 27 per cent in low irrigated villages. The situation is not worse, if not better. Let us turn to other statistics to test the hypothesis. Bottom 40 per cent of the households in high irrigated villages control only three per cent of the total land but tend to fetch 24 per cent of the total income. This compares with five and 19 per cent in low irrigated villages. Again, in terms of non-agricultural income, the bottom 40 per cent in high irrigated villages do better than in low irrigated villages. All these developments occur in the face of some land and labour transfers from land-rich to land poor households in irrigated areas. Availability of irrigation facilities there, appear as a moderator of rural income distribution.

As noted in the beginning, the results so presented are based on a 'quick and dirty' glance at the data base. A clear verdict should await the final processing of data. And it is not only on income that we might say something but also on other aspects of rural households that we should be able to speak in future.

Beneath the Surface

by Abdul Bayes



and a concomitant rise in the share of non-crop ones, seemingly, reject the notion that the ownership of land is the arbor of rural household income. It appears that, over the years, rural households leaned more towards non-land agricultural practices (e.g. fisheries, livestock and poultry etc) to eke out a living. This would not be surprising given the recent emphasis placed by the government on the development of these activities.

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annum in the realm of non-agricultural sources the better performing stars are, for example, trade/business, remittances and services. The share of trade/business and remittances are 16 and six per cent respectively.

The survey data tend to show that only three per cent of the total household income originate from rural processing and manufacturing activities. This might sound surprising in the wake of growing concerns for rural industrialization by successive governments.

By and large, the survey re-

Islamisation of the Hill Tracts: A Case of Majority Chauvinism

by Mohiuddin Ahmad

Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) is a bone of contention between the ethnic minorities and the Bangladesh state. An ugly form of majority chauvinism is evident in the state policy of Bangladesh regarding the CHT. On the other hand, members of the majority community in Bangladesh have so far remained largely passive to this issue

of liquidation has probably reinforced the theory: either fight or perish. It is only the militant Chakmas, the members of the Shanti Bahini, who are involved in a resistance movement against their plight. They are branded as insurgents, miscreants, agent-provocateurs and anti-state elements by our state and the media. But they are respected as freedom fighters in their own community.

The situation of the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) is a bone of contention between the ethnic minorities and the Bangladesh state. An ugly form of majority chauvinism is evident in the state policy of Bangladesh regarding the CHT. On the other hand, members of the majority community in Bangladesh have so far remained largely passive to this issue, though we express a lot of concern about the people of Kashmir, West Bank, Bosnia.

The peace process in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) is yet to exhibit a tangible result. There is a temporary truce. But the armistice is recurrently breached, reportedly by the members of the Shanti Bahini. In an encounter in last May, a member of the law-enforcing agency was killed by

the Shanti Bahini. In another incidence, a group of Shanti Bahini men were arrested. They were reportedly carrying an India-made firearm. There are stories on atrocious activities of the 'outlawed Shanti Bahini'. But little or no reference about the persecution of the tribals is mentioned by our media.

The government of Bangladesh had opted for a military solution to the issue from the beginning. This strategy failed. Apparently there has been a shift in the attitude and endeavours of the government since the late 80s. But the government has not yet been able to convince the ethnic minorities that it has discarded the military option all to one. Bangladesh army is still physically present in that region in a very big way.

There has been some discussion and agreement about stopping of further in-migration of the 'outsiders' to the CHT via a restoration of some traditional rights of the local people which they used to enjoy in good old days. But most of these remained in papers. The estrangement of the ethnic minorities from the 'mainstream population' has not been minimised.

Unfortunately, the majority population of the country is not yet responsive to the injured psyche of the ethnic minorities. This apathy is well manifested in the literature of our major political parties. All of them are committed to 'peaceful solution of the CHT problem', and none of them have elaborated what they mean by it, how they would achieve it and under what terms. Our politicians and the media are particularly apathetic to the issue of autonomy which is the cardinal concern of the ethnic minorities. The ethnic minorities of the CHT want a 'constitutional guarantee' to live in an environment of cultural plurality. They oppose any idea of forcible integration with the so called mainstream. Their position has not been changed from that of 1972 when their leader Manobendra Narayan Larma made an emotional speech in the Constituent Assembly expressing his disappointment: 'We want to live together with the people of Bangladesh. But we want regional autonomy. Our nationality has not been recognized in the draft constitution. We have raised this issue not only now, but also during the period of Ayub and Yahia. If our entity is not recognized in the constitution, then how the backward Chittagong Hill Tracts will move forward with other parts of the country?' (comment on the draft Constitution, 25 October 1972)

His lone voice was completely lost in the Assembly comprising more than four hundred members. Not a single word about the minority ethnic nationalities was mentioned in the Constitution that

came into force on 16 December 1972. It is a pity that a nation after going through two decades of democratic movement and a war of independence succumbed to the vice of majority chauvinism so soon.

The aspirations of the CHT people can be materialised through creating a separate constituency with special status within the framework of the Bangladesh state. One need not raise one's eyebrows and should not smell separatism in their demand. Denial to their wish will only aggravate the situation. The ethnic minorities of the CHT have a feeling, which is not unfounded, that they are being outnumbered by the 'plainlanders' at the behest of the Bangladesh state. The influx of new settlers changed the demographic pattern of the region significantly and turned the social balance upside down. During 1976-84, three settlement schemes were implemented by the Government where thousands of families from some coastal districts were brought to the CHT and were provided with land. This is the only case of induced 'transmigration' in known history of the country. The local people have been alarmed by the growing number of new settlers which has already outnumbered them in some towns and in many rural areas. This has been perceived by the tribals as an aggression on their economy and the way of life.

This has also changed the cultural fabric and social composition of the people in the region. Although the government has apparently abstained from fresh settlements, the immigration has not stopped

completely. The ethnic balance of the region has substantially gone against the locals.

The official 'transmigration project' of the Zia and Ershad administrations on the one hand and gradual transformation of secular Bangladesh state into an Islamic one in form and content on the other, have pushed the locals to a state of further self-estrangement. The present generation of the tribals witnessed a provocative process of Islamisation in their traditional domain which made them vulnerable and alienated. This damage seems to be beyond repair.

According to 1981 population census, the Muslim population in the CHT was 12 per cent. This proportion increased to 19 per cent in 1974, 34 per cent in 1981 and 44 per cent in 1991. Assuming the inter-censal growth rate between 1981 and 1991, the Muslim population in the CHT is likely to be 50 per cent by the turn of the century.

Autonomy is the main concern of the ethnic minorities. So far, our authorities had been content with 'mitigation measures' in the form of reserved seats for the tribals in selected educational institutions and in the civil service and some succour to the returning refugees. These are not enough. A political solution can only take place in the acknowledgement of political rights through constitutional guarantee. The tribals want autonomy, because they feel discriminated. Why are we apathetic to this demand? Didn't we fight for autonomy for more than two decades? If legitimate rights are denied, the affected people resort to 'extra-constitutional' modes, from which it may not be possible to retreat. We are probably heading toward such a disaster.

The author is a researcher and Coordinator of the South Asia People's Commission.

To the Editor...

BTV's sycophancy

Sir, I just couldn't help endorsing your editorial titled 'An Ordeal, a Relief' published on June 27, 1996. It was simply a timely piece of writing in a sense that BTV's role should be cleared at the very outset. Infamous for its role, it previously earned the name — a box of Shahib Bibi Golum or so. I think, this is high time for BTV to behave sense. Why projecting the premier and her Cabinet colleagues for such a long time at the 8 O'clock/10 O'clock news so that it bores the viewers?

This sort of sycophancy and hypocrisy by BTV should be shunned forth with if it at all wants to build a fair image among its audience.

Naina Hassan
Nil Nirjon, Agrabad, Chittagong

Never underestimate...

Sir, We saw in some of the newspapers on June 23, 1996 that immediately after formation of the government, Awami League wished to take some steps which would include constituting the pay commission, giving autonomy to the radio and television, and amending the school textbooks to stop 'distortion' of the history of Bangladesh.

It is this last item on the AL agenda which sounds ominous to many of us. We all know that our country has been divided into two distinct and different camps claiming almost the same size of population on each side, where wide differences of opinion exist on events of history.

The school children with their tender minds should not be subjected to the bickering that the political parties are engaged in or to the ideological fights between our so-called 'packaged intellectuals' and their opposite camp. The children should not be confused and should be presented with only those facts that are acceptable to everybody like the 1971 War of ours with Pakistan without any exaggeration, but in the process, we should not try to paint whole of Pakistan as a nation of villains, or for that matter, whole of India as a nation of angels for all times to come.

I think the BNP should

immediately constitute a shadow cabinet and whosever is the shadow minister for education, his task should be to constantly watch the moves of the motivated section of AL so that no controversial matter is produced before our school children in the name of 'correcting' history.

The AL should also understand that the people of Bangladesh while punishing BNP mainly for the misdeeds of its corrupt ministers have also given it a very sizeable number of votes and a good many more seats in the opposition bench than AL had in 1991 election. AL therefore should not underestimate the strength of BNP and should not be in a hurry to take such steps as will bring out the sensitive items in the open and create a turmoil in the country before it a firm grip on the reins of government.

A M Mahmood
Dhanmandi, Dhaka

Some thoughts on June 12 Election

Sir, I am wondering about the meaning of 'Free and Fair' if in our country these words imply something else. We know that for widespread violence and malpractice election had to be postponed in 27 constituencies for repolling in 122 polling centres in the June 12 JS election. Is it the example of a free and fair election? May be, if not fair, it was free for a particular political party.

We see headlines in newspapers, 'Foreign observers say election had been free and fair.' But how could they give verdict observing only a few of the polling centres and only for a short time? We could have accepted their verdict if they have stayed in every polling centre from the commencing of the vote casting till the votes were counted. But I think we can't blame them, as they must have no idea how tricky our people can become.

At the demand of the then opposition political parties, caretaker government was formed. But from the very start we knew that hope for a fair election is a far cry, as the caretaker government's first step was to include huge number of voters in the voters' list and instead of issuing voters'

registration form to them, they abolished the existing system in which one had to procure voters registration form to cast vote. In addition, those government officials who joined openly in the movement of the then opposition political parties were appointed as returning officers. Is it not preposterous? Then, many senior government officers including police commissioners were struggled from their respective posts prior to the election. What all these indicate to?

In short, Chief Adviser and Chief Election Commissioner had failed miserably in their duty to hold an election which would have been accepted by all. Their partial activities to Awami League is so obvious I had to muse if justice really exists?

Anyway, there is a third party, the Almighty creator, who watches over everything and in his own time will redress if anything happened out of the way.

I am not linked with any political parties in any ways, but as a citizen of Bangladesh I think it is my sacred duty to point out to which to me seems as irregularities.

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Review their cases

Sir, A few days back, I came to know through newspaper that a forum has been formed with more than 100 senior ex-government officials including Secretaries and Ambassadors, who were, according to them, illegally retired from the service. Incidentally I know some senior officers of the forum who are indeed honest and patriotic but were retired from services on not so logical and genuine grounds. Some officers, as my knowledge goes had in fact tried to protect the interest of the country but their action was misevaluated.

So, I would fervently call upon the government to constitute a committee to review their cases and do justice to them. It should be forgotten that our national management system badly needs honest, dedicated and patriotic officers and employees.

M Zahidul Haque
Asstt Prof. BAI, Dhaka

OPINION

AL and BNP: Of Major Political Parties

Anwarul Kabir

First, I would like to congratulate Awami League for securing majority i.e. 146 seats in the parliament and thereby forming the government, but side by side, I would also like to congratulate Bangladesh Nationalist Party for emerging as the strongest opposition in the parliament by obtaining 116 seats and also becoming the first ever single opposition to have such a number.

We, as citizens of Bangladesh should now try not to make any remarks which directly or indirectly hurt the feelings of one party and separate them more from us when we are with a new government looking for better future. Except on few occasions in most of the articles and letters to the editor, accusations have been brought against BNP in many ways and different comments have been made while they were in power for the last five years. It is all very good, but when we are now having a new Government, is such criticism really necessary? My suggestions to those who are writing this kind of comments and evaluating BNP's rule is, please do not forget that the people have enough sense to judge and thereby give their verdict through ballot. Taking into consideration all the misdeeds and bad things that BNP has done in the last five years, still people have allowed them to emerge as the second biggest party and nearly half of the population is backing them up. We should not therefore take them as a low-end party. It is quite visible now that Bangladesh is coming up through a democratic process with two of its major parties as each other's competitor i.e. AL and BNP. BNP has lost in this

election mainly because of two reasons its administrative flaws and not accepting the neutral caretaker government earlier and going for a one-party election. BNP had to pay their price by not coming to the parliament as a ruling party through election in 1996.

I might be dreaming but I, and many others like me would have been very happy if we could see that congratulatory remarks were coming from both the parties (AL and BNP) to each other for getting the highest number of seats in the parliament in their respective areas (Government and Opposition), but will that be true? Did we see any congratulations in 1991 from any of these two deserving parties? Why is it so? When President Bush of USA handed over the power to President Clinton, we all watched on the CNN President Bush's remarks: 'My party will always stand by you whenever you do something good and will always oppose you whenever you do something wrong.' Why can't this be in our country? In reality, we have seen that from day one the opposition rather than collaborating with the government in making fruitful decision for betterment of the country, indulged themselves in trying to find out ways and means to attack the government. Please give one reference where the opposition after 1991 election had supported the government for taking a good decision or for that matter the government had congratulated the opposition for giving a good suggestion? Some say that this will come through democratic process while to others' apprehension this may never

happen with these two parties. Where do we stand then?

We are all talking about the development of the country when, in true sense, we all know that it doesn't take much to enforce a hartal, a strike, or a road blockade (whether the people support it or not) on an issue which the government refuses to agree. One might say that unnecessary hartal or strike will not be accepted now as people are very much alert and conscious. Yes, I do agree, and please look behind, when there was a continuous hartal and strike in the last few months where the whole country came to a standstill, it seemed that the opposition had the upperhand and the whole nation was behind them, but through election where BNP got 116 seats, it is proved that there were actually large number of people who did not support this type of hartal or strike and had to wait for the election to give their verdict. This I think has set a good example for the opposition whenever they are thinking of giving hartal or strike.

Last but not the least, my earnest request to those who are writing in the newspapers and specially to the editors is that please write and set some examples so that the government and the opposition can work together for the development of the country and gradually develop a mentality to praise each other for good decisions so that combinedly they can take this country to its goal and target. Let us not, through our writings, do anything or make such comments as may let these two major parties have more differences while they are in the parliament.