

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 non-cooperation 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 coordination 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 bazaar 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 servants of these poor rustics and not their lords. If the new government falters or fails 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 *masnati* 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 pervade 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 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

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.

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.

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

aluminum in the realm of non-agricultural sources the 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 Ahmmad

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 Kishoreganj, West Bank, Bosnia.

Some of these minority nationalities are alarmingly getting smaller in size. For example, the Hajong and the Koch people are at the edge of extinction. The Garo community has been dwindling fast. They have lost much of their traditional land rights. Their lands are being occupied by the members of the majority community. Ethnic minorities have probably accepted this phenomenon as a fait accompli. A sizable section of them have already migrated to India. This involuntary migration has never been confirmed by our authorities. The silent process

is 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, vis a vis, 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)

But 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 secessionism 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

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To the Editor...

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