

A Major Concern

That agricultural growth of the country is recording a gradual fall is no revelation. But few people knew that more than 60 per cent of the country's cultivable soil has serious deficiency in organic matter contents. Thanks to a seminar organised by the Bangladesh Academy of Agriculture (BAA) at the BARC auditorium, we now know this and about some of the less known causes behind the problem. Although details are not available from the report on the seminar, we come to realise how critical the situation in the agriculture sector is becoming.

Soil fertility is declining fast. Universally acknowledged, this problem however, has not been seriously looked into. We recognise that the country's soil cannot be blamed for the declining fertility. Indiscriminate use of chemical fertiliser and pesticide is mostly to blame. But then the cultivation of same crops over and over again on a plot and inefficient use of inputs too have their share in this negative growth pattern. Now the question is how to improve the quality of agricultural soil. To do that we surely need a scientific management scheme for our agriculture with direct supervision from an agricultural cell manned by agricultural scientists and equipped with a laboratory for advanced agricultural tests.

Fortunately for us we have our agricultural extension programme to disseminate information to the farmers at the field level. Yet another plus point is that our farmers are quick to respond to newer technologies and their application. So what we need is a policy that decides the cropping pattern based on the level of soil nutrition. Moreover, an well-organised mechanism has to be developed for dissemination of information on agriculture and distribution of improved varieties of seeds, fertiliser and other inputs. The agriculture extension programme must coordinate at the field level for better management of soil and crops. Only then we can reverse the process of negative growth in agriculture.

Up Against Polio

In India, Bangladesh, Myanmar and Nepal 90% of the polio-stricken population in South and East Asian regions live and the target of bringing 20 million of Adam's progeny under the vaccination programme as a part of the crusade against the dreaded disease in Bangladesh looked like a real hope-generating occasion. Even if the official earmarking in connection with the observance of the National Immunisation Day (NID), third of its kind yesterday, failed by some thousands or a few hundreds it does not matter much for the vastness of the drive.

All diseases are dangerous and despicable because they pose threat not only to life but also to progress. But in the comparative annals of diseases, polio along with a few beat the rest for the sheer crippling effect it has on human resources of a nation. It is notorious for the legacy of disability it leaves on the victim. Polio is not merely a case of an individual's misfortune. Multiplied in numbers, the segment of a country's population plagued by a crippling disease like polio can mean an enormous burden on its economy. Perhaps it verges on cruelty in the typically sentimental frame of our mind that we dig into the detailed statistics of the relation of economics with disease but if we were to do so, we have would awakened much earlier to the necessity of being up against diseases.

If the sustained and successful implementation of the crusade against polio gets further pushes through occasions like NIDs, meaning date-bound intensification of the Extended Programme for Immunisation (EPI), there is no reason why the curse can not be bidden good-bye truly by the year 2000 with our emaciated economy poised for a new life. Normally deemed as a hotbed of diseases and other mortifying news, Bangladesh is being credited with a welcome deviation — as a leader in the global drive against polio. Health and Family Welfare Ministry needs to remain unfailingly focused on its role in utilising the assistance from the various non-governmental organisations, donors and the UN bodies like UNICEF and WHO to come on top of child mortality or crippling problems.

In for Hassle

A particular advertisement in the press marked with quite a bit of visual prominence has been drawing attention for quite some time now. The National Revenue Board (NRB) has gone in black and white for general information that law enforcers of the customs excise department will soon go into action to check the Value Added Tax receipts of the private automobiles bought after 28-7-96 from local car dealers.

This move, intended to ensure flow into the government coffer, is likely to bring along with it a host of new problems bordering on public nuisance.

Since cars without VAT receipts cannot be expected to roam around with indicators emblematic of their legal inadequacy, it is understood that vigilantes will have to stop automobiles purely on their guesses, a task that appears to be replete with great chaotic prospects even before implementation. Not that these 'stoppages' will add to the city's already intolerable traffic congestion but will also throw car owners in a maelstrom of avoidable hassles amounting to what might be deemed as a violation of civic rights. Besides, who can guarantee that some crooks will not be there to give rise to a new kind of miseries by masquerading as customs or excise people.

On the whole, it does not augur well and looks almost destined to give a new dimension to the problem-ridden urban life. Sentient citizens cannot help questioning the wisdom in a move like this when the option for checking legal abidance should have started with the source — the car dealers or sellers. Records should speak for themselves.

'Dictator's Legacy' Raises Doubts for Democracy

Pakistan's interim government is urgently seeking an IMF loan to tide it over an acute shortage of foreign reserves, down to the equivalent value of three weeks' imports. The situation is exacerbated by political uncertainty following the ousting of Benazir Bhutto, writes Shakil Shaikh from Islamabad.

HERE is widespread scepticism in Pakistan about the President's repeated assurances that elections will be held as promised, following his dismissal of Benazir Bhutto's government. After dissolving the National Assembly, the lower house of the bicameral parliament, President Sardar Farooq Ahmed Khan Leghari announced that elections would be held on 3 February, in accordance with the 90-day constitutional provision.

People's memories of the 11 years of dictatorship they suffered under Zia-ul-Haq last time elections were postponed beyond 90 days are still relatively fresh, pointed out the Islamabad-based English daily newspaper *The Nation*.

"Zia, an army general, promised to hold elections within 90 days when he imposed martial law in 1977 — but did not restore even partial democracy until 1985 and continued in power until his death in an unexplained air crash in 1988.

One reason for suspecting the intentions of President Leghari is that he had often been quoted as saying that he would never resort to Article 58 of the Constitution to dismiss the Benazir Bhutto government since the provision was the legacy of a dictator. But, at the end of the day, he did.

This is not the first time the Article has been used to dissolve the National Assembly and dismiss an elected government before the end of its five-year tenure. In the past, ousted administrations have blamed the military for their removal.

This time, Bhutto was careful not to accuse the army of involvement when she was dismissed on 5 November amid al-

legations of widespread corruption and economic mismanagement. She said: "The army did not interfere in politics during my government."

Troops were mobilised at the time of the Government's removal, but a military spokesman said they had merely been acting on the President's orders to protect sensitive installations.

Bhutto hit out at the President, describing his actions as "undemocratic, uncalled for and unconstitutional", and challenging the Government's dismissal and parliamentary dissolution in the Supreme Court.

She and her Pakistan People's Party (PPP) are more concerned with righting the wrong she believes she has suffered than in demanding a quick poll.

"If we are not restored, there is no way the next elections could be fair and free with Farooq Leghari being the President," she commented. "My party wants a level playing field, which could only be possible if the President resigns. I do not believe the caretaker administration wants to have elections on 3 February."

But the leader of the Pakistan Muslim League, Nawaz Sharif, said the Government's dismissal "reflects the nation's aspirations," adding, "Elections should not be delayed."

Sharif became Prime Minister in 1990 when Bhutto was pushed aside by the military, but he was then defeated by her in the 1993 election. He is hoping that her three years in power, and particularly her harsh, International Monetary Fund-backed economic policies, will ensure her electoral defeat.

An election would be an important test for two other par-

ties. The religion-based Jamaat-e-Islami played a major role in bringing down the Bhutto administration by staging a series of public demonstrations. "Our movement is for a better, prosperous and true Islamic country," says party leader Qazi Hussain Ahmed. But its ability to organise street protests may not translate into votes.

And for former cricket star Imran Khan, chief of the recently formed Tehrik-e-Insaf (Movement for Justice), an election offers the first chance to put his personal popularity to the political test.

In the meantime, the President is calling the shots, and placing his favourites in the caretaker cabinet or as heads of government departments.

Oddly, Leghari was for years a PPP loyalist and stood with Benazir Bhutto in the years after General Zia deposed and executed her father, Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto.

The Nation, however, commented: "The President's action comes as no great surprise. No matter what Ms Bhutto may have to say in self-defence, the charges levelled against her government are prima facie substantial, and she has only herself to blame for getting trapped in a credibility crisis."

Now it is the President's credibility that is on the line. If charges against the ousted PPP leaders are not established within three months, the President's action will appear to have been unjustified. If he then uses that argument to extend the 90-day limit, the sceptics will say: "I told you so."

— GEMINI NEWS
SHAKIL SHAIKH is senior correspondent with *The News* in Islamabad and Rawalpindi.

The Future of Congress

Whether the Congress leaders will be able to maintain their unity and avert further split is today a matter of conjecture. There is, however, little hope of the Congress leaders lifting themselves from internal squabbles and rebuilding the party itself, writes Nikhil Chakravarty from New Delhi

WHAT'S the future that holds for the Congress? On the fiftieth year of India's independence, it is relevant to raise this question, because that was the organisation which provided the platform for all those committed to the nationwide mass struggle that brought about the country's freedom from colonial rule.

That was in 1942, fifty-four years from today. Five years later when the country got partitioned by the British, the Congress came to power in all the provinces (later called States) and also at the centre to head the first government of independent India with Jawaharlal Nehru as the Prime Minister. However, it is worth reminding ourselves that even by the time independence was won, the Congress was losing its all-pervasive character. First the Communist who had entered the Congress were expelled in 1946 for having kept away from the 1942 Quit India struggle. Within a year of independence, the Socialists left the Congress on their own as they felt cramped, that with the leadership heavily loaded on the side of vested interests, it would be difficult to strike out an independent line.

The first breach in the Congress monopoly of power came at the State level in 1957 when in the newly-formed State of Kerala, the Communists won a water-tight majority of two seats. The emergence of this first Communist ruled state in the country turned out to be an eye-sore for the majority in the Congress leadership including Indira Gandhi (who had then first taken over the reins of the Congress presidentialship) though Nehru himself was in a state of distress as he was personally opposed to the dismissal of a government which commanded the majority in the State Assembly. But largely through Indira Gandhi's insistence, the Congress leaders pressed the Central government to dismiss the Kerala ministry by Presidential Order on the plea that it could not settle all the agitations and campaigns unleashed by its opponents.

At the election that followed the President's rule in Kerala, the Congress formed alliances with parties with questionable secular credibility like the Muslim League and the caste organisations and thereby the Communists were isolated and were defeated at the poll. The 1959 poll for the Kerala Assembly was thus in a sense a landmark in the country's parliamentary history as it exposed its readiness of the tallest of Congress leaders to strike alliances with communal and caste parties.

It was significant that even after Nehru's demise in 1964 the Congress did maintain its position and pre-eminence in the country's politics. However, two years later, in 1966, after Indira Gandhi was made the prime minister, that serious differ-

ence arose in approach mainly in relation to the economic perspective.

This phase of the intense infighting in the Congress leadership synchronised with the party's debacle at the State level in the 1967 election in which the Congress lost majority in as many as nine State Assemblies. The 1969 Congress split then created a totally new situation, when in many of the States where Congress lost the election poll, State level coalitions were formed almost at the spur of the moment, composed of most of the opposition parties from the Communists to the Jana Sangh readily taking part along with the split group of the Congress and other splinter groups.

These opportunist coalitions however did not last long. But though the Congress regained its position in most of the State Assemblies, the Congress itself was split from top to bottom with the Indira Congress breaking out with the tabling of populist slogan of *Garibi Hatao*. This Garibi Hatao demagoguery fetched rich dividends for Indira Gandhi and her party in the mid-term Lok Sabha poll that she managed, in which the old wing of the Congress collapsed and the Indira Congress became the biggest beneficiary out of the 1971 Lok Sabha poll. By the time the Bangladesh liberation was achieved in December 1971, Indira Gandhi rode the high horse of popularity which made her and her party bosses dizzy with electoral success.

However, the grim reality caught her up. While complacency overcast the victorious Indira Congress, many disturbances and distrust overtook the country. These broke out in a visible form in Gujarat and Bihar under the leadership of Jayaprakash Narain. Already the Congress government was facing accusations of largescale corruption together with misadministration in three years, the situation turned bleak and by mid-1975, the crisis gripped the Indira Congress, as its leader, Indira Gandhi, herself having to face an election petition against her up-held by the Allahabad High Court.

Overtaken with panic, Indira Gandhi declared Emergency — which lasted for less than two years. It meant the snuffing out of all democratic liberties but it did not at all help the Congress party to consolidate its position though most of its opponents had been in detention under strict police surveillance. Rather when she thought the situation was safe for her, ordered the general election early in 1977, in which the Congress lost heavily with Indira Gandhi herself getting defeated. In that crisis, Indira Gandhi while facing charges of arbitrary rule, found that most of the Congress leaders were not ready to stand by her, and so broke away from the Congress. It was an uphill task for her to rebuild her party under her total control. Side by side, she

used her political skill and cunning to divide and confuse the ruling Janata Party which got split and by consummate political manoeuvring, Indira Gandhi could bring the Congress party out of the crisis and through a hectic campaign she brought the Congress back to victory in 1980 and resumed her tenure as prime minister. However, in this term she could hardly build the party, while at the governmental level, she mismanaged in Punjab to the point of ordering military action against the supreme place of Sikh worship, the Gurudwara in Amritsar under Operation Blue Star. In less than six months, she was assassinated at the hands of two Sikh assassins.

The Congress party could manage to retain its position when after Indira's death, her son Rajiv became the prime minister. His record, with all the hi-fi publicity, was that he and his government could not retain popular support particularly after the exposure of the Bofors gun deal. In 1989, the Congress lost the election, but V P Singh's government that followed, could not last as the BJP withdrew support from it. For a few months, the Congress under Rajiv, backed Chandrasekhar as prime minister but he was without any mass base. Followed the 1991 general election, in which Rajiv himself lost his life while the Congress failed to win the majority in the Lok Sabha. But as the largest party in Parliament, the then President called the Congress to form the government and Narasimha Rao became the prime minister. The widely held view that some of the smaller groups were bribed to join the Congress or support it is now being confirmed by the on-going cases in which some JMM leaders are now being tried for accepting large bribes — a case which has affected the standing of Narasimha Rao himself.

In this year's general election, the Congress has done worse and is forced to reconcile to the position of a support group to prop up the United Front against the BJP. Despite subterranean tension, however, the Congress and the UF have been placed in the same boat, as both have been opposing BJP coming to power at the Centre.

Whether the Congress leaders will be able to maintain their unity and avert further split is today a matter of conjecture. There is however little hope of the Congress leaders lifting themselves from internal squabbles and rebuilding the party itself — a prospect which every Congress leader shudders to face like an ugly ghost in the darkness of night, but they can see no light that can dispel the prospect of further split altogether.

A Greek tragedy with its inexorable finality.

— Mridula
The writer is a well known columnist.

The changing faces of Pakistan

1958 General Ayub Khan seizes power	1969 General Yahya Khan takes over	1971 East Pakistan secedes as Bangladesh. Zulfikar Ali Bhutto takes over
1977 General Zia-ul-Haq seizes power	1988 Zia killed in air crash. Benazir Bhutto wins election	1990 Military ousts Bhutto. Nawaz Sharif becomes Prime Minister
1978 Zulfikar Bhutto hanged	1993 Bhutto wins election	1996 President Leghari dismisses Bhutto. Promises Feb. 1997 election

To the Editor

The Ganges water

Sir, All that glitters is not gold. And, so also, not all the glittering words of some Indian leaders are not promises. After a series of their visit to Dhaka and recently that of Jyoti Basu's — who knows what is next?

After independence of our country, New Delhi kept on withdrawing Ganges water for trial operation of her Farakka Barrage and promised without any agreement that our rightful share of the Ganges water would be made available after the trial.

Once the trial operation of Farakka Barrage proved successful in 1975, New Delhi made rather a breach of trust and started a full-scale operation of Farakka withdrawing maximum quantum of the Ganges water as an upper-riparian country depriving us, a lower riparian country, of our legitimate share of water for the last twenty-one years in violation of Universal Declaration of Human Rights and against all international norms. Don't the Indian leaders know how the common international rivers the Nile, Rhine, Volga, Mississippi, Euphrates, Tigris, Mekong, Indus etc. flow?

What is the best solution to the Ganges water sharing issue? The answer is very easy and simple. What was the flow of the Ganges water in our side of the Padma river at a mean point near Harding Bridge before commissioning of Farakka Barrage? It was some one lakh cusecs of water which is now reduced to less than 8,000 cusecs.

If New Delhi does not agree to release 35,500 cusecs of water to Bangladesh which we need for our survival, let us go to the International Court of Justice, mobilise world opinion and get our genuine share of water.

It is very strange and shocking that so far we had only talks on the Ganges water for last twenty-one years!

OH Kabir
6, Hare Street, Wari, Dhaka-1203

Sports news on BTV

Sir, The sports news in BTV's eight and ten o'clock news broadcast had never been up to the mark. As for the satellite TV channels like BBC and CNN we have seen newscasters, specialised in sportscasting, reading the sports news. Since BTV has no such facilities its newscasters very often screw up while reading the same.

The Bangla newscasters, specially the female ones, don't understand the games like cricket and tennis very well. As a result, the names of the players, which are on everybody's lips, turn out to be very difficult for them. When recently the results of three or four cricket matches held at different parts of the world dominated the sports news the newscasters seemed to be gasping for breath. A person who is really interested in cricket would have done otherwise — read them with a lot of zeal.

More often than not, the results of the Premier and First Division football league matches are not provided with any footage whereas some insignificant sports events of the armed forces get wide coverage. The other day when three Test matches were simultaneously in progress at different venues of the world, BTV took the most short-cut way possible when it came to briefing the viewers about them.

For example, BTV just mentioned who won against whom, the scores and the margin of win about the second Test match between Pakistan and New Zealand. It was not before the next day when we found in the newspaper that Pakistan had got another pace in Md Zahid. BTV didn't bother to mention anything about his record-setting 11-wicket feat in his debut.

Over the years BTV has lost its credibility to the politically conscious citizens. Now it's disappoining the sports buffs as well. The situation, no doubt, calls for a change.

Ahmed Zamil
Level 1, Term 1,
Dept. of CE
BUET, Dhaka

How to arouse that sentiment again?

Sir, As our Victory Day (Dec 16) nears, I feel more and more depressed in the thought that we, the young generation, are not getting the actual rhythm, emotion and the spirit of our great Liberation War. There's a long gap, we have diverged a lot. In my mid-twenties, I hardly find any of my friends talking or thinking about our struggle in 1971. Why, why do we tend to forget our 'not these days?' There's a number of answers.

We are misled. We are really misled by our ancestors. How unfortunate we are! Our parents, superiors and leaders have left us with a hazy picture of that glorious time of our history. The facts and events of '71 are being presented to us with intentional changes over time. Who to believe? Which to believe? How can the mortals be so mean to demolish each other's roles and contributions overnight? What a ridiculous and relentless effort to become the 'hero' of the history! I wonder and become very depressed sometimes.

I observe most of us do not discuss about '71, because we lack historical knowledge and eventually, it turns out to be a political debate. But it shouldn't be. Our holy struggle for freedom was not a petty thing to be debated after 25 years. So, we must have an access to our real history and it's possible through lots of reading. However, these days, we do not like to read much even. Let me suggest at least one 'Ekkator Din-gulee' by late Jahanara Imam.

So, the only option left other than reading, is acquisition of facts from our valiant freedom fighters, many of whom are now frontline politicians of the country. I, therefore, request our brave and revered freedom fighters-turned-politicians to reveal the truth, being oblivious of their mere party identity, so that we can really celebrate the Silver Jubilee of our Independence. Let's have that sentiment right once again.

Ibnay Saed
Narayanganj

Begum Rokeya — Pioneer of Women's Emancipation

by Prof Roushan Ara Hoque

NINTH December, '96 marks the 64th death anniversary of Begum Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain, the great pioneer of women's emancipation, who as a humanist writer and social reformer had shown a new philosophy of life to the millions of secluded and oppressed women of the society in the first quarter of the 20th century. She gave them a clarion call to come out of confinement and improve their lot by themselves.

Begum Rokeya was revolutionary in her ideas and far advanced of her time. She was influenced by the women's emancipation movements started in the West during the later part of the 18th century. Rokeya claimed equality in status of men and women as was done by Mary Wolstone Croft in her book, 'Vindication of the Rights of Women', by Virginia Wolf in her book 'A Room of One's Own'. With them Rokeya also challenged the reasoning and authority of the men. She said that wives have been born out of the ribs of their husbands and for that they should be subservient to them. With firm conviction Rokeya had also challenged the origin of the strictures as propagated by the fanatics as of being God-sent. She called upon women not to abide by those man-made strictures which were made only to perpetuate men's domination over women. She further said that such fanatics do not give those rights to women as have been granted by Islam to them. Thus Rokeya had rebelled against the existing rules of the society.

Rokeya claimed equal rights both for male and female children as mother give them equal space and time in the womb and equal milk after their birth. It is only the society that creates unequal position for the women. Rokeya claimed that women were rather the best half of the God's creation as they are the mothers of the creation. Therefore, Rokeya rebelled against the man-made rules of the society and appealed to all women that they are to improve their own lot by themselves and that Allah helps those who help themselves. Her progressive ideas

convinced the then progressive thinkers and they also realised the urgency of educating women for the balanced development and progress of the whole society, which is, as argued by Rokeya, just like a cart having two wheels both of which are to be equally strong for the progress of the cart. So she had appealed to the women to emancipate themselves from the bondage of seclusion and virtual slavery and to educate themselves to achieve strength and economic freedom to be equal to their male-counterparts of the society.



Rokeya had strongly criticised women for their fascination for ornaments and luxury as, according to her, these are nothing but badges of slavery by accepting which from men and by decorating themselves with those shackles women place themselves under life-long slavery. Therefore, she appealed to all the mothers to educate their daughters with the money they would spend for giving gold ornaments to them. She argued that ornaments of knowledge would be far more useful for them than those of gold.

Rokeya's ideas were almost identical to the Three Forward Looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women which are Equality, Development and Peace as declared from the Platform of Action of the recent World Conferences of Women. The three aims of Rokeya's movement were: 1) To give equal rights to women both at home and in the society; 2) To improve their condition by giving proper education and mak-

ing them economically self-sufficient; 3) to help them develop as ideal mothers, sisters and housewives and to ensure peace at home.

She had dedicated her whole life to achieve these three goals for women. She had trained many destitute girls in the Anjuman-e-Khawatin-e-Islam and had given them a new lease of life. In her Narai Disha she had rehabilitated many socially rejected girls. To impart ideal education to the girls she established a school known as Rokeya Sakhawat Memorial Girls' School at Calcutta, with the money left by her husband. That school has ultimately been developed into an ideal institute inspiring its students with the messages of women's emancipation as delivered by Rokeya. Many illustrious ladies of the present and past generations were inspired by her motto who as student of that school and as dedicated workers by themselves delivered the messages of Rokeya to every nook and corner of the country. All the women's organisations are also striving to achieve the goals as laid down by Rokeya and envisaged at the beginning of the present century.

Therefore, Begum Rokeya deserving the right of being called the Great Pioneer of Women's Emancipation may also deserve that her contribution should be recognised not only by the women section of the society but also by the male section as well as government. As a mark of gratitude to her one 'Rokeya Award' has been introduced since last year with Begum Shamsun Nahar Mahmood being the first recipient. This year the Award will be given to two more illustrious ladies Begum Sufila Kamal and Dr. Nilima Ibrahim who have also left their foot marks in the long history of women's emancipation. We, all the inspired followers of Begum Rokeya, further request the government to declare the 9th of December as Rokeya Day, and to include Rokeya's writings in the school syllabus of all classes. Rokeya-chairs should also be established in all the universities. These will be the proper tribute paid to Rokeya.