

Welcome Regrets

The traditional role for governments is to deny that its police or its supporters ever attack opposition rallies. Government press notes have long earned notoriety in the matter of changing day into night and claiming that a helpless police force had to act to save their own lives. The Home Minister on Thursday admitted straightforwardly that people travelling to Begum Khaleda Zia's meeting were attacked at three places. These happened away from the vicinity of the meeting and in spite of arrangements made beforehand to thwart such and the minister said unambiguously that he was sorry for all that. He said he had asked the IGP to identify and nab the culprits who would be given exemplary punishment. Minister Islam's regret and his assurance bodes well for the Jatiya Sangsad's effectiveness as a sovereign body in looking after and promoting a peaceable society. More importantly, this would be a positive step towards dissipating the atmosphere of animosity now developing between the government and the opposition.

The regret and the assurance, although in a way brave and ground-breaking, go but half the way. The nation is now interested in seeing when the culprits are apprehended and what punishment they get. The minister's great performance remains to be consummated through action. Government conduct must be guided by truth and justice, sincerity and fairplay rather than by petty-minded stratagems. Being morally right always pays in the end and shortsighted guides paying off readily consigns a party to doom and the nation to meaning less and avoidable spells of degeneration.

The government's regrets in the JS sets a precedent daring subsequent governments to better this. The government should, of course, protect itself from making a habit of committing a faux pas and then apologising for it.

Commendable

The three-day fifth South Asia Dialogue on Cultural Cooperation seeking stronger cultural ties among the countries of this zone concluded last Thursday. Amid suggestions not so new nevertheless, perennially relevant and some really new ones like the composition of a literature anthology and its translation of it into one another's language, the meet that saw the assembly of some renowned performers and scholars from various disciplines ended only to leave behind an essential deposit of both inspiration and direction from which similar future efforts can gain both in experience and excellence.

More than the recommendations that beg some for implementation in either distant or near future, it is the initiative of organising such a grand arrangement which deserves an immediate evaluation and appreciation. Indeed, Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD), a private institution committed to the cause of cerebral input into the socio-economic progress of the nations, particularly those of South Asia, has done a marvellous job in actualising this brain-storming session of experts. The successful holding of such a serious yet mirthful congregation should blaze the trail for similar effort by other private sector organisations.

CPD's laudable initiative which has an idealistic cue for other private sector organisations who despite their strength both in terms of finance and logistics are yet to come out of the cocoon of philistine commercialism could not have come at a better time. With winds of wholesome change marked by sincere awakening to the necessity of one another's cooperation blowing across the region in every field ranging from politics to economics, a maieutic intellectual gathering was what the doctor ordered. The time is propitious for waking up from the nightmares of history and draw the necessary nutrients from all possible sources for a strong cultural backbone. Constant intellectual nourishment is what we need to fight the true and not the propagandised threats to our cultural identity and individuality. As a nation, as a region we are at the cultural cross-roads. Misinterpretation and propaganda emanating from narrow political objective have obscured the understanding and scope of our cultural cooperation. We need to follow up such occasions of intellectual input to maintain a steady supply of ideas.

Element, the Mar-sport

In the end it was element which took the cake. Better still, contributed to the doughing of spectators' cake. Cricket buffs' interest around the SAARC cricket tourney survived a whole gamut of negative influences ranging from the dunking of patriotic zeal and hope due to a thoroughly uninspiring performance by the Bangladesh national team to weather intervention only to be pipped to the post. With India placed on 124 for five in 31 overs in their quest for a victory target of 200 from 44 overs against arch-rivals Pakistan, the match between the second selections of the two countries was poised fascinatingly enough for a fitting finale when the grey and grim welkin began weeping copiously. It was a shame for such a promising encounter to be forced to such a nostalgic statistical conclusion. It was a day of great cricketing potential that was born in fog and died in rain.

Actually, the cloud of elemental certainty had been hanging right from the beginning. A match had to be called off and points shared in the match between India and Sri Lanka, a fact that though sounding like a left-handed compliment, did contribute to the suspense of the meet.

In the end, it all rolled out in line with the form book with favourites Pakistan and holders India locking horns in the final. Pakistan won the SAARC tourney for the first time and a bunch of young Indian cricketers showed their promise besides landing the runners' up trophy. And Sri Lanka A true to their optimistic prediction did improve their SAARC record by registering maiden win. What Bangladesh, the hosts have got? A hat-trick of losses where at least one victory was very sane and logical in terms of popular expectation. We are old enough to stop living at peace with memories of unabated reversals. A new start with new people is what we seem to need now.

Rice Outlook : Chewy Challenges

The challenges that rice growing countries tend to face are two pronged. On the one hand there remains the dire need of raising land productivity through the uses of modern agricultural inputs and, on the other, there are growing problems related to environment arising from the non-optimal uses of these inputs.

Despite growing access of non-rice items in the food basket of consumers in many countries over the years, rice still continues to stay as a staple food to nearly one-half of the world's population. Most of the rice consumers hail from this continent of Asia where many of the people still groan under extreme poverty and malnutrition. The global food projection as done by the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) forecast that the demand for cereal grains will increase by 72 per cent and that of rice by nearly 60 per cent over 1990-2020 period. The additional demand for cereals and rice are likely to be generated by the projected hefty increase in population by another 2.13 billion people over next three decades compared to an increase of 2.12 billion over the previous three decades. Available evidence at hand tend to show that the demand for rice in Bangladesh is also likely to go up by 63 per cent over the same period of time. The figures thus, appear to bring to the fore concerns in place of complacency over food grain production all over the world, especially in Bangladesh.

The above mentioned "pessimistic" picture on foodgrain demand alarming supply balance came from George Rothchild, the Director General of the International Rice Research Institute (IRRI) while he was speaking on IRRI's vision and strategic roles at a recently held seminar in Dhaka. As we are aware, IRRI has been playing a pivotal role in the realm of agricultural research and a principal actor in the augmentation of rice research in many countries including Bangladesh. According to the DG of IRRI, "IRRI played a small role... by mobilizing interna-

tional support for developing rice research capacity in Bangladesh and by training a large number of scientists. Over 120 Bangladeshi scientists have received Ph.D or M.Sc degree for thesis research and under supervision of IRRI scientists." The investment that the GoB and its development partners made in rice research has given a high pay off. It is estimated that investment in research has contributed to a cost saving in rice production of US \$300 million and saved foreign exchange

past, irrigation had been the main instrument in raising land productivity but that possibility is, allegedly, threatened by over exploitation of ground water. Bangladesh is thus seemingly poised for the crossroads in agricultural growth in the near future. "Rice research must show ways to farmers to save water in rice cultivation so that additional rice-land could be served with existing irrigation infrastructure. These are opportunities for increasing production in rain-fed ecosystems.

Beneath the Surface

by Abdul Bayes

"As fertilizer and labour are used very intensively, further increase in rice yield will most likely be based on new biological technologies; greater understanding of the interrelationships among soil, water and biotic resources; and improved farm-level management of natural resources and material inputs. The scientific breakthroughs of advanced research laboratories, international research centres and national research systems as well as the management techniques that will be needed to make use of these breakthroughs will have to be fine-tuned to suit local conditions."

The chewy challenges that rice growing countries tend to face are two pronged. On the one hand there remains the dire need of raising land productivity through the uses of modern agricultural inputs and, on the other, there are growing problems related to environment arising from the non-optimal uses of these inputs. The latter problem was not so much emphasised in the earlier phase of green revolution but it seemingly assumes greater importance with the passage of time. Thus an environment-friendly rice system has to be evolved soon. Rice growing countries, including Bangladesh, need to recast their development strategy in agriculture in the light of the emerging imperatives. And the sooner the thrust follows,

of US\$350 million per year. The benefits have been a hefty, 19 times the cost of investment."

But, argued Rothchild, Bangladesh is yet to race fast to maintain a demand-supply balance in foodgrain production on the eve of the necessity to feed an extra 60 million people over 1995-2025 period. Close at heel is the disconcerting trend that the growth rate of non-rice food items such as pulses and oilseeds — important sources of nutrition for the poor — is lagging behind that of the population growth rate. With rapid urbanization and speedy economic growth in the offing, the demand for non-rice food items will accelerate at a much faster rate than rice. To allow some space for the growth of these crops, rice has to yield some corridors to these crops by releasing land erstwhile occupied by rice (about two-thirds of cultivated land) and that could only be possible if land productivity is enhanced fast. In the

Suitable technologies are yet to be developed for the 30 per cent rice land that are flooded regularly at a depth of over 90 cm. Scientists need to develop technologies to reduce the cost of fertilizer, water and pesticides for the bottom 50 per cent of the rural population who find it difficult to mobilize these resources for obtaining full benefits from modern rice varieties. These and many other pressing issues demand continued attention of rice scientists."

From what has been delivered by George Rothchild it appears that the complacency in foodgrain self-sufficiency with which we have been marching forward so long does not seem to be in tune with the ensuing population growth and foodgrain production possibility. In fact, the pressure is likely to mount in the near future. Nor the frightening future leaves any room for a withdrawal of government increased budgetary allocation from agricultural

Is Deve Gowda Going to Fall?

by A N Dar

Deve Gowda has been vigorously holding his coalition together. In regard to the Congress he is playing a diplomatic game. His initial wish was to have someone in the Congress (Pawar was a favourite) with whom he could discuss policy. This could have created another centre of power in the Congress, apart from Sitaram Kesri.

Most politicians, bureaucrats and professionals wonder whether the current political activity is meant to remove the Deve Gowda ministry and find another outfit to replace the present coalition. Many presume that the Congress, which is supporting the Deve Gowda ministry, would itself want to shoulder the responsibility.

What good is it for it to let the Gowda government continue if it is not going to get anything out of it? This is the thinking in some circles.

The Congress has several choices before it. It could, like the BJP, be in total opposition and in the process create a strong position for itself for the next elections. The main purpose why the coalition was formed and why the Congress supported it was to keep the BJP out of power. But is the price of not letting the BJP form a government enough for the Congress to let others enjoy the exercise of power? The choice for it is to let the Deve Gowda ministry fall by withdrawing its support.

The debate has sharpened after the ouster of P V Narasimha Rao. When Narasimha Rao was there he had worked out a compromise with H D Deve Gowda to let him carry on so long as his coalition continued to function. This had the merit for Narasimha Rao of letting him also continue at the helm of the Congress and also fight the cases against him with a somewhat sympathetic government in the saddle.

The Congress has several choices before it. It could, like the BJP, be in total opposition and in the process create a strong position for itself for the next elections. The main purpose why the coalition was formed and why the Congress supported it was to keep the BJP out of power. But is the price of not letting the BJP form a government enough for the Congress to let others enjoy the exercise of power? The choice for it is to let the Deve Gowda ministry fall by withdrawing its support.

Only a few, half-hearted, indications are available. The CPM leader, Jyoti Basu's view that his party should have joined the government has given the firm inkling that if that party joined the coalition government, Jyoti Basu would become the Prime Minister. This points to the surmise that the tallest CPM leader could some day want a change in the government and install himself as the Prime Minister.

This applescart was upset when the pressure in the Congress mounted on Narasimha Rao to vacate the leadership. At first it was thought that Sitaram Kesri would not cause too much disturbance to Rao. But this proved wrong. There are two suppositions: either Sitaram Kesri wanted to wipe out Rao's influence and impose himself firmly as the leader of the Congress or he (Kesri) came to the conclusion that history had given him an opportunity to re-establish the Congress as a strong party to wield power again and he must not shirk

this responsibility. The two suppositions are closely interlinked.

Both lead to the conclusion that the Congress must make a bid for power. To make this happen it is necessary that the Deve Gowda ministry must go. It can go only if the United Front coalition breaks up and the Congress withdraws support to the government. This is a prerequisite for the Congress, or any other party, to come to power. If the present coalition breaks up, two things can happen: the Lok Sabha will be dissolved and a fresh election held or a new coalition will come into being to form another government. No one is at present sure which of the two alternatives can come about if the present coalition breaks up. That is why all analysis at present is hypothetical.

The main question is whether the present coalition will break up. The unanswered reply to this question is intriguing the political circles these days. Every political party's meeting, every public demonstration and every iftar dinner has had this question hanging on it. There is no answer yet.

Only a few, half-hearted, indications are available. The CPM leader, Jyoti Basu's view that his party should have joined the government has given the firm inkling that if that party joined the coalition government, Jyoti Basu would become the Prime Minister. This points to the surmise that the tallest CPM leader could some day want a change in the government and install himself as the Prime Minister.

This applescart was upset when the pressure in the Congress mounted on Narasimha Rao to vacate the leadership. At first it was thought that Sitaram Kesri would not cause too much disturbance to Rao. But this proved wrong. There are two suppositions: either Sitaram Kesri wanted to wipe out Rao's influence and impose himself firmly as the leader of the Congress or he (Kesri) came to the conclusion that history had given him an opportunity to re-establish the Congress as a strong party to wield power again and he must not shirk

the black mark lost its importance when Narasimha Rao, who also became an accused, too wanted to continue as the leader. At the same time, Kesri has also been accused of dealing harshly with the Rao faction, with what he has done to G S Brar and others.

Deve Gowda has been vigorously holding his coalition together. In regard to the Congress he is playing a diplomatic game. His initial wish was to have someone in the Congress (Pawar was a favourite) with whom he could discuss policy. This could have created another centre of power in the Congress, apart from Sitaram Kesri.

Both lead to the conclusion that the Congress must make a bid for power. To make this happen it is necessary that the Deve Gowda ministry must go. It can go only if the United Front coalition breaks up and the Congress withdraws support to the government. This is a prerequisite for the Congress, or any other party, to come to power. If the present coalition breaks up, two things can happen: the Lok Sabha will be dissolved and a fresh election held or a new coalition will come into being to form another government. No one is at present sure which of the two alternatives can come about if the present coalition breaks up. That is why all analysis at present is hypothetical.

Within the Congress there is no single straight path to power. Even if the present coalition falls and a new grouping comes into being, could it, for instance, be that Kesri would be elected and not Pawar? Congress leaders are also warning themselves that to break the present coalition by weaning those who are in power can be an uncertain game to play.

Many think that the farmer will go on tilling the land until a storm breaks open. When the storms come, say most weather pundits, they come not without warning but they can be fast and swift. Some farmers ride through them: some don't. Much depends on where one stands, from which direction the winds come and whether they have a focal point or no. At present all that is happening is that every humble farmer is watching the sky.

We would also advise Indian leaders to improve, develop and expand the existing road and railway links between West Bengal and its seven north-eastern states and to build a new sea port in West Bengal declaring the ageing and useless Calcutta port as closed with a view of finding a permanent and smooth solution to meet India's future requirements.

We would also advise Indian leaders to improve, develop and expand the existing road and railway links between West Bengal and its seven north-eastern states and to build a new sea port in West Bengal declaring the ageing and useless Calcutta port as closed with a view of finding a permanent and smooth solution to meet India's future requirements.

'Shameful incident on 22nd January'

Sir, Thanks to Prof Monawar Uddin Ahmed for his free opinion about a campus event (which took place on 22 January in front of the Arts Building). A third-year honours stu-

Dhaka Day by Day

A New Textile Trend

by Raffat Binte Rashid



NO WE DON'T HAVE THE XXL SIZE YET... YOU CAN, INSTEAD, HAVE TWO SAREES STITCHED TOGETHER TO FIT YOUR SIZE!

ladies an impressive second choice from the usual Indian cotton sarees or Tangail tats and at such a low price — were an instant hit with the consumers.

The textile industry in our country could never satisfy its middle class clients, people who most certainly have rich taste but poor purse. A fact that reflects its rating even in the share market, where textile scripts are hardly anybody's choice. But this shouldn't have been the case, because success experienced by our garments industry should have had positive influence in our very own local mills and textile industries.

Malaa saree, an enterprising endeavour of mid seventies, maintained a stagnant position promoting saree to and for the lower and lower middle class people only. Later following its trend we see similar ventures like Jhony print saree, Bourne print saree, Rocky print, Pakkeezza etc. catering to the same section of people. These sarees though were publicised in TV ads as favourite wears of actresses, however didn't help attract middle class clients.

However we are undergoing a slow but steady revolution as far as 'deshi' cotton clothes are involved. Grameen check, Aarong check, Bexi fabrics, Pride textile, perfect textile all add colour and variation to our markets and their reasonable prices only draw people with taste but tight pocket.

OPINION

Prejudice-free Politics

Dr A K A Aziz

Pakistan's former prime minister Benazir Bhutto's latest statement about the outcome of last general election held on the 3rd February 1997, vis-a-vis her party's role when Nawaz Sharif takes office as the prime minister is a complete departure from personal animosity and hatred which flagged politics of Pakistan since its creation. Her's is a sensible utterance from an overwhelmingly defeated leader just out of office. She has not only expressed her happiness over the sweeping victory of her bitter rival Mian Nawaz Sharif, but also sees a positive turn for the country in the event he fulfils the commitment he made on the eve of the election.

On the contrary, if we look at Bangladesh's political activities, particularly the role of party in power and the opposition BNP, we note to our dismay that leader of the opposition Begum Khaleda Zia could not as yet accept her defeat in grace in the last general election. She did not show respect to the world opinion as was shown by the opposition after 1991 election. She made mockery of democracy in February 1996 election. Yet she has been claiming and maintaining that victory of her party has been snatched away from the Awami League in collaboration with the Chief Advisor of Caretaker Government and Chief Election Commissioner who were appointed with her full consent. Now the opposition party is bent on undoing the government by fair means or foul.

Mentionable here that Benazir Bhutto's statement features her political maturity while those of our politicians, particularly in the opposition, speak volumes about immaturity in politics.

Now the fact is, as the leader of a strong opposition, Begum Zia ranks second to the nation's political leaders. The nation is facing one of the most critical situations as regards its sovereignty. In the Chittagong Hill Tracts, for example, no unilateral solution should be made that compromises the national interest.

The writer is Chairman of the Bangladesh Krishak Somaj.

This is very funny. How can our generation enjoy these episodes? In fact, the story is about emotional abduction of another's wife. This may be interesting, but it's unethical.

I don't know why we people are still curious about this cheap story.

I think it should stop. Mostafa Sohel, Banani, Dhaka 1217.

Congrats!

Sir, Congratulations on publishing the news item 'Declare global war against poverty'. It will be a healthy and refreshing change to find the poor (street) children called 'tokais' inside a school classroom seeking normal education instead of functioning as waste collectors. Dr Rumi Tabrez Hyder, 222/Ru, Malibagh, Dhaka-1217.