

## Treat DMCH

Things are falling apart at the Dhaka Medical College Hospital. Service as an idea went out of the window there long ago. Now its equipment are going out, thanks to 'invaders' who are running a pillaging business quietly and uninterruptedly in connivance with some of the lower tier staff of the hospital. Nothing is spared by them. Even ordinary stethoscope is on the 'vanishing list'. Nobody challenges them because the 'invaders' and their associates are dangerous people and police would not bother about the complaints.

It is true over the years a symbiotic relationship has grown between police and the criminals. But the real reason why police turns a deaf ear to complaints against criminality and corruption in a place like DMCH is probably because it never got the 'message' from the top to concentrate on cases like these. When asked by our correspondent about police inaction, the official concerned of the law enforcing agency came up with an answer that summed up the whole situation. "We have more priority jobs than detaining invaders." It is true and we cannot quite blame him. He is only a product of a culture. A culture that has taught him to place these cases down his priority list. But public institutions particularly those in the health sector cannot suffer perennially because of this 'priority' problem. We urge the Home Minister to take a personal initiative in this matter. We believe an effective swoop on the den of these invaders will take care of a few evils in an around that area. The colonies of lower tier government employees around DMCH, BUET and Dhaka University have virtually turned into criminals' 'barracks'. Once these places regain their pure residential character, law and order will improve.

But mere tightening of law and order won't do. Efficient administration is what our dilapidated health care sector misses most. The government attitude in this respect is baffling. Despite repeated exposes of rampant corruption, insensible unionism and CBA tyranny in all the state-run medical facilities, it has preferred to turn a blind eye. We had suggested earlier in this column that the government should form a task force to probe into the evils devitalising the government hospitals. Furthermore, we counsel it to think about banning all sorts of union activities in the medical facilities.

## New But Not Wholesome

In a span of only five years sixteen universities came into being in this country where it took almost eighty years to have ten. If the government instituted ten can be cited as models of laggardly development, the private sixteen can be said to have had a mushroom growth. The astounding or impressive appearance — more than three every year — of the private ones somehow rings a dubious note to people used to believing universities to be truly very lofty institutions in perfect tune with other such establishments of the world, all of dizzy intellectual height and encompassing the universe in both its physical connotation and its content of ideas and cultures.

There is indeed hardly a higher point reached by all civilisation than a university. Suddenly we awake to the fact that we have sixteen such new highest points of civilisation here in Dhaka and Chittagong and Comilla, housed in rented premises and manned, in some cases, by part-time teachers rushing about making rounds of different campuses.

The University Grants Commission has come to find many serious failings of these universities. It is strange to believe a university enrolling students without fulfilling all the statutory necessities.

This is education business as usual. We believe there are exceptions here too, trying sincerely to rise to the high billing they have forced on themselves. But, to believe UGC and also our horse sense, most have so far been ventures not well-thought-out. The UGC findings leaves one no option to think otherwise.

The question is why did the government feel so generous with this novel enterprise? A case of infatuation it seems in the explicable absence of any arrangement of monitoring or control with regard to academic standards and financial probity. There is here a very clear case of striking out the approvals of those that haven't yet fulfilled the first minimums. Those that stay after that must answer to demands of academic excellence to be able to cut out a deserved niche. To that end they should be subjected to monitoring and UGC discipline. And, please, no more of these fledglings now. Keep these 16 under strict observation for, say, five years and act according to assessments then made.

Universities and libraries grow and not just burst out each of God's days.

## Indian EC's Precaution

The Indian Election Commission has made more of a thought provoking rather than a conclusive pre-poll announcement of seemingly any exhaustive consequence. It has put a ban not on conducting opinion surveys as such but on publishing the results thereof, from February 14 until February 28 when the crucial mid-term election will have been practically over.

In other words, going by the AP news item that flashed the EC's orders for restriction, the pollsters in India would be able to conduct the opinion polls and publish their results in the run-up to the elections except on or after February 14, the day the hustlings begin.

Two reasons have been cited for the EC's partial but operatively significant ban on opinion polls. In a country as vast as India with pervasive poverty and illiteracy, opinion polls are susceptible to manipulative deflections. The underlying implication here is that cross-sectional random sampling under those unwieldy circumstances can not be relied upon as the mirror-image of broader trends of voter choices in a huge and complex matrix of the Indian electorate. More to the point for the Indian Election Commission is the lurking possibility that such opinion poll results could unfairly influence voters in the forthcoming Lok Sabha elections. Most of the recently published survey results suggest that BJP could emerge as a single majority party but not with a sufficient number of seats to form a government on its own. BJP rivals are apprehensive of the snow-balling effect of such an impression circulating, because undecided voters craving for stable government might just like to help BJP gain a working majority.

What the Indian EC is doing for the sake of fair polls does hold a message for any functioning democracy in the world.

THIS is the story of Nurjahan Begum (40), one of the millions of poor women in Rural Bangladesh. That she stole our attention rather than others of same kind in the basket is due to the fact that Nurjahan — a most backward woman — moves with a most forward technology, cellular phone. She leased-in a cellular phone from Grameen Bank (GB) at a cost of Tk. 18000 to be paid in three years in an easy instalment of Tk 160 per week. Her phone is now being used by many of the people of the village Boura in Dakshin Khan, 10 km north of the Zia International Airport. Each week her phone serves 150-170 calls — to charge Tk 4.50 a minute. The net monthly income of her household from selling phone service alone stands at Tk. 2500-3000, on average.

When I visited her last week, a smiling Nurjahan appeared cheerful and confident seemingly of a direction to her destiny. Her two sons have two shops in the village with access to a pucca road and electricity. From all these sources (viz. phone, grocery shop and electronics repairing), the net income fetched to the household is nearly Tk 7000 (\$155) per month or a per capita income of \$622 per annum. This is almost double the national average per capita income.

Nurjahan was telling me about her rocky road to survival that she travelled throughout. Twelve years back, her husband deserted her with two small children to marry another woman and settle there. He mortgaged the scant property and moved away with the money. Nurjahan with her two kids found the sky falling on her and took refuge in her parents' house. But a benevolent villager brought her back to Boura village so that she could impinge her claims on the property. Nurjahan started working in others' houses, sent children to school and thus took up the challenge for survival.

When darkness shrouded her from all around, and she was torn apart by poverty, Grameen Bank laid the torch before her. GB provided her Tk 1500 as credit to pursue income generating activities. Nurjahan bought goats and reared these to earn Tk 8000 as profit. Moved with the zeal to steal fortunes, Nurjahan reinvested the surplus on a grocery shop. Besides, she took house loans to repair the house — and also borrowed money to sink a tubewell and

**Dr Yunus saw the poor through his visionary lens, to come to the conclusion that it is the technology that matters most for poverty alleviation.**



## Beneath the Surface

by Abdul Bayes

I was set up a sanitary latrine. I was told by Mr Nurul Alam — the Dakshin Khan GB branch manager — that Nurjahan had paid back most of her dues. And because of her bright track of records in loan repayment, she was selected to lease-in cellular phone.

Who are the users of her cellular phone? Mostly people involved in the business of land

involved in trading. Now they cannot cheat the suppliers, I was told. Do the GB members — the poorest in the village — utilize the services provided by Nurjahan? Yes, she replied and then pointed at Somota standing nearby who has just finished a call. "What did you phone for?" I asked Somota. "My chickens are not providing enough eggs, they also seem to

be sick. So I called the expert 10 km from here to advise me. I got the advice and now going home to work accordingly. They also use the phone to call friends and relatives in and around Dhaka, to call doctor for advice on medicines. Nurjahan — aided by Nurul Alam — also informed me that calls are received from and made to Saudi Arabia, Malaysia, Singapore by friends and relatives of the villagers.

Nurjahan is proud of her graduation from extreme poverty to moderate solvency. Her graduation is sustainable because the total value of the property that she now possesses including household effects — a dressing table, a ceiling fan, a showcase, and stock in two shops and livestock at the home — would far exceed her total loans due to GB. Further, her two sons are also her assets with secondary level education. The "Grameen Graduate" Nurjahan has already been interviewed by BBC and many a newspaper — both national and international — who flashed

her photographs with a cellular phone in hand.

As mentioned earlier, Nurjahan's husband deserted her, but never divorced. "Where and how is he now?" I asked the elder son about his father. I was told that Nurjahan's husband has become poorer and off and on seeks help from his sons. He also comes to visit them once in a while and stays with his sons. Nurjahan does not mind. "After all, he is the husband and nothing can be grudged against husband!" — told the lady with the mobile phone. As I left her place, the village with the latest technology, I recalled the dreamer of the dreams — Dr Yunus — who saw the poor through his visionary lens, to come to the conclusion that it is the technology that matters most for poverty alleviation. There are thirty other Grameen graduates belonging to the poorest segment of the villages who are carrying with mobile phones, to ensure mobility without physical movements. The dawn that started with Grameen Credit Programmes is now landing on latest technology in rural Bangladesh. It's nice to see, pleasant to hear.

# The Smoking Gun

**Doordarshan even blacked out the news when Sweden ordered a probe into the Bofors gun deal. Subsequently, the probe was stalled on Rajiv Gandhi's order. The Swedish team coming to India was stopped on its way to Stockholm airport. All efforts were made to cover up the deal.**

few wanted to handle it." The Foreign Secretary added on second thought: "Maybe Rajiv Gandhi was personally involved in it."

"If Bofors was the villain of the piece," Oza says, "India or more precisely, Rajiv Gandhi was a willing accomplice." He says: "In diplomatic circles, my ambassador colleagues used to jokingly ask me, 'Ambassador, how much did you get from Bofors?' I used to reply in the same vein, 'Only a handkerchief to wipe my tears' pointing to my monogrammed handkerchief displaying 'B', the first letter of my initials and the first letter of 'Bofors'."

Sonia's demand that the Bofors papers be placed before the public is fair. The reason why this may not happen is the same one which influenced the previous governments to withhold them. The VP Singh government could not have done it because of deference to Arun Nehru. Rajiv Gandhi's close relation, who was then in the cabinet. The Chandra Shekhar government was in office with the support of Congress and so it could not do anything. If at all, it helped Rajiv Gandhi in the cover-up.

Then came the Narasimha Rao government. This was that of Congress. He, in fact, tried to stop investigation through the then Foreign Minister Madhav Singh Solanki, who requested to slow down the investigation in an unsigned and undated letter to his counterpart, Rene Felber. Fresh elections returned the BJP as the largest single

party, followed by Congress. The 13-day government of Atal Bihari Vajpayee could not have got hold of the papers, although the then Law Minister Ram Jethamalani is said to have tried it. He should speak out.

The two coalitions, following the BJP government's exit, were too dependent on the Congress support to have dared to expose the Bofors deal. The Gujral government's problem is that it would withhold the names if any more information was made public on the Bofors gun kickbacks.

that the public prosecutor, Lars Ringberg, who ordered the inquiry, was impressed by the pressure that the opposition party members exerted and thousands of letters sent from India to Sweden on the deal. But Rajiv Gandhi sabotaged every effort. How does Sonia Gandhi's mere denial can efface everything?

Lack of guts on the part of governments to place the entire material before the public does not mean that Rajiv Gandhi was not involved. It has something to do with courage, not information. Rajiv Gandhi's close

## BETWEEN THE LINES

Kuldip Nayar writes from New Delhi

If Sonia Gandhi has nothing to hide, she should volunteer herself to give the entire information. Doordarshan even blacked out the news when Sweden ordered a probe into the Bofors gun deal. Subsequently, the probe was stalled on Rajiv Gandhi's order. The Swedish team coming to India was stopped on its way to Stockholm airport. All efforts were made to cover up the deal. A bit of hope flickered when at that time over 100 non-Congress MPs sent a telegram to the Swedish prime minister, followed by the opposition leader's call on the Swedish ambassador in New Delhi. It turns out now

friend, Arun Singh, as quoted by General Sundarji, was pretty upset about what he saw as a fairly massive cover-up plan.

Sonia Gandhi herself is not an innocent party. Steri Lindstrom has said that she should lead the way and tell what she knew about the Bofors kickbacks. He says that she should also speak about Quatrochi, an Italian businessman who ran away from India before arrest. He has been proved to be the middleman. Some \$7 million reportedly found its way to the Quatrochi account.

New Delhi has, in fact, never

## To the Editor...

Letters for publication in these columns should be addressed to the Editor and legibly written or typed with double space. For reasons of space, short letters are preferred, and all are subject to editing and cuts. Pseudonyms are accepted. However, all communications must bear the writer's real name, signature and address.

### Unfair practice

Sir, How helpless are the consumers and general public? Wherever there is scope the traders, employees, transport workers, professionals and even civil servants are ganging up for their narrow selfish interest and the vast majority of public (consumers, who have no means for such unionisation) are silently suffering. Though political parties who are supposed to be for the people are captives in the hand of those unholy groupings.

Almost everyday the newspapers are publishing write-ups on this agony. There is none to hear their cries.

So why I am bothering? Just to point out a new addition to this silent terrorism. Recently, the cable operators have formed such union and decided not to subscribe the pay channels! They will force the customers (who pay) to see only the channels which are in the sky (free of any charges) for some ideological or cultural propaganda. But no ESPN which caters to the vast population of sport lovers or the movie channels which give pleasure to the cinema addicts.

What next?

M A Haq  
(By e-mail)  
Dhaka

### Biman

Sir, Every nation is proud of its national airlines. But what about our feeling of our airlines? One feels very sad to express that we really cannot boast of our airlines. The question is, if our neighbouring countries can feel proud of their national airlines then why not we!

There is a lot to be toned up in case of Biman Bangladesh and nothing is very difficult. The only question is that all policy/decision makers have to be sincere, clear about their responsibilities, be accountable for their action and put national interest over self.

I want to write about my recent experience about Biman flight BG091 to Calcutta. I had to travel to Bangalore by a con-

necting flight but because of this flight's delay by over two hours I missed the connecting flight. But then Biman staff at Calcutta made no efforts to find out our problems or at least say a few words of sympathy. Mind you I was a 'J' class passenger. What are they paid for? To make a fortune through most irregular way? Don't they know that they are maintained by earning through passengers?

Again, while returning on 25th December '97 from Calcutta reporting time was 10 am local time and the flight BG092 at 1220 pm. But on arrival we noticed on flight information that ETD was 1615 local time. However, after completing all formalities we came to the waiting lounge. At 1 pm local time announcement was made to collect lunch packet on production of boarding card.

But there was no information about the flight and 'not a single announcement in this respect. There was no arrangement of water with the lunch. The question is as to why the Biman staff did not come even once to enquire about the passengers. Mind you there were many expatriate passengers and some of them had connecting flights outward.

What are the duties of Biman staff at Calcutta? Will the authority concern look into these avoidable lapses? They should not forget that in the present day tough competition Biman, or for that matter any airline, cannot survive with such service attitude. At last we departed from Calcutta airport at 1800 pm local time.

But the greatest pity was that on return while visiting a relative, I heard their harrowing tale. Their flight from Kathmandu to Dhaka was on 25th December '97. A day before their departure they had gone to Biman office to enquire about their flight and they were told that the same flight had been rescheduled to the day of their enquiry, that is, a day earlier. What a good luck!

Anyway, they rushed to collect their luggage and reported to the airport. Having completed the airport formalities they boarded the aircraft DC 10

for their onward flight to Dhaka. They had to remain seated on board for over three hours as a VIP passenger was yet to arrive for the same flight. It is alleged that the VIP passenger (as reported, Foreign Minister of Bangladesh) was out sightseeing in Kathmandu with his grand children.

Again, on board the aircraft all announcements about Zia International Airport was made as Dhaka International Airport. Why did they do so?

Can we expect positive changes towards service improvement of our national airline? Or will it dip down further as we are reading scandalous news about aircraft purchases.

Manik  
New DOHS, Dhaka

### Distribute jute blankets

Sir, Some of our jute mills are manufacturing jute blankets. Several lakh may be ordered by the government and manufactured immediately and distributed under relief operation to the needy living below or just above the poverty line, for protection against the cold weather. The funding may be subsidised jointly by the government and foreign and local relief agencies and local philanthropists as humanitarian aid. There is likely to be another cold wave during this winter. It is a pity that when local materials are available, the economically handicapped people have no access to it.

Our jute mills can get some business and reduce the financial losses. The jute growers will also benefit from this scheme.

A Zabr  
Dhaka

### "Reducing the line rent"

Sir, I fully agree with the letter, written by Mr O H Kabir, published in your daily on January 6, 1998 under the caption "Reducing the Line Rent".

I would like to add some more that there are one million "Kotipoti" out of 12 crore Bangladeshis. They can afford this exorbitant price Taka 50,000 to 30,000 for this modern technology in telecommunication. But there are millions more who cannot afford this price for this necessity. Out

of which there are hundreds more may be thousands who are known in other parts of the world as senior citizens they enjoy rather embedded to cheap travel by buses or trains, subsidised ration, medicine and other utility service. But what are we getting — nothing. Only in the current budget the government, has allocated Tk 100 for some 'very poor' citizens of the metropolitan cities of the country.

To start with, may I request Grameen Phone, City Cell, Airtel and others to make this modern technology available for the senior citizens by reducing line rent cell charges etc., as rewards for their serious rendered during their service life.

Mazhar Haq  
52/28 Road, Gulshan  
Dhaka

### Irritating question

Sir, In the BTV 'general knowledge' programme screened at 4.40 pm on 3.1.98, a question was asked to Chamell group who opted for question regarding British rule. The question was: Who disliked the word Pakistan? None of the participants could answer it. The presenter then cleared the could and disclosed that Mawlana Mohammad Ali disliked the word Pakistan. Because the word Pakistan means "some parts of the world are holy and some are unholy."

Has it been a question to set in the BTV 'general knowledge' programme for our present generation? Does it bear any moral or political value in it or will it bear any teaching for the people of Bangladesh except creating hostility?

A reason we may locate that Bangladesh has been independent severing all its relations with Pakistan. I think, meanwhile we have been able to forget all the war-time bitterness with Pakistan. For example, in recent past we made a SAARC opposition leaders forum initiated by our present PM.

She also did not mind to be photographed with Benazir Bhutto (Ittefaq 24.3.97). Our foreign minister cut the independence cake of Pakistan in August '97 (photo: Inqilab, 17.8.97) at the Embassy of Pakistan in Bangladesh.

Then, why such irritating question on the television?

Nur Hossain  
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Dhaka-1100

## OPINION

## Cricket: The Game of Life

Alif Zabr

Dhaka stadium's cricket pitch is a batting paradise, as confirmed by Tendulkar after the classical confrontation between Pakistan and India in the Independence Cup final on January 18. The one-day battle produced more than 625 runs, three centuries, and the nail-biting match was decided with one ball remaining of the 48 overs. The Dhaka audience was lucky to have their fill of one of the finest one-day encounters of the 20th century. The money was well spent.

The commercial fall-out is significant. From now on, Dhaka would be selected as an 'international site, for another reason — the drawing power of the crowd. It is not easy for a developing country to produce an acceptable cricket pitch. But it has to be made more lively for the bowlers, fast and slow. The great contribution of honorary Bangladesh citizen Gordon Greenidge cannot be forgotten for 'bringing' cricket to Dhaka and Bangladesh.

Cricket has 'arrived' in Dhaka, thanks to the exploits of three Bangladeshi national teams, the national, the under-19, and the juniors. The latter beating the English schoolboys is unbelievable but true. Bangladesh is now a TIGER CRICKET COUNTRY in Asia! Wait till we come to 8 per cent growth rate in the economic and development sector. With hot rumours of the detection of oil at three 'secret' sites, the future is flaming bright — if the politicians do not set fire to it, considering that their spoiling power is second to none in the world! They should play cricket, in and out of the field; and no googlies please, we are the babes in cricket and politics!

Back to the Indo-Pak tussle. The Pakistanis must be in a state of shock for losing after scoring 314 runs in one-day cricket — a rare defeat. There were other records at the Dhaka stadium, three centuries in a one-day match, and two great partnerships. The way India accepted the challenge was admirable — thanks to Tendulkar. India must find some fast bowlers and a new crop of spinners to back up their formidable batting line.

Tendulkar at 24 is the world's top batsman. His fielding was spectacular; and, as a change bowler, he looks harm-

less, but is dangerous, as he spins the ball not with his fingers but with psychology — his 'halwas' cannot be resisted by the plain batsmen!

Compare Tendulkar and Saeed Anwar. A John Arlott or Swanton is needed to do that, but some personal opinion cannot be resisted. Tendulkar is very much 'visible' with his masterly shots (being an aggressive Aries-Taurus, as are Gower, Selim Malik and Lara), whereas Saeed (a Virgo) hides his art and power — the true identity of an Ustaaad (master). Tendulkar is also a little master now. The flick of the wrist is delightful to watch, but not to the fielders: 'the ball sped to the boundary, leaving the fielders standing'. The timing of directing the ball into the gaps comes only with fast mental and muscular reflexes, and the ability to read the ball early. This aptitude makes the batsman appear to have plenty of time to play his shots — a sign of a class player.

I recall Moustaque Ali's batting at the Eden Gardens Calcutta. He wielded a scimitar, not a bat, hitting the ball from off to leg, and from leg to off — the harassed bowler did not know where to pitch the ball. Natural batting looks effortless, but there is a lot of training, practice, and experience behind (like the tip of an iceberg, 90 per cent of the ice is hidden).

Saqin has become a great slow bowler very early in his career. The way he took three wickets during the Indian innings showed his class. He does not look dangerous, but makes the batsman make mistakes at the very last moment, when it is too late to change the stroke.

Azharuddin is also a superb stroke player. He also uses the wrist to great advantage and artistry like Saeed. All left-handed bats look graceful (to right-eye spectators?), be it Lara, Ganguly, Saeed or Sobers. The latter I watched in Dhaka in the '80s, with the 3Ws, if I recall correctly, when the WI team were bowled out for below 100 with Fazal Mahmood taking eight wickets with his leg cutters.

The reminiscences about cricket are seemingly endless. Watching this great match filled the heart. Some overflow is recorded here to share with the readers.