

## Gas Sector Mess

The natural gas sector is clearly in a mess. After a year and half of prevarication, the government's feeble attempt to breathe new life into the second round of negotiation to award production sharing contracts (PSC) for gas blocks has evidently run into a wall of indifference. Some major transnational oil companies (TOCs), which had earlier shown tremendous interest in gas exploration in Bangladesh, have reportedly at cold feet in negotiating PSCs for blocks, which they had been awarded months earlier. There are many reasons why TOCs may wish to defer investment projects in Bangladesh. Falling profits due to decline in oil prices in the international market may be one such reason. But there is every reason to believe that bureaucratic inertia and political interference in the bidding process played a major role in turning potential partners into disinterested outsiders.

These negotiations should have been completed by December 1997, but government indecision over results of the bidding process led to this extraordinary delay. There were allegations that bidding rules were changed arbitrarily, in order to favour some smaller TOCs with politically connected local agents. This had irritated major TOCs, brought diplomatic pressure on the government, and raised a whole host of questions about transparency and possibilities of corruption. All these, along with external market factors, have combined to diminish TOC interest in gas exploration in Bangladesh. What the apparent apathy among TOCs means is that development of the gas sector is now under a cloud of uncertainty.

However, growing energy needs of the country make it imperative that Bangladesh attract massive private investment in development of new sources of natural gas. The government has a duty to ensure that terms and conditions of foreign participation are compatible with national capabilities and interests. Development of the gas sector, including extraction and use of gas, should be carried out within the framework of a national energy policy, in accordance with the country's short, medium and long term needs. On the other hand, the government has major responsibilities, too. For a start, it must keep to a rigid time-table and not allow any machination by vested quarters to cause delay. The room for corruption, particularly among government officials and Petrobangla staff, should be minimised. But above all, the government ought to ensure that all processes for awarding blocks for exploration and contracts for production are totally transparent and free of political interference.

## Emergency Care

Trifling with medical emergencies even at normal times is an offence but during a hartal period its culpability ought to be far greater. We have occasionally run stories about the ordeal patients needing emergency medical attention had to face at the hospitals basically putting it down to fewer doctors on duty than required by the onrush of patients in such critical conditions. A healthy sense of urgency is a matter of attitude really, which in a good measure can obviously help hospital authorities tide over equipment shortages or sundry other hurdles. During hartals a hospital is expected to be in a state of red alert to stretch its resources to the full to handle an extra load. An emergency is an emergency, regardless of hartal or no hartal — that would be one way of perceiving the general seriousness of a doctor's calling. But the fact about hartal-time emergency is that victims have to be treated with speedy dispatch given the sheer number in which they land up in hospitals for immediate attention.

Parvez, a 13-year-old apprentice motor garage worker was a test-case for medical treatment as a hartal casualty. Escorted by his brother he arrived at the DMCH emergency ward with severe head injuries sustained from a missile of a brick thrown at him. It seemed from our report based on first-hand impressions that from the very word go Parvez's case was handled on a wrong footing. Right through the six hours of his ordeal it was the mere technicality of his lacking an admission slip that apparently stood in the way of clinically determining the gravity of his situation first, let alone carrying out an emergency operation on him. It is a pity he could not be CT scanned nor taken to the OT promptly in a premier hospital like the DMCH.

It is time the authorities of major government-run hospitals took steps to streamline and strengthen their emergency wards in view of the rising number of people landing up there in critical conditions these days.

## Far from Ideal

Fault is thick where love is thin; so goes the saying and it has been proven right at least in this case. A news agency reports that Swanirvar Ideal Village Project initiated by the previous government "is no longer ideal." After his extensive tour of the area in Pabna district the reporter concerned found that families rehabilitated in the project area are moving out of it for various reasons. The AL government has a project by the name of Ashrayan. But the fate of the new project 'hangs in the balance' as the report claims. Any government which has the well-being of the people uppermost in its mind will try to alleviate the suffering of the people who are the source of power for any democratic government. The situation in the ideal village has been further aggravated by growing terrorism in the area resulting from lack of supervision by government functionaries. The noble idea of rehabilitating landless and destitute families in such ideal villages risks going the same way that some such innovative projects had gone in the past. Some 3001 families were settled in such villages all over the district but the number has now come down to only 748.

The villagers have squarely put the responsibility on the government for not fulfilling their pledges to offer pure drinking water, mother and child healthcare, mass education centres and small credit facilities.

"No government officials or organisations feel the necessity to visit the villages to see our misery," lamented a resident of a village. A good job started by a political 'adversary' should get all the support it needs. Whatever is the name of the project we strongly feel that the government should look into the problems immediately, redeem its pledges and bring confidence in the minds of the settlers of ideal villages.

## The Decline and Fall of Abdullah Ocalan

**Abdullah Ocalan, who launched his campaign against the Turkish authorities 15 years ago, returned to his own soil, handcuffed and eyes closed tight. It is a bitter home-coming. On his return he said, "I have love my country. I love the Turks." Turks have a hard time believing his statement.**

ABDULLAH Ocalan (read Ojalan) (Apo for short), the master terrorist of the Kurdistan Workers party (PKK) has been captured following a high drama at the Greek Embassy in Kenya. It does not bring to an end the 15-year old guerrilla warfare in east and south-eastern Turkey, but heralds the beginning of the end.

The Turkish authorities have been engaged in a relentless pursuit of Ocalan, the leader of PKK. In that pursuit towards the end of last year they massed tanks and heavy weapons at the border of Syria and demanded expulsion of Ocalan from their territory. Turkey had maintained throughout that Ocalan was an outlaw and did not deserve any compassion. The Turkish commanding general leading the troops pronounced an ultimatum to the Syrians to immediately expel Ocalan. Since the Syrians and for that matter the Arabs, long living as part of the Ottoman empire, know the determined nature of the Turks, they complied with the demand.

Thus began the Ocalan saga. He sought refuge in Russia. Once again the Russians put great pressure on the Turkish authorities. Turkey has very strong economic ties with Russia and Turkish contractors have been virtually rebuilding Russia after the fall of communism. Ocalan found himself this time in Rome. The Turks demanded expulsion of Ocalan. They withdrew their Ambassador. They virtually froze economic relations and lucrative contracts for Italian firms hung in the balance.

And now came Greece in the picture. Abdullah Ocalan was brought to Kenya and found asylum in the Greek Embassy. The Greek Ambassador took the

whole matter in his own hands. He sought for an European country, which would accept Ocalan. Here the facts are blurred. Abdullah Ocalan was taken out of the Greek Embassy and found himself prisoner in the hands of the Turks. A Turkish plane had been waiting at the tarmac for 12 days. It flew off to Turkey and Ocalan was brought to the Imrali island near Istanbul. Transferring prize prisoners to the islands off the coast of Turkey is an old tradition of Turkey. Following the 1960 coup which toppled Prime Minister Adnan Menderes, he and his close associates were transferred to the island of Yassi near Istanbul. The names of intelligence agencies like the CIA and the Israeli Mossad have been frequently mentioned along with Turkish Agency MIT. What is certain is that in the capture of Ocalan more than one intelligence agency was involved.

Abdullah Ocalan has been masterminding the terrorist operations in a large part of Turkey in the East for nearly 15 years. A campaign of murder and torture, taking of hostages had been unleashed by him. The operations were for the so called rights of the Kurds. Thus an attempt has been made to give the struggle of the Kurds, who are nearly 20 per cent of the population of Turkey, an ethnic character. Turkey is a great mosaic of ethnic varieties that include Kurds, Laz (Black Sea people), Caucasians, Arabs and a large number of people who live around the Caspian Sea. Indeed Turkey is the ver-

table crossroads between East and West. With the collapse of the Soviet Union it has become more so. A picture has been attempted to be portrayed that the Kurds are an oppressed minority in Turkey. Nothing can be further from the truth. The Kurds have blended completely with other ethnic varieties of Turkey. Indeed within the Turkish administration Kurds can be found everywhere and many in high places.

What is an undisputed fact, however, is that the area where the Kurds are heavily concentrated, has remained hopelessly

in the field of winning hearts and minds of the people that the PKK failed. The population of the area remained essentially spectators of the drama. They needed security and the Turkish security forces carried out an energetic campaign. The loss in lives and property has been colossal. An estimated 37,000 people including young and old, women and children, civilian and military are reported to have died. Unspeakable atrocities have been committed. Turkish TV frequently show pictures of rows of PKK guerrillas lying dead and patriotic fu-

riety forces have been crossing deep into northern Iraq and striking not only with ground troops but also with planes and helicopters.

The Ocalan saga has led to extensive fallout. The first foreign country to feel the heat has been Greece. It has been established beyond doubt that there was complicity between Ocalan and Greece. In other words a member of the European Union (EU) has been involved in harbouring the head of a terrorist organisation. Greece has been accused of treachery and three Greek ministers have resigned including the Foreign Minister. Greek Embassies around the world have come under attack by the Kurds and their sympathizers. For years throughout western Europe the Kurds have been used to bitterly criticize Turkey for her human rights violations and many similar offences. Thus there is a heavy concentration of Kurds in Germany and particularly the city of Berlin. They have been demonstrating and threatening Turkey with dire consequences should any harm come to their captured leader Ocalan.

Undeterred by these threats Turkey is expected not to veer from course. The law of the land will be applied rigorously. A statement of the Turkish Government pointed out "Turkish Judiciary is independent and Turkey will not permit or tolerate any attempt of interference with justice by any third party". Thus Ocalan's defense will be assured by Turkish lawyers provided by the state and chances of outside lawyers



## The Horizon This Week

Arshad-uz Zaman

behind in economic development. The fruits of recent great strides taken by Turkey in economic progress has not reached the area. One great handicap has been the harnessing of waters of the Tigris and the Euphrates rivers. Sensing that something needed to be done to win the hearts and minds of the people, successive Turkish governments have taken up gigantic plans for economic development. Thus the huge project called GAP has been launched. Schools, hospitals, polytechnics are being opened daily and there is a race to build roads, bridges and airports.

During the 15-year old war it

nerals for the soldiers killed in battle.

Whereas Abdullah Ocalan has been carrying on his campaign from Syria and training his commandos in the Bekaa valley of nearby Lebanon, the large concentration of Kurdish guerrillas have been in Northern Iraq. Since the Gulf War northern Iraq has become a virtual no man's land since it has been declared off limits for Iraq by the US. There is thus a vacuum in northern Iraq. Kurdish guerrillas have been crossing with impunity through the porous borders into Turkey and striking at targets indiscriminately. Thus the Turkish secu-

## SAARC and D-8, So Alike Yet So Unlike

**The D-8 needs similar zeal and zest at the initial phase because presence of the leaders is necessary to provide fillip to new ventures. Understandably, some of the leaders are too occupied on the domestic front and some have expressed inability to attend at the last moment. They have genuine reasons and this does not show a lack of commitment because in that case they would not have been involved at all in the bloc. Nevertheless, a full quorum at the Dhaka summit would have been more encouraging for the new bloc.**

THE two economic blocs Bangladesh is active members of, the South Asian Association of Regional Co-operation (SAARC) and the Developing Eight (D-8), have a lot of things in common. Both are designed to promote economic, technological and other forms of co-operation among the member states to bring economic benefit to a vast multitude of people living in some of the densely populated countries in the world. Both are relatively new. The SAARC came into being in 1985 while the D-8 was formed 12 years later.

Bangladesh has played an instrumental role in the formation of both. In fact, the SAARC is Bangladesh's brain child. It was formally launched in Dhaka with the first summit in 1985. On the other hand, the D-8 had its first summit in Istanbul, Turkey two years ago.

Now it is Dhaka's turn to host the heads of the D-8 nations at the second summit, slated for March 1 and 2. Meetings at other levels are already on at the Dhaka Declaration, expected to be issued at the end of the summit, is being drafted. The declaration is likely to contain a series of promises and measures aimed at promoting

economic, technological and other form of co-operation among eight members of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC). It can be safely concluded that the D-8 will go a long way towards furthering co-operation among these countries although it remains to be seen how the new bloc takes shape in the years to come.

The SAARC is the first major regional grouping Bangladesh became part of. When the concept of regional co-operation among seven regional nations was mooted, it generated mixed feelings. While the smaller nations in the region welcomed it, India and Pakistan were sceptical. Both took a long time to weigh the pros and cons before making commitment. But once they accepted the idea, there was no looking back. All the SAARC nations played enthusiastic roles in its development and



expansion, even though many feel, and justifiably so, that the progress is rather too slow. The slow growth of SAARC is due to resource constraints. While its requirement is vast given the size of the population of the SAARC which is more than one billion.

The SAARC with integrated programme of actions (IPA) and different technical committees have been expanded its activities into such varied areas like co-operation in mitigating consequences of natural disasters to cultural field. The progress

may be modest but this is in a way remarkable when seen in the context of the prevalent poverty and much more importantly, the inherent mistrust and hostilities that had been the hallmark for the region for decades. To come out of such a perilous condition and make common decisions shedding mutual mistrust and misgivings is indeed a positive development.

The Developing Eight has come with a lot of promise although it is clear that speedy

progress may not be possible because of certain factors. The D-8 and the SAARC have many things in common like the fact that both covers a vast segment of the world population. The SAARC has populous nations like India, Pakistan and Bangladesh while the D-8 has countries with relatively big population like Indonesia and Turkey in addition to Pakistan and Bangladesh. The bottom line is that if the two blocs work well and succeed in delivering the goods, the benefits will cover a large people which may not be the case with other economic blocs comprising less than ten members. Both have advantages and disadvantages. The geographical proximity of the SAARC countries brings them under a regional pattern. It is easier to identify the nature of co-operation in many fields as the conditions happen to be almost similar. It also facilitates exchanges of views etc.

By sharp contrast, the D-8 countries are spread in far-flung areas in Asia and Africa or even Europe. However, it may prove beneficial because the bloc will be free from political troubles that essentially stem from geographical proximity. Besides, they are already under a broad framework of co-operation through the aegis of the OIC and all they have to do now is take up specific proposals and projects that serve their interest, which is a less cumbersome task than the ones SAARC had to face at the onset.

The SAARC has a secretariat in Kathmandu which is effective in rendering the day-to-day services to member countries under the guidance of a secretary-general which rotates among the member nations with a two-year term. Of course,

it took some time for SAARC to have a secretariat. Similarly, the D-8 has to evolve some effective mechanism in due course so that the can work in closer contact and union. This new group has the resource advantage compared to the SAARC but pragmatic approach is needed to derive maximum benefit. The D-8 members also do not have to suffer from a kind of inferiority or superiority complex as none of the members are too big or too small. Whereas the SAARC has member from vast India to tiny Himalayan kingdom of Bhutan or small island state of Maldives.

The SAARC and the D-8 are two blocs with which Dhaka's interests are manifold. Bangladesh's political leadership and officials burned midnight oil in the formative stage of the SAARC to give a shape to it. The same applies to an extent for the D-8 summit here since the first summit was more a formality while the second one is more functional. The SAARC leaders have by and large attended the summits demonstrating cohesion, sharp political differences at times notwithstanding.

The D-8 needs similar zeal and zest at the initial phase because presence of the leaders is necessary to provide fillip to new ventures. Understandably, some of the leaders are too occupied on the domestic front and some have expressed inability to attend at the last moment. They have genuine reasons and this does not show a lack of commitment because in that case they would not have been involved at all in the bloc. Nevertheless, a full quorum at the Dhaka summit would have been more encouraging for the new bloc.

The D-8 is poised to take off effectively from the second summit. Bangladesh has reasons to spare no effort to develop it like it has done for the SAARC. The common well-being of the members of two forums will hopefully result in benefits of vast multitude living in these densely populated countries of the world.

## To the Editor...

## "Point-blank" politics

Sir, Recently a political activist was killed during the hartal hours. That is normal and we are able to digest this kind of political murders throughout the country.

But my attention was caught when I read that there was a Member of Parliament at the scene of the crime. It was during the hartal hours when MP Moqbul Hossain took out a motorcade to protest the hartal and it was then that his soldiers shot an opposition activist in a point blank range.

This certainly proves that our elected representatives have lost tolerance and control of their minds.

My question is whether this case will ever reach the court or even the police station? And does Sheikh Hasina or President plan to set up an inquiry committee because in this matter a Member of the Parliament is being accused as the person implicating the murder.

I wish to see justice served.

Siragis Salekin  
USA

## What is dignified for the CEC?

Sir, It is true that any destructive measure like hartal will bring no good result for the country. Despite all the negative features of hartal, in democracy the right to observe it is entitled. And hence in many countries the opposition take resort to this when all other measures fail to make the ruling party behave well. I think in our country the same thing is happening. The cruel treatment of the ruling party and the stubbornness of the CEC has made the hartal programme of the present time quite justified.

The most important demand of the opposition is the removal of the CEC and this demand has justification in the failure of CEC to hold a free election in the recent poll. As he is not going away from his office, the opposition is giving destructive programmes one after another and consequently the whole nation is now suffering.

In fact, the CEC has nothing to do in the present political tangle. But what he can do immediately is to quit his office. Such a bold and wise step will be good for him and for the country. It is really unbecoming of a high official like him to be so covetous of holding a post at the expense of his honour and

dignity. I think it will be a noble decision on his part to resign and it will be at least substruct the list of demand of the opposition.

I hope the CEC will be wise enough to safeguard his dignity as well as the image of his post.

M Al-Hasan  
Dhaka

## No mercy, at all

Sir, A two-year-old girl, a mere baby, was raped and left unconscious near her house at Mirpur Section-1 on February 11, '99. She is now fighting for her life at Dhaka Medical College Hospital. We are shocked beyond words though this is not the first case we have heard of in the recent days a great number of happenings of this sort came to our knowledge. No, I am not going to compare the rapists with animals because it would be an insult to them, animals are more humane in some fields than human beings.

We feel deeply for the families of the unfortunate girls who had become victims of such a horrible fate.

Why this sort of incidents are growing day-by-day, what is the reason behind it? One thing is quite clear, those who are guilty of this horrible crime are not getting any punishment, in some cases they are even shielded as in the case of Tania, the six-year-old girl who was violated at the CMM court building in Dhaka by a policeman so others are becoming more daring.

We urge the government to take steps to prevent this heinous crime, and to do so the government will have to punish the offenders without showing any mercy.

Nur Jahari  
Chittagong

## "Leave Osmani Uddyan Alone"

Sir, Let me congratulate you on your editorial "Leave Osmani Uddyan Alone" (dated 10.2.99). This could not have come at a more appropriate time. Environmental disaster the capital is faced with presently will only be compounded for the worse with the elimination of this carefully carved piece of land for the oxygen-hungry people of the city. I agree with you that an alternative site should be found to build a convention centre worthy of our capital city.

I am reminded of a discussion I had with late President Ziaur Rahman in early '81 (shortly before his death) about

the fate of the old assembly building (presently Prime Minister's Secretariat) when the parliament would shift to Sher-e-Bangla Nagar. He told me in the presence of Mr Jamaluddin Ahmed (former Deputy Prime Minister) that he was contemplating to turn it into an International Convention Centre.

I suggest that the government take a fresh look at this proposal on the following grounds:

(a) That this is an ideal site in which already exists a conference centre and sufficient land will be available to build it according to the plan of the government.

(b) That there is ample space available in and around PM's residence, Gonohavan, to build a new office block to accommodate the PM's secretariat.

(c) This will save PM's valuable time travelling to and from office and a composite office cum residence will be quite in line with similar facilities enjoyed by the chief executives of other countries, e.g., No 10 Downing Street in UK, White House in USA etc.

(d) Frequent traffic dislocation and congestion caused to facilitate PM's movement will be averted.

We certainly want to welcome world leaders at the NAM summit but not at the cost of environmental damage to our capital city.

Dr A F M Yusuf  
Chittagong

## TRIPS

Sir, Unlike many other LDC members of the GATT, Bangladesh is well equipped with laws, judges lawyers, law enforcing agencies and the required logistical support for improved new laws and enforcement thereof and extend all assistance to the WTO in its activities. We request the WTO Director General to assist Bangladesh for better and quicker implementation of the provisions of the GATT, especially on the trade-related provisions of the GATT better known as TRIPS.

Bangladesh needs to update her Intellectual Property laws made obligatory in the GATT document. We trust that in addition to her membership of the Paris Convention, World Intellectual Property Organization Convention, and Universal Copyright Convention, Bangladesh should consider to join other International Intellectual Property Laws.

We are pleased to say that

Society for Information and Research on Business Intellectual Inventions (SIRBII) is planning to publish all the major International Intellectual Property Laws adopted by Bangladesh, India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.

ABM Shamsud Doulah

Chairman, Society for Information and Research on Business Intellectual Inventions (SIRBII), Dhaka.

## Two killings

Sir, Thank you so much for your commentary "Two killings, two leaders and a helpless nation." This is a timely publication and we all appreciate this type of write-ups.

I encourage you to write this type of people-oriented articles.

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Chairman  
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## "... will do BNP no good"

Sir, I read the commentary "These harts will do BNP no good" on February 8 and a news item "Enact law to ban harts" on February 9 with interest. These have pointed out correctly that our politicians are "geared towards selfish ends which simply put means getting to power at any cost. There is very little concern for the welfare of people."

I will go one step further, our politicians are self-centred and selfish. They do politics only for themselves and for their families and friends. They use politics as a business tool to get rich and to get to power. People who do not have any money will be very rich, within a very short period of time, if they are in politics and if they can go to power. Khaleda Zia is an example. In fact in our sub-continent, politicians are the richest people. Pakistan is a good example in this respects. Politicians of Bangladesh are not far behind!

When these politicians do not have any sense of responsibility or any motivation to sacrifice their own interest, in the interest of the people and the country, there is a justification to control their activities and there must be someone to check them. In this respect I support business leaders' demand to enact law to ban hartal.

A Concerned Citizen  
Dhaka.

## Art Buchwald's COLUMN

## Zippity Doodah

THE big news from Hollywood is that a movie studio (Columbia) has announced that it is going to cut screenwriters in on the big money. The reason this is major news is that the motion picture companies have never put writers in the same class as big-time actors and directors.

Writers were ignored when the grosses were split up. Now Columbia (a k a Sony) says it will give name writers up to 2 per cent of the gross, besides the money they are paid to write the script.

Zippity doodah. Once the motion picture pays back its costs we will all be driving around in Rolls Royces on clover. But there is the rub — the phrase "once the costs of the motion picture are recouped."

Having had a slight experience with trying to collect profits from the movie "Coming to America," I am going to warn all the writers not to get their hopes up.

Almost no motion picture makes money. The greatest blockbusters wind up in the red. It has nothing to do with the film — it has to do with the bookkeeping.

Say "My Wild Irish Bourbon" turns out to be the biggest hit of the year, grossing a minimum of \$800 million, with the Tanzanian theaters still waiting to report in.

The head of the studio, with tears in his eyes, tells the people entitled to a piece of the gross, "We lost our shirts."

"How is that?"

"Besides prints, advertising and cellular telephones, we spent \$400,000 for new Porsches for our executives, \$1 million for our distributors' trip to Turkey, \$2 million to refurbish my offices and another million for reserved parking places."

"It's a pity the picture went under because we all had high hopes for it. That's why we spent \$8 million to dub it in Hungarian."

"I want to thank you all for what you have done. Maybe the next time we'll see a light at the end of the tunnel — unless we have to pay for the tunnel."

By arrangement with Los Angeles Times Syndicate and UNB