

## 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 hartial 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 hartsals 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 hartial or no hartial — that would be one way of perceiving the general seriousness of a doctor's calling. But the fact about hartial-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 hartial 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 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 Kurdish 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 explosion of Ocalan from their territory. Turkey had maintained 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 Turks put great pressure on the Russian 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 veri-

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-

lity 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

participating in his defense in slim.

Through the Ocalan saga there is one person, who stands out as the central figure. That is Prime Minister Bülent Ecevit. And as luck would have it, it is once again with Greece. For it was in 1974 that he as Prime Minister of Turkey had sent Turkish forces in the island of Cyprus and wrested one third of that island from the majority Greeks. A virtual new state is in existence ever since despite of great world pressure. Turkey maintains 30,000 troops on that island to provide security to its population.

These dramatic events — are they going to brighten the chances of Bülent Ecevit at the forthcoming general elections in Turkey, due on the 18th April next? It is an intriguing question. Of all the politicians in the field Ecevit has succeeded in maintaining an utterly incorruptible image. Corruption is going to play an important part in the forthcoming elections. Yet it would be foolhardy to predict a single majority in an election, where there is a plethora of parties and leaders. The chances are that the Turks will have to learn to live with coalition governments.

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## 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 GAF 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

was 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.*

economic, technological and other forms 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 have 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 closer contacts for meetings, 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 to 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 unison. 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 complexes 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 efforts 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.

## Art Buchwald's COLUMN

Zippy Doodah

**T**HE 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.

Zippy 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 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 theater 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."

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**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 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 will soon consider to join other International Intellectual Property Laws.

We are pleased to say that

these nations 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 hartial.

A Concerned Citizen Dhaka.