

## Pay Heed to Real Problems, Please

IT is a truism that our politicians are more pre-occupied with politics of power than politics for people, although their relentless rhetoric may suggest the contrary. Against this backdrop, it is highly likely that the gravity of two front-page news items — *Millions at risk of arsenic cancer and 50 pc babies are born with low weight* — in The Daily Star of yesterday, will be lost upon them. The issues highlighted through the reportage, in all probability, will be deemed as not having enough significance or weightage for inclusion in the list of agenda of our political parties, ruling and opposition alike. Worse even, the legislators, on both sides of the aisle, may not be able to squeeze time out of their busy schedules to have even a cursory glance at these ominous findings, let alone try to fathom their cataclysmic significance.

The Dhaka Community Hospital projection, based on a nation-wide survey on arsenic contamination, puts the number of people exposed to arsenic cancer at several millions. The Centre of Health and Population Research of the ICDDR,B study says that nearly half of the three million babies born every year in the country are of low birth weight, thereby susceptible to physical and mental impairment, infectious diseases, malnutrition and growth failure that account for one-third of deaths in the first year of birth. The rest grow up with abnormal mental development and physical impairment, and are at a greater risk of morbidity and premature death from heart disease, hypertension and diabetes. More alarming is the fact that it is a continuum, an inter-generational phenomenon — a girl born with low weight "may grow up stunted and may give birth to a low weight baby." It means that the malcontent will be there in generations to come.

These findings have unnerving implications: our dreams of a healthy nation may well turn into our worst nightmare until and unless we invest money and energy in reversing the trend. At the Parliament and on the streets, there have been plenty of perfunctory talks for enhancement of the quality of life for the masses; however, real issues have always been conveniently ignored. There is a crying need for change in the attitude of our politicians. They are expected to set aside their relentless pursuit of power and dedicate their efforts towards welfare of the nation. They have not been up to popular expectations. One wishes they would be, sooner than later.

## Shrill Voices Unwelcome

PRIME Minister Sheikh Hasina has drawn the battle-lines for AL MPs with an eye to the imminent opposition stridency against the budget at the on-going JS session. She has counselled them 'not to spare' the opposition on the floor of the House. We understand her spirit but cannot quite appreciate the phrase she has used.

In all fairness to her, we are giving other excerpts of her advisory note to AL MPs: "Come up with statistics and arguments" while you face your opposition colleagues. Furthermore, the PM 'preferred' to wait for opposition suggestions on controversial points of the budget before reacting to them. In other words, we understand that all she is basically urging her MPs to do is to provide a stout defence of the government budget in a spirit of competitiveness to outscore the opposition in the public eye. We wish she had said just as much without even unwittingly giving any provocation to the other side.

That said, we cannot help condemn the opposition's mindless hartal call on taxes within hours of presentation of the budget. We said as much in a previous editorial and we say it again. Not only have they ignored and undermined the JS already in session to debate the new budget but also added insult to the injury by gloating over the fiction of a 'successful' hartal proving that the people 'rejected' the budget.

The provocative language must now be eschewed by both sides because of the simple reason that the people look forward to a constructive, meaningful and rewarding debate on a budget that contains some controversial proposals. The Leader of the House is expected to set the right kind of idiomatic tenor because she vociferously wants the parliament to be the centre of all political debates. Rather than shrill voices and bombastic rhetorics reverberating through the budget session of the Jatiya Sangsad people crave for a serious battle of facts and logic on the floor of the House. There may be sense in what the critics say, a view the ruling party needs to take for the benefit of governance without being dismissive of whatever the opposition says.

## Playground Put to Business

DHANMONDI playground is once again being used for holding a two-week tree fair. This open space meant as a regular playground for youngsters has often been the venue for various kinds of melas, meenabazars, circuses. It has also been used as a market-place for cattle. All this for the purpose of raising funds for the Dhanmondi Sporting Club situated at one end of the ground.

This paper had in the past reported such unsporting act of the club and the DCC officials concerned assured that nothing of that kind would take place in the future. But once again the playground is being used for a tree fair by the forest department in collusion with the club officials who have pleaded their innocence about the whole affair though. The ground belongs to the Works Ministry but the Dhaka City Corporation is in charge of its maintenance. The organisers of the tree fair have claimed that they applied to the DCC for permission to hold the fair. It is impossible to believe that the playground is used without the knowledge of the three parties involved here — public works, DCC and Dhanmondi Sporting Club.

The arbitrary use of this important playground at the heart of an important residential area must be stopped forthwith. An inquiry committee should be in place to probe the financial matters arising out of the lease of the ground from time to time. The playground should be restored to sporting activities at all times.

# Talks Fail: What Next?

by Harun ur Rashid

*A crisis has its own momentum and one situation leads inevitably to another. In that process, a war is not unlikely to break out between the two countries to the consternation of the other countries... The neighbouring countries do not want to see an armed conflict on their doorsteps.*

THE face-to-face talks between the Foreign Ministers of India and Pakistan on 12 June failed in Delhi. They met for 70 minutes and ended their discussions. The result was not unexpected. It would have been a miracle if the talks were successful.

India initially hesitated to accept the visit of Pakistan's Foreign Minister saying that it was an inappropriate time for such a visit. Furthermore India was reported to have narrowed down the agenda of talks on only two topics: (a) withdrawal of the infiltrators from Kargil sector in Kashmir and (b) the causes of such a flare up in Kashmir since 9 May.

Indian Foreign Minister Jaswant Singh said after the talks: "It is for Pakistan to establish its bonafides. We do not have luxury to talk about talks". The statement appears to be very tough in diplomatic terms. It demonstrated India's determination to continue its measures to push back the alleged infiltrators from Kargil sector of Kashmir.

Pakistan's Foreign Minister Sartaj Aziz said in New Delhi that Pakistan respected Line of Control (LoC) in the disputed Kashmir territory agreed after 1971 war but there was confusion as to the actual line of demarcation in the hilly region. This implies that Pakistan doubts the existing LoC in the Kargil sector, apart from that Pakistan maintains that the so-called infiltrators are in fact the Kashmiris who demand a free and fair plebiscite to determine the status of Kashmir.

The talks were clouded by the allegation from the Indian side that the six dead Indian soldiers whose bodies were returned were tortured to death and India accused Pakistan of "barbaric torture" of its soldiers. Pakistan summarily dismissed the accusation. The atmosphere was vitiated by

such allegations on the eve of the talks.

It was reported that Pakistan Foreign Minister went to China prior to his visit to New Delhi and India claimed to have the transcripts of the conversation between Pakistan's Army Chief Musharraf and another Pakistani General Aziz while Pakistan's Foreign Minister was in China. The transcripts were issued by India to the press which read: "My recommendation for Sartaj Aziz is that he should make no commitment in the first meeting on the military situation. And he should not even accept ceasefire." Hardly the environment was made conducive enough for the talks to succeed.

It appears that the purpose of the release of the alleged transcripts by India was to indicate that it was Pakistan's military and not the politicians who control and conduct the policy on Kashmir. India implicitly makes out a case Pakistan's powerful army acts independently of their politicians and the present escalation is the making of Pakistan's army. Pakistan rejects this insinuation.

Pakistan Foreign Minister knew that the talks would be inconclusive given the wide divergence of views on the causes of such flare-up in Kashmir. Pakistan's primary purpose was to defuse the tension by raising the wider issue of the sovereignty of Indian administered Kashmir, dominated by Muslims. India did not accept to widen the issue at the meeting. Another reason for Pakistan to undertake the visit is to show to the world that Pakistan has made efforts to settle the existing tension by peaceful means. If Pakistan retaliates with armed attack, they can argue that they are not to be blamed for further escalation. The international community has to look up to India and not

to Pakistan.

If the attitude and the mode of the parties is anything to go by, it does not presage any improvement of the situation in Kashmir. On the other hand, it may escalate further. It is reported that Pakistan has been assured by China that Pakistan's security and integrity would be safeguarded. India's Foreign Minister is reported to make a trip to China to brief the Chinese on the New Delhi talks.

Both India and Pakistan do not seem to be in a mood to defuse the tension. Each party feels that it is right to protect its territorial integrity. Added to it, Pakistan maintains that the conflict has a moral dimension in that the Muslim Kashmiris should not be denied of their right to exercise self-determination. The danger rests that failure of talks is likely to harden both countries' positions on Kashmir. Pakistan will continue trying to prove that Kashmir dispute needs international intervention while India will strive to show that it is a bilateral problem.

As I have argued earlier (DS/28 May 1999) that a crisis has its own momentum and one situation leads inevitably to another. In that process, a war is not unlikely to break out between the two countries to the consternation of the other countries of the Indian sub-continent. The neighbouring countries do not want to see an armed conflict on their doorsteps. In that situation, do the leaders of Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Bhutan have any joint role to play to defuse the tension between the two key players of the sub-continent?

The writer, a Barrister, is a former Bangladesh Ambassador to the UN in Europe, Geneva.

## LETTER FROM AMERICA

# How Good are We in Sports?

Dr. Fakhruddin Ahmed writes from Princeton

LIKE Bangladeshis everywhere, the writer rejoiced at Bangladesh's victory over Scotland and Pakistan in Cricket's world cup. Actually, the basking was in reflected glory, my happiness derived from the ecstasy exuded by my fellow countrymen at home and abroad.

Although the writer was fortunate enough to be a member and captain of Bangladesh Track and Field team in the late 1960s and early 1970s, that does not make him an expert on anything. Nevertheless, I shall, use that excuse of a 'sports insider' to evaluate what we really accomplished.

During Pakistani days, we believed that our weather — hot, humid and rainy — were the main impediments to our excellence in cricket. Of course, Sri Lanka, with worse weather, put a dent in that argument. Nevertheless, Bangladeshi cricketers were steadily gaining on Pakistan right up to the War of Liberation. Raquibul Hassan represented Pakistan against MCC at Dhaka in 1971.

We were pretty good in other sports too. Abdus Sadeque was a member of Pakistan's world beating hockey team in 1970. At least half the Pakistani football team used to be from Bangladesh. Nabi Chowdhury captained the team in the 1950s. After liberation, Bangladesh became the dominant football power in the Sub-continent. If we could be as good as, if not better than India and Pakistan in football, why should we be so far behind in cricket?

I guess the simple answer to that was the level of popular participation in the two sports. Whereas football is played in every village in Bangladesh, cricket is predominantly a city sport and very much a sport of the elite. The elitist nature of the cricket lies in its origin, after all, it was the English nobility who invented cricket — and even today, in England and elsewhere, it remains the game of choice of the upper class. Cricket can be an oddity in a society like Bangladesh, which aspires to be egalitarian.

There is a gulf of difference between a champion and an also-ran. Mere proficiency in a sport is not enough; to go to the next level one needs to take a quantum leap. And only a true champion can provide that. By all accounts, Bangladesh attained exalted level in cricket under the tutelage of the former West Indian test superstar Gordon Greenidge.

The writer was lucky to watch Gordon play for Hampshire (I believe) and of course the West Indies. I had never seen a batsman square-cut the ball more exquisitely. Having been a member of the unofficial World Champion West Indian team of the 1970s that featured Sir Gary Sobers, Rohan Kanhai, Clive Lloyd, Alvin Kalicharran, Lance Gibbs and Andy Roberts, Greenidge knew what it took to be a champion. His talent and experience clearly rubbed off on the young Bangladeshi Tigers, as exemplified by their victory in the ICC trophy.

It was ironic that Gordon Greenidge was dismissed the day Bangladesh achieved its supreme cricket glory against Pakistan. Without knowing the inside story, it will not be fair to criticize Bangladesh cricket authorities for their decision to fire Gordon Greenidge. However, the timing could not have been worse. If Mr. Greenidge was fired because he thought Bangladesh was not ready for test cricket, the decision is even more scandalous. Gordon Greenidge knows what he is talking about: what it takes to be a test playing nation. The last thing Bangladesh wants is to be the doormat of test cricket to be the perennial entry into test status. Firing Greenidge will not hasten Bangladesh's entry into test cricket — it may delay it. It is shameful to fire someone for his opinion, not his coaching ability.

At the risk of sounding unpopular and unpatriotic, I should like to state that should we overemphasize cricket, we will be in danger of committing the same mistake that India and Pakistan did with field hockey. For years, India and Pakistan wrapped their Olympic aspirations solely around that minor sport. The writer was surprised to see that in the semi-final of 1972 Munich Olympic hockey between India and Pakistan, very few non-subcontinentals were in

attendance (West Germany won the gold). Yet, perusing newspapers in India and Pakistan, one would have concluded that the Olympics was all about field hockey! Now that some western nations have taken a little more interest in field hockey, the subcontinental dominance is history.

Let us face it, cricket is a minor sport on the world stage; less so than field hockey. One can count on one's fingertip how many nations play it. Excelling in cricket, while commendable, will not make us a world sports power. The other day, all excited, I told a colleague from Scotland that Bangladesh had beaten Scotland in cricket. "I did not know Scotland played cricket," he replied. Now, if Bangladesh had beaten Scotland in football, he and the rest of the world would have known!

Like all sports, cricket requires extraordinary coordination of the body, especially that of arms and feet. With that satisfied, the other part of the torso becomes less critical in cricket. An on-and-off game like golf, cricket is much more forgiving physically. That is why 'false' like former English batsman Tom Graveney could play the game at the highest level. Football, on the other hand is a game of perpetual motion. Excessive weight, or lack of fitness is unthinkable in a top football player.

One-dimensional approach is not going to help us raise our sports standard. We have to develop talent in whichever field we like. We have back in 1960 Rome Olympics, India's Milkha Singh finished fourth in men's 400 metres run. As recently as, the 1984 Los Angeles Olympics, India's P.T. Usha finished just outside the medals in the women's 400 metres hurdles. The writer remembers that in the 1960s and 1970s Bangladesh boasted of excellent athletes like Shiraz (100 metres), Miraj (pole vault) and Sultana Ahmed Khushi (sprints).

Roger Bannister, the first person to break the 4-minute barrier in the mile, says that with their elevated bone structure around the hip, black athletes have an advantage in the sprints. I am in no mood to argue with Sir Roger, a physician

# Now, Information War

Praful Bidwai writes from New Delhi

*Fortunately, an intra-Kashmiri dialogue across ethnic and political divides has started. Around the Hague Peace Conference last month, a large number of Kashmiris, from Pannun Kashmir to pro-Mujahideen groups met for the first time. They called for an end to all violence, for free dialogue between Kashmiris, and return to Kashmir's traditions of peaceful co-existence.*

TRUTH is the first casualty of war. Even though the Kargil conflict is not war, it is proving this. The government is moving towards censorship. On June 4, it banned journalists from going to Kargil. Now it says it would "escort" them selectively. The decision has no logistical rationale.

Consider the government's record. First, it refused to disclose pertinent details about the "infiltrators". The vantage-points they occupied were variously reported at five, eight, and 21. Mysteriously, 10 days into the air-strikes, the number had increased!

Second, the government banned Pakistan TV. Third, it rejected the reasonable demand for a Rajya Sabha session. Fourth, it gave out conflicting numbers on the "infiltrators": killed: first 100, later 589, then 500. On May 8, it claimed to have killed 227 Pakistani soldiers, but 'only produced three bodies.

Mr George Fernandes's record of contradictory statements is disgraceful. Mr Vajpayee has joined him in depriving the media of its official credibility. On May 5, Mr Vajpayee exhorted the media to consider "the impact" of what it writes on the armed forces' "morale"... "before publishing" it. This was an appeal for self-censorship.

Ministers are not censorship's sole advocates. Eleven former generals and bureaucrats have demanded "censorship" of independent analyses of Kargil. They include, unsurprisingly, the hawk K. Subrahmanyam, and, disturbingly, two former foreign secretaries.

They say Kargil "is a test of [the] national will". Hence any "post-mortem by analysts should be suspended". We must

not talk about "any inadequacies and failures that have led to the crisis". At stake is "our credibility as a nation."

This is a plea for suppressing truth and suspending rationality. Unless we have independent analyses, how will citizens know whether the right policies are being pursued? Or must we think our leaders always act competently? Is there no alternative to analyses by sarkari "experts"? The signatories' plea to ban non-sarkari analysts is gross.

Whom is the government trying to fool? Mr Fernandes has done more damage to the army's morale than our enemies. He helped arms-smugglers in the Andamans, sacked Admiral Bhatnagar, offered "safe passage" to infiltrators. This is compounded by diplomatic failure and Mr Vajpayee's poor leadership.

The plain truth is, the Right has proved incapable of defending the nation; it has compromised our security. It is trying to cover up its failures through media censorship.

There are two larger issues here. We have reason to be proud of our media. But it has regrettably spread ignorance and prejudice on issues of security by towing the official line. In 1962, it reported that our army was fully prepared to meet the Chinese, when it wasn't. The media was partly to blame for public shock and disbelief at the outcome of the China war.

Then the media exaggerated India's defeat and the 'Yellow Peril's' villainy. As independent scholars have shown, the war had its origins in India's impatience with China's attempt to settle its borders in the post-colonial era according to consistent principles. New Delhi followed an arrogantly unilateral approach, citing Imperial claims, and refusing negotiation.

Yet, the war was less bitter than believed. Indian casualties were less than during the 1962 war. The Chinese even oiled Indian firearms before returning them. They did not take prisoners. However, the picture from our media is different and foments chauvinism.

Take the Pakistan 1965 war. It ended not in a decisive defeat for Pakistan, as the media portrayed, but in a stalemate. In 1966-69 too, the media was not objective on India's Sri Lanka intervention and the IPKF's poor performance. By being manipulated for 'national honour', the press added to the poverty of public debate.

The media's litmus-test is not loyalty to officialdom, even arbitrarily defined "patriotism", but to truth and critical analysis. It must question and verify official claims and be prepared to cross swords with power. This is doubly important in a crisis. It is profoundly wrong to suspend or abridge the role of the media as mirror of the truth.

The second larger issue is the link between Kargil and Kashmir. It is futile to pretend that Kashmir is not a dispute. Numerous UN resolutions and even the Simla agreement recognise this, although this does not mean Pakistan should alter the LoC.

The present crisis partly stems from the festering of the Kashmir dispute and periodic border skirmishes. It shows how civilians have become victims of India-Pakistan rivalry. Kargil's Shias have never been part of the Valley's azadi movement. But they have been turned into refugees. This is not inevitable.

The Kashmir problem is amenable to solution. This can come about through changed Indian and Pakistani mindsets and involvement of the Kashmiri people in the determination of their fate.

Kashmir is not just about Partition and the Maharajah's refusal to accede to India until October 1947. Nor is it about Muslim identity. It is about giving Kashmiris a voice in a just solution to the problem, which enhances everyone's security. Kashmir's relationship to India and Pakistan must be settled on a modern, secular, pluralist basis.

The Kashmiri people's involvement in the conciliation process will transform its complexion. All concerned will then have to confront the issues of democracy and plurality in culture and society — outside the straitjacket of rivalry. This is just what is needed.

Fortunately, an intra-Kashmiri dialogue across ethnic and political divides has started. Around the Hague Peace Conference last month, a large number of Kashmiris, from Pannun Kashmir to pro-Mujahideen groups met for the first time. They called for an end to all violence, for free dialogue between Kashmiris, and return to Kashmir's traditions of peaceful co-existence.

This is a positive step. Real progress will come through such moves, not military conflict with its horrific potential for nuclear devastation.

The writer is an eminent Indian journalist.

## Art Buchwald's COLUMN

# Gun Guarantees?

AFTER the shootings in a Denver suburb, where 15 people were killed, I read the constitution again. I was interested because Charlton Heston, president of the National Rifle Association, and his people still insist the Second Amendment has to be protected, whatever the fatality rate.

I looked through the amendment to see if there is anything about shooting students. Then I checked on whether or not there is any guarantee for the sales of gun dealers.

There didn't seem to be any. The Second Amendment says nothing about sawed-off shotguns, automatic carbines, pistols and Saturday Night Specials.

The NRA says it doesn't have to — arms are arms, and militias are militias, and good people have to protect themselves from bad people.

The question arises. "What did the people who voted for the Second Amendment have in mind?"

The pro-gun lobby, which finances your politicians, believes that the founders wanted everyone to have a gun in his home and should be permitted to buy a second in case the first one doesn't work.

Guns are not to be used in crimes or homicides, though there is nothing spelled out as to who are the good guys or who are the bad guys.

The founding fathers never dealt with teenage shootings because none of them had children in high school. Besides, it is not guns that kill people, etc., etc.

The NRA says the anti-gun bleeders are going to destroy the constitution. As a matter of fact, the NRA is now sending e-mails begging its members to give money.

Where does any sane person stand? If previous school shootings are an indication, the furor will die down, the international media will leave Colorado and people will forget about it until the next shooting — when everyone will ask: "Why didn't they do anything about this?"

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## To the Editor...

### Miandad! No thanks

Sir, I was appalled to read that Bangladesh is considering hiring Javed Miandad of Pakistan as the coach for Bangladesh cricket team. It was rightly pointed out in the DS that in what language will Miandad communicate with our cricketers? And since when have the Pakistanis begun to have the best interest of this country at heart? But most importantly will or anybody care to investigate Miandad's role in the notorious tower of Bangladesh in the early '80s by the Pakistani team, when they made derogatory remarks about our team? Wasn't Miandad then the captain of the Pakistani team?

Please, anybody even remotely suggesting Miandad as the only option for a coach for us should not only be questioned for ulterior motives, but should also be encouraged to visit Punjab in Pakistan, to assess how much feelings the Punjabis have for their Bengali "brothers" and Javed Miandad is a Punjabi.

Najma Ali  
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Dhaka

### Nice victory

Sir, May I first take this opportunity to congratulate the Bangladesh cricket team in its recent victories in the World Cup in England.

I had the great fortune to have attended the match against Pakistan and let me tell you the pride that ran through my veins as I witnessed our team defeat one of the pre-tournament favourites, in such a convincing manner. Both Wasim Akram and Imran Khan have commented on the exemplary way in which we played this year.

But there is a down side to this famous victory. Already

the charges are out that the Pakistan team had lost the game intentionally in order to profit from fixed bets, in a game they did not have to win.

Stories are already out in claiming players are awaiting huge profits when they go back home. The charge has been denied by the Pakistan captain vehemently, but the damage has been done.

Our country has been the butt of many jokes from our close neighbours — India and Pakistan — let us now move forward and enjoy the fruits of a successful nation, and stop living in the past.

Anamur Rehman  
23 Mountside Crescent  
Prestwich, Manchester, UK

### "The G Force"

Sir, Reading "The G Force" printed in the Opinion column of the 14th June was a breath of fresh air. A big round of thanks goes to Mr. Asif Quader for an

awaited opinion.

It is understood that Gordon should not have deserted our players during the practice sessions for the World Cup, nor should he have made any deplorable comments, which was way out of line either. The failure of a team directly involves and includes the coach. And isn't it the sign of a good coach or a teacher to admit to failure? Even if Gordon failed to acknowledge his own deficiency, he should not have added salt to an already ugly sore by accusing the players and the Board quite vehemently.

Whatever reasons could be put forward for the dismissal of Gordon as the coach of the national team, one thing is absolutely certain — today we are rejoicing because of the talent and hard work of our ex-coach. Today we are the ICC trophy winners. And today we have not only participated in the World Cup, but we are in par with teams like Kenya, England, West Indies, Scotland and the

World Champions Sri Lanka. History will reveal to the cricket-loving generations to come that the Bengal Tigers did not walk away with their heads bowed.

Masroor Ahmed Deepak  
Dhaka

### Authorised money changers

Sir, The government's recent decision to allow authorised money changers to transact business is to be welcomed as a public service. But it is found that all such establishments do not follow the regulations strictly.

For example, the registration number is not displayed; and the rates are quoted verbally, and not displayed on a board prominently. The exchange rates are sometimes much lower than the official rates quoted in the newspapers,

and the explanation offered is not satisfactory.

Some clients might be confused about the genuineness of some of the transactions. Also it is openly admitted that the rates are negotiable for bigger sums, and fluctuating market conditions. The official receipts are also not written in the correct way with all relevant information; and are not issued unless demanded. How the authorities keep track of the transactions for official audit purposes?

The intricacies of each transactions should be transparent. The notice must display the name and telephone number of the inspecting or regulating agency for instant check-up by client. A service may be newly introduced, but the game must be played by the rules. The Monitoring Agency must be visible to the public.

Abul M Ahmad  
Dhaka