

Boro Bounty Messed Up

HOW effectively we can spoil the advantage of a good harvest is driven home by the virtual derailment of the government's much-vaunted cereals procurement drive. On an upbeat note in the aftermath of a Boro boom, the government did not rest content merely with revising the GDP growth rate it very enthusiastically also launched a food gathering operation with a price support package for the farmers ostensibly designed to remunerate and reward them for the sizable crop their redoubled efforts after the flood yielded.

Against that overall optimistic backdrop the government seemed to forget that some forward planning and administrative preparations were essential to make a success of the food procurement drive, especially when some of the preceding ones had abysmally failed. That there was a Boro boom and the procurement prices were raised to an incentive level compared with those offered in the past, could not be sufficient guarantees for a success. On the contrary, in such conditions, the lure of money becomes all the more irresistible for those who wait in the wings to capitalise on the 'procurement business'.

Indeed, some latest field level studies reveal that, having been induced by the higher purchasing prices and the scale of procurement targeted, vested interest groups soaked up the surplus produce at the grower's level on the cheap. Then they sold the cereals at the procurement centres keeping the farmers completely at bay from the mainstream and thereby hijacking the benefits that were meant to be entirely the farmers'. Our Sunday's front-page report on the subject revealed how the game was being played by big millers, middlemen and even people's representatives to deprive the growers of their due. The procurement centre officials who are freely buying the commodity from these seasonal birds of businessmen are evidently playing into their hands. Why isn't there any stipulation on them to buy directly from the growers when the procurement price, to our understanding, includes a transport cost element? The farmers could be organised to come in a body to the purchase-centres and sell their produce there, something that would have been compatible with the government's vociferous claim to be the champion of peasant rights.

The procurement exercise is circumscribed by storage constraints as the government silos are brimming with previous stocks. That is another factor impeding the maximisation of benefits from a good crop. It is too late in the season to be building the desired number of godowns in the public sector now. Besides, the floods have come on requiring of us to fortify the existing ones in addition to moving the food to safer places. The private sector can be of some help to preserve the food under government surveillance.

In any case, it would be worthwhile for the government to issue a statement on food procurement and storage at this juncture.

BJMB Benefit Fragmented

INAUGURATION of construction works for the 55-kilometre Bonapara-Nakia-Hatikumrul road linking the Bangabandhu Bridge to the country's north-western districts appears to have breathed fresh air into industrial activities in the region. While potential investors have started exploring project possibilities, efforts have been under way to revive the laid-off local mills. In the context of such positive activism, the Natore Chamber of Commerce and Industry (NCCI) president's observation that "massive industrialisation would accelerate the pace of development in the region, removing unemployment problem within five to seven years" is definitely not an exaggeration. However, the road link, by itself, is not enough to expedite industrialisation in the north.

The three-hour time advantage the bridge is expected to provide the frequenters remains elusive as ever for the miserable condition of the Dhaka-Tangail highway. Besides being narrow, the highway is replete with cavities and potholes, thereby not only killing time but also heightening possibilities of fatal road accidents. Equally atrocious is the condition of quite a few diversion roads and box-culverts constructed as part of the access roads projects, as reported in an English-language news daily.

Moreover, there is the question of ensuring uninterrupted gas supply to the region, an essential ingredient for industrialisation. Installation of gas pipeline should be immediately underway. On the whole, a lot of works lie ahead.

Nevertheless, the construction of the road link is indeed a positive start that needs to be followed up in all earnestness. The linkage should also pave the way for more EPZs, a necessity to attract more foreign direct investment. However, the government should take a more comprehensive approach in this regard, treating construction of road links, improvement of conditions of the Dhaka-Tangail highway and installation of gas pipeline as one single project. Otherwise, optimal benefit of the multi-purpose bridge will elude us.

Pak Cricket in a Bind

THE Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) ad-hoc committee chairman slapped a temporary ban on three senior cricketers including Wasim Akram, captain of the national team. The ban comes in the wake of a long-drawn controversy and enquiry into allegations of match-fixing against some top Pakistani cricketers. Also banned are former captain Salim Malik and his brother-in-law Ijaz Ahmed. The order, though apparently softened by the label 'temporary', could well spell the end of the illustrious career of Wasim Akram and that of his two colleagues. The chairman of PCB Mujeeb Rehman said that until investigations into corruption changes were completed they would not be available for selection but there is no definite indication as to when investigation will be completed and its finding made public. It could prove redundant if the players reached the age of superannuation.

The players, however, have always denied their involvement in such nefarious activities. When Mark Waugh and Shane Warne alleged they were offered money by Salim Malik to lose a match, fingers were raised against the Pakistan captain but the complainants themselves admitted having taken substantial amount in lieu of supplying information on weather, pitch and overall bearing of the visiting Australian team to complete strangers. They later apologised to the PCB and the ICC also covered them up for four years. Allegations against the Pakistani trio are very strong and there should not have been any smoke without fire. The PCB should act quickly and decisively and close the issue beyond any doubt for the greater good of the game.

IN my last comment on July 11, 1999 under this column I said, "President Clinton may like to use the remaining period of his presidency to establish peace in the Middle East. With the changed situation peace appears within reach but to grab it President Clinton will have to run an extra mile..... The world will be there to acclaim the success. Let M-E peace be the last glorious star of his presidency." All peace loving people feel encouraged to see that both Prime Minister Barak and President Clinton have agreed to work together to achieve comprehensive peace in the M-East in 15 months time i.e. the remaining part of the presidency. After brief meetings with President Mubarak, President Arafat and King Abdullah II, Prime Minister Barak's six-day visit to Washington was the most important part of his peace initiative. Indeed this visit was very vital to unfreeze the icy relationship that developed during Netanyahu's time. Indeed, President Clinton was eagerly looking forward to it as indicated by his very frank remark — "eager as a kid with a new toy" to receive a new partner Prime Minister Ehud Barak. Though President Clinton's remark raised some criticism in Israel, this only reflected his enthusiasm for taking the peace process forward with Prime Minister Barak who is 'not-Netanyahu'. There were several interpretations of his remark but he could have never meant offering that "new toy" to his new partner to lull him into easy play. Ehud Barak is not at all new in the game.

However, Clinton wanted to have one to one match with his new partner Barak away in the woods — the famous Camp David where another important match was played years ago that led to the peace deal between Sadat of Egypt and Begin of Israel. The match during overnight stay at Camp David produced interesting — results both won and both were happy. Barak wanted less intrusive role by the US administration in the peace process; Clinton had no problem with it. He said, "The best peace process is one where critical decisions are made with the parties that have to live with it." These political pronouncements are undoubtedly for domestic consumption — what happens on the ground is entirely a different matter and generally beyond the control of both the leaders. The US-Israel relationship is so deep that Israel cannot go without the US. The US administration also largely depends on Israel for the reasons of domestic politics and also for strategic reasons and superpower politics in the Middle East and beyond.

Barak knows that land is important but peace is still more important for his people as there could be no security without peace. The contract for 50 new F-16 fighter planes worth \$2.5 b. from the US may further strengthen Israeli army but cannot guarantee peace and security to its people. Israel is virtually a superpower in terms of its military arsenal in the region but could not guarantee security to the Israelis in the northern region against Hezbollah's rockets. Therefore Prime Minister Barak rightly embarked on the peace mission. He has to negotiate a peace deal with those people with whom his people will have to live. Here again it has to be a Camp

ME Peace in 15 Months.
It is quite evident that Ehud Barak has created a positive and friendly environment for peace negotiations. Even President Assad of Syria whose country has been technically at war with Israel for the last 30 years, has not only shown his eagerness to work out a peace deal with Prime Minister Barak but has already "initiated four measures designed to gain confidence of Israel and the United States".

David match where both parties must win. He cannot afford to leave the other party dissatisfied; the deal has to be something that all will have to accept and agree to live with. Here comes the question of mandate. Fortunately Ehud Barak carries the mandate of his people — mandate to negotiate peace with security. Israeli people trust Barak who was Israel's security chief. He was also Israel's most decorated soldier and he knows what security means for the Israeli people. If

taken by Arafat and other Arabs. Arafat has already resigned President Ahtisaari of Finland, the President of EU to play his role in the peace process. It is quite evident that Ehud Barak has created a positive and friendly environment for peace negotiations. Even President Assad of Syria whose country has been technically at war with Israel for the last 30 years, has not only shown his eagerness to work out a peace deal with Prime Minister Barak

gerness to join the peace negotiations. President Assad's eagerness is based on two considerations. He feels that he can strike a deal with Ehud Barak to get back his Golan Heights though there appears some difficulties with the interpretation of the stage of negotiation that the last Labour government reached. Assad, however, knows that he would have to agree to leave for security purposes an appropriate strip of the edge of the Height that overlapped in the hands of the international peace keepers who are expected to be there till full confidence between two people is established. The other consideration is that a peace deal with Israel is likely to ensure President Assad's son as his successor.

For Prime Minister Barak it would be a great success as peace with Syria would bring peace with Lebanon and would greatly facilitate the negotiating work with the Palestinians. Undoubtedly there are several very difficult issues with Palestinians. Though Palestinian State is a foregone conclusion the issues like its nature, size, contiguous border etc will involve serious negotiations. The most important and sensitive issue is Jerusalem as extreme sentiments of both the parties are attached to it. Here the "braves" must exhibit their bravery not to fight on the issue but to show maximum flexibility to come to an acceptable solution. It will not at all be easy but a solution is a must for peace and security in the region.

East Jerusalem and the rest of the city of Jerusalem do not look like one city and many would say that it has never been so. Our visit to Jerusalem some time ago gave us the same impression. East Jerusalem with the walled city has always been different and it's more so today. As soon as one drives down to East Jerusalem from the most developed part of Jerusalem, it's a different world. The "Green Line" dividing the city appears to have very little practical significance and possibly here lies the answer. Israel must realize that it can never administer/control the population living in East Jerusalem. Even now it does not; East Jerusalem practices its own laws and rules and regulations. The sentiments are equally strong and valid on both sides but realities are not equally accepted. Israel, indeed, should give up the idea of keeping East Jerusalem under its administrative control. It will not be practical and moreover it will be a constant source of trouble for Israel in terms of administration, demographic strategy etc. Indeed, it may be possible to find a solution with some good adjustments and leaving the holy sites open for all faiths — Islamic sites under Palestinian administration and Jewish sites under Israel. Of course, it would not at all be easy to find a solution but once the parameters are set the problems may look somewhat less difficult. But the most important thing is that the parties will have to accept the realities and have the spirit of sacrifice as they are destined to live together side by side. Once they have decided to share the "biblical land" as the Israelis put it, let them go all the way up to Jerusalem and share it equitably for the sake of comprehensive and permanent peace and security of the people of the region.



Spotlight on Middle East
Muslehuddin Ahmad

Barak cannot deliver security to Israelis, no other Israeli leader will be able to do so.

Prime Minister Barak has extended his peace net not only to all parties to the conflict but also to all possible "facilitators" — the US and the EU. While returning from the US Prime Minister Barak stopped at the UK to meet Prime Minister Tony Blair and asked for UK's support. He said, "I believe that Britain can have a leading role within the EU in supporting the peace process." This is a new turn in Israel's foreign policy as under Netanyahu Israel was virtually opposed to any direct role by the EU in the peace process. Barak's policy seems to be in line with the approach

but has already "initiated four measures designed to gain confidence of Israel and the United States", as put by an Israeli analyst Ron Ben Yishai in his comment on July 20, 1999 in *Yedioth Achronot*. The four confidence-building measures are: (i) Assad's statements reflecting his confidence in Ehud Barak, (ii) Syrian military instructed Hezbollah to stop unilateral shooting and acts of violence in South Lebanon, (iii) Syrian officials asked the Palestinian rebels including Hamas members living in Syria to stop all terrorist activities from Syrian soil which will undoubtedly make the US happy and (iv) several conciliatory statements from Damascus expressing eagerness to join the peace negotiations.

Peace Hopes in the Middle East

by Henry Kissinger

As the peace process approaches its final stage, America's role will be no less important for being more subtle. A former chief of staff, Barak is unlikely to be less conscious of the requirements of Israeli security than his predecessors. In any event, Washington is not in a position to draw final lines or to stage-manage indefinitely a series of tactical compromises.

neighbours. And if Israel is perceived as the obstacle to peace, the indispensable relationship with America is at risk. Hence Rabin's comment to a diplomat who congratulated him on having been converted to the peace process: "Committed, not converted," replied the gruff soldier.

The Arab countries have gone through a similar evolution. Treating Israel as essentially illegitimate, too many Arab leaders have considered recognition of the Jewish state as the sole *quid pro quo* required of them. The PLO has insisted on borders that it had never accepted before the 1967 war, and has lately even been arguing for the 1947 UN partition plan that would reduce Israel to vestigial, unsustainable limits. Only last year — half a century after Israel came into being — did it manage to remove the clause in its charter calling for Israel's extinction by procedures provided in that very charter.

But the hard-liners are now increasingly isolated. Egypt and Jordan have concluded formal peace treaties. The remaining hold-outs are learning that they have in fact no realistic alternative. The Soviet Union has disappeared as a major arms supplier and Russia is in no position to provide convincing diplomatic or military support. The Gulf states have made clear that, while prepared to give the Palestinians economic assistance, they will not go to war over West Bank issues. Syria's Hafez Assad wants to minimize turmoil in the region as he seeks to arrange a succession for his son. All this accounts for the unprecedented conciliatory sounds emanating from Damascus and the more cooperative public attitude of the Palestinians. Nevertheless, the new atmosphere is not self-fulfilling.

The issues that produced the impasse remain unresolved. They concern borders, the future of Jerusalem, Jewish West Bank settlements and the right of refugees to return. These issues are enormously complex, and American mediation remains essential. American diplomacy has kept the peace process moving forward over six administrations and made possible all the landmark agreements. But it is also true that two seminal initiatives — Sadat's trip to Jerusalem and

Peres' and Rabin's negotiation of the Oslo agreement — were triggered because the Middle East parties sought to preempt American efforts they perceived as misguided. Sadat journeyed to Israel to forestall an American push to reassemble the Geneva conference with Soviet participation. Rabin and Peres opted for the Oslo negotiation to avoid a comprehensive proposal by the new Clinton Administration. Still, in the end, both of these initiatives required an energetic American follow-up to bring them to fruition.

Barak's upcoming visit to Washington, following that of President Hosni Mubarak, provides an opportunity to place US-Israeli diplomatic cooperation on a new basis. This cooperation is not easy in the best of circumstances. Israeli negotiators, however appreciative of American material help, instinctively resist American pressure for fear of establishing a pattern that would gradually prod them beyond the limits of Israel's security — especially the margin that determines the survival of a country whose maximum width is measured in tens of miles. It inevitably appears trivial to a continental power like the United States. Hence, Israeli negotiators are forever tempted to make the extraction of concessions so painful as to discourage an escalation of demands.

American mediators, however strong their theoretical conviction about American-Israeli friendship, too often respond with a mixture of exasperation and exhaustion. By pressing their own preconceived ideas, generally regurgitating the Rogers plan of 1969 which endorsed the '67 borders with "minor rectifications" and lately hinting at an unlimited right for refugees to return. Or else they split the difference between the two sides, in the process giving an incentive to each party to put forward its most extreme position. These inherent tensions have been overcome in earlier stages of the peace process and, in Rabin's second term as prime minister, were substantially eliminated.

In recent years, however, a dangerous rift has opened up. Netanyahu may well have pursued a strategy of demonstrating his vigilance as a prelude to leading his recalcitrant party

toward final peace in his second term, as he occasionally asserted in private conversations. But in the process, he so strained his relations with his American interlocutors — who did not like his thinking in the first place — as to defeat his design. Israel has a duty to insist that it remain the ultimate arbiter of the elements of its security, but its leaders must never forget that working relations with America are themselves a key element of their country's security.

When US-Israeli tensions turn this confrontational, the peace process is in jeopardy. Such a state of affairs compounds rigidity by all parties as Israel digs in, waiting for the storm to blow over and Palestinians wait for America to impose their maximum demands. The recent Wye agreement is a case in point. It represented a compromise between the Palestinian demand for more than 20 per cent of the disputed territory as an entrance price into final status talks, and the Israeli offer of 10 per cent. The ultimate compromise of around 13 per cent eased tensions temporarily, but in the absence of a definition of either security or peace, it failed to allay ultimate concerns. Many Israelis saw it as part of a process to push them back, step by step, toward the indefensible '67 borders. And some PLO radicals may have viewed the entire process as an exercise in substituting American pressure for their own need to make concessions.

To elicit genuine Israeli flexibility, there needs to be an understanding between Washington and Israel about both the extent and the limits of Israeli withdrawal — such as existed in the first, disengagement agreement in 1974 that launched the entire peace process. Such coordination is not a special favour to Israel. It is the precondition to persuade the Palestinians that we can deliver what we promise and to reassure the Israelis that we will not push them beyond what they see as their vital security interests.

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Suharto. Dr Soekarno died in old age of natural causes.

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Child trafficking

Sir, These days, child trafficking has become very common in our country. Parents feel so insecure that they cannot even dare allow their children to play outside the house in the evening. On 24th June, there was a report about four child-traffickers who were caught red-handed with four children. Our police were able to catch only a few of them while there are lots of them roaming around the country.

The arrested ones should be punished severely so that others don't dare to repeat such crime. Whatever punishment they are given should be known to each and every citizen of the country.

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To the Editor...

Why on everything?

Sir, In my opinion, scientists and researchers of proven integrity and expertise should remain confined to only their own fields of specialisation. But these days, I find a growing tendency among the foreign based Bangladeshi scientists and researchers to write on other topics in which they have no proven expertise. Their sources of information are also not impeccable. A case in point is the write-up "Heavenly Freedom at Midnight" written by Dr A H Jaffar Ullah (The Daily Star, July 17th, 1999).

Mostly uninformed about the current situation obtaining in Bangladesh and relying on second hand or third hand sources, I wonder why the author decided to choose the topic. He is neither a 'peace worker' nor connected with any recognised and association engaged in 'conflict resolution'. He should have first done his home work.

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In search of leadership

Sir, I read with much interest Dr Jaf' Ullah's write-ups, but the most interesting piece was on 25th June 1999 wherein he narrated Dr Wajed Mia's views on his wife's ability to govern the country.

My personal view is that Sheikh Mujib after his return to Bangladesh from Pakistan in 1972 should have declared his retirement from politics and should have let Tajuddin Ahmed run the government as PM. If he had done such, he and his family most probably would have been alive today!

We may recall that Mahatma Gandhi did just so, and after India's independence in 1947, he refused to hold any political post and thus passed into the history forever.

In 1972, Bangladesh was in ruins after the liberation war. The physical infrastructure was badly damaged and the Central Bank was empty. A member of the Cabinet at that time himself told the foreign press many years later and I quote: "None of

Art Buchwald's COLUMN

Object of His Affection

SINCE the Supreme Court ruled that a woman may sue if she believes she has been harassed, men have been wary of making moves that would bring them in front of a grand jury.

Dellah Frescoe recently came into my office. She was about to shake hands with me when I asked her to leave the door open. "Legally," I said, "I can't touch you with a 10-foot pole."

"I'm just playing it safe in case this visit turns out to be an abusive one. What can I do for you?"

"I came to you because I have a problem. I'm in love with Charles Kildair, and he is in love with me."

"What's the problem?"

"He won't touch me. He's afraid I'll accuse him of sexual harassment. Charles's brother is a lawyer and he advised Charles to play it safe."

"How can Charles show his affection for you if he won't touch you?"

"I asked him the same question and he said that he would do it verbally, and I could reply in kind."

"I assume this is not satisfactory."

"Well, it leaves a lot to be desired. A girl likes to get kissed once in a while if she's in love. I offered to sign a statement saying that I wouldn't sue him if he held me in his arms at the movies."

"And what came of that?"

"Charles's brother said it wouldn't suffice if someone reported us to a special prosecutor."

"I said, 'If Charles really loves you, he would take a chance — even if it means 10 years in prison.'"

"I don't know how much passion he would put into kissing me if he knew it could lead to perjury."

"I told her: 'This is a tough case. People have to show affection for each other if they are in love. That's what all the songs are about. Have you spoken to your lawyer about this?'"

"Yes. He advised me not to make the first move on Charles. If Charles wants to kiss me, we should find a third party to witness it. If he wants to go even further, we would ask five or six people to look on. They can testify that it was consensual and that both of us were trembling at the same time."

"This was a difficult situation," I told Dellah. "The rules of love are different from the rules of the court. There are only two choices. You either have to find a fiancée who is not afraid of getting physical, or one who doesn't have a lawyer for a brother."

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