

## Brick factories generate killer pollution

*Time for a movement to begin*

In simple terms, Dhaka's brick making factories are not just producing bricks but also generating pollution at a level which is choking the city to death. Although there are regulations governing such production processes, nothing is stopping the emission of deadly fumes that has given the sector such a poisonous reputation. It also seems obvious that neither the regulators nor the agencies are enabled enough to tackle the problem.

No less than 6000 brick kilns are operating on the outer skirts of the city and spewing out fumes that are creating manifold health problems. However, the connection between environmental pollution and the causal factors are rarely recognized. Which is why there is focus on the Environment Conservation Act but the Brick Burning Ordinance is not updated. Although limits exist on the number of kilns that can operate in the city there is no supervision of the brick supply sector itself. Plus, the demand from the housing sector itself is so high that the laws of economics encourage black market operations. The fact that the Environment Ministry is unaware that existing regulatory laws haven't changed while the Department of Environment waits to amend it shows that lack of co-ordination has further aggravated the problem.

Hollow building blocs have been in the market for the last five years as a substitute for bricks. They are in fact cheaper, safer and well tested but lack of advertisement and limited production capacity prevent their greater use.

The existing laws will have to be amended and adjusted to suit contemporary needs. The production sector of the building industry will also require a policy that satisfies the building sector's demand. Environmental concern will have to recognize market realities and it's best to look for production options that already exist. And since they do, support for non-polluting production units should form part of the thrust.

In case of polybags the government moved because the level of advocacy had reached a point of demand. Right now the housing demand outweighs concern for pollution. It's up to the activists, including the media, to start a movement while arguing for the alternatives to let Dhaka breathe and live.

## Agni missile test

*Regional stability under thicker clouds*

INDIA'S test-firing of another missile in the Agni series, capable of carrying a ton of nuclear payload to a distance of 700 kilometers, seems set to aggravate the arms race in South Asia. Its immediate impact is likely to be the heightening of military tensions between India and Pakistan they can ill-afford having regard to the six-week-long massing of 8,00,000 troops across their borders.

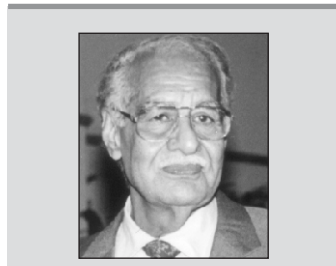
India's sense of achievement in terms of ballistic missile acquisition has been summed up by Professor Brahma Chellany of strategic studies at the Centre for Policy Research in New Delhi in the following words: The present feat "is a strategic addition to the nuclear arsenal aimed at Pakistan. So far Prithvi missile (the short-range one) dominated the scene here. Now, New Delhi is capable of striking Pakistan from anywhere in India...."

To jog the memory a little, when India had successfully test-fired Agni-II in April 1999, Pakistan was to follow suit in a week's time by testing her Ghori-II and Shaheen. Islamabad's reactions to India's latest Agni test have been predictably condemnatory but not instantly indicative of an immediate intent to carry out any reprisal missile tests. One hopes very much that these do not happen in view of the highly bellicose positioning of troops along the Indo-Pak border and the LOC in Kashmir. Indian Home Minister LK Advani has lately given to understand that New Delhi will keep its troops massed along the border so long as she is not 'satisfied' with Pakistan's actions against 'cross-border terrorism'. So, tensions remain bottled in, as it is, and no compounding of the same should be entertained in a right frame of mind.

Apparently, India has Prithvi with Pakistan in view and Agni with China on her mind. Pakistan has her versions and China has a range of intercontinental ballistic missiles. All of these conjure up dangerous intra-and inter-regional scenarios.

Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee has Justified the missile test on Friday asserting that it was solely aimed to strengthen national security; but to this we must say that national security of India can not be seen in isolation from the South Asian security concerns, let alone the extended Chinese dimension to them. The race for nuclear deterrence is the other name for nuclear arms race. The sooner India and Pakistan realises this truism, the better for them it will be, and certainly better for the smaller countries of South Asia.

# Gandhi? He doesn't live here anymore



**KULDEEP NAYYAR**  
*writes from New Delhi*

THREE bullet shots. And the man called Mahatma Gandhi was no more. A Hindu fanatic killed the father of the nation.

This happened 54 years ago on this day. Only a few weeks earlier Gandhi had said: "What greater folly can there be than claiming that Hindustan is only for Hindus and Pakistan for Muslims alone."

Still New Delhi had balked at paying Rs. 55 crore to Pakistan even after settling the division of assets between the two countries. Gandhi made the Indian government pay, re-announcing his life-long principle: "Love begets love." It was an ugly atmosphere of hatred which he was fighting.

Partition had taken the toll of 10 lakh people and uprooted many more lakhs. The anger in India was focused on Muslims and Pakistan had pushed out nearly all non-Muslims. Men had become beasts, as Gandhi had said. He was sad and disappointed. This was not the India of his dreams. Leaders tried to revive confidence among Muslims. Rajendra Prasad, then chairman of the constituent assembly, convened the Communal Harmony Committee of more than 100 members of every faith. They delivered to Gandhi a single pledge "to end discrimination against Muslims." A

forlorn Maulana Abul Kalam Azad spent most of his time in the Jama Masjid area ensuring Muslims' safety. Jawaharlal Nehru and Sardar Patel marshalled all resources of the state to combat rioting. Still, conspirators, terrorists and fanatics came from nowhere to destroy the pluralistic society Gandhi had tried to build. The fire of communal frenzy raged unabated. What it put out was, ironically, Gandhi's own life. Everything froze in its tracks - crime as well as callousness. A shocked nation

run. They were considered Babu's killers. Political parties with communal bias were decimated at the polls. Even a wisp of parochialism was openly denounced. We began to inhale secular air once again.

Whatever experts may say, Gandhi's martyrdom protected the country from the hot wind of communalism for nearly four decades. Slowly and gradually, communalists came out of their holes in which they had hidden themselves when the sun of secularism was shining. Complacent

constitution to overcome the Supreme Court's judgment on the maintenance to a divorcee, Shah Bano, and pleasing Hindus by opening the locks at the disputed Babri masjid. Rajiv polarised the society. LK Advani's rath yatra did the rest. Many people were killed in its wake. The demolition of the masjid, followed by communal riots and bomb blasts in Mumbai, more or less, finished whatever was left of Gandhi's heritage. The nation looked stark naked without his skimpy clothes. The manner in

the tiers of establishment is frightening. There has been great erosion of secular values. In the name of cultural entity, we have been swamped with communal thoughts and communal actions. We are feeling increasingly helpless.

We must eliminate communalism which has spread its tentacles in the last few years. Civil service, the police - everything is getting more and more contaminated. At the time of entry, there is still a check on whether a candidate has been a member of the communist party but

fight communalism. In fact, religious fundamentalism, which some political parties are fanning for electoral gains, can seriously harm the country's integrity. Those who are trying to rebuild the Ram temple at the place where the Babri masjid stood before demolition are striking at the roots of secularism. We have a difficult task because the ruling BJP's own agenda is to rebuild the temple at the disputed site. MPs of the party have been asked to give moral support to the cause. How can the ruling party take such a stand? And the Home Minister takes pride in saying that his rath yatra was like Gandhi's Dandi march. It is like comparing the sublime with the ridiculous.

I am amused to find Advani presiding over the launch of a book on Mahatma Gandhi. If he is trying to make a u-turn, let him copy Musharraf who is almost denouncing the two-nation theory, the thesis on which Pakistan was won. There are many Advanis lurking in the government. Atal Behari Vajpayee's unequivocal attitude and the imbecility of secular forces only make it more tragic. Strange, in a left-inclined state like Kerala, secular people indulged in communal riots recently.

What the communal elements have not yet appreciated is that pluralism is what is keeping India united and democratic.

Our secular credentials will be judged by the feeling of equality we give the minorities. Probably a movement needs to be initiated to make Gandhi's words - Hindus and Muslims are my two eyes - come true. Let his martyrdom day begin the process.

Kuldeep Nayyar is an eminent Indian columnist.

## BETWEEN THE LINES

**Our secular credentials will be judged by the feeling of equality we give the minorities. Probably a movement needs to be initiated to make Gandhi's words - Hindus and Muslims are my two eyes - come true. Let his martyrdom day begin the process.**

groped for light, which Gandhi had provided. There was also a feeling of guilt, the realisation how hatred had blinded people.

A mountain of grief fell on us: the Punjabis, the worst sufferers. I remember how we, the refugees, blamed Gandhi all the time. But the moment we heard of his assassination, we put water on the fire burning in our kitchens, a custom when someone from the family died. We were angry with Gandhi but it was like a child showing his temper. "We will not run to him now for advice and seek solace from him and that is a terrible blow," Nehru said it for all.

However, Gandhi's assassination made a sea change in the atmosphere. The country turned over a new leaf of love and amity. None dared to talk in communal terms. The public pounced on whoever did. Fanatics were on the

liberals never bothered about their nefarious activities. So much so, the communalists "owned" Gandhi and also became part of the resistance built against the authoritarian rule of Mrs Indira Gandhi during the emergency.

Dangers of dictatorship pushed back fears of communalism. The emergency provided an opportunity when even known fanatics jettisoned their separatist agenda and joined the battle for restoration of democracy. The Jana Sangh merged with the Janata Party. But it turned out that it had not snapped its ties with the RSS, contrary to the undertaking given to Jayaprakash Narayan who had brought disparate elements together against the autocratic regime.

Gandhi's India was really buffeted by Rajiv Gandhi's naive: placating Muslims by amending the

which the Gandhians were beaten up at Ayodhya for their protest on the day the Babri masjid was demolished showed the country's respect for Gandhi. A caustic comment by a Muslim MP in the Rajya Sabha shook me the other day. He said that even after 55 years of independence, Muslims felt insecure and unwanted. In my speech I said that if that was how the Muslim community felt, there was something wrong with the Hindus, who constituted 80 per cent of the population. "It is the duty of the majority to ensure that the minorities had a sense of belonging, not alienation." I have found the same feeling of not being treated fairly growing among the Christians. It must be really bad because they are the most tolerant lot. The extent to which Hindutva has permeated our society, the education system and

there is no bar on those who have had communal affiliations. The Intelligence Bureau keeps a tab on people with radical, not parochial, views.

Pakistan's fundamentalism owes most to government servants and police. There even the military, which was 'islamised' by General Zia-ul-Haq, needed to be cleansed. President Pervez Musharraf's determination to convert his theocratic country into a modern one will be tested when he initiates action against fundamentalists in the services and the ISI. Still his announcement is praiseworthy. There is not even a semblance of fight by the government against communal forces in India.

Our war against terrorism or confrontation against Pakistan does not in anyway affect our resolve to

# English as a second language: A priority programme

**SHAMSUL HOQUE**

THE issue of English Language Teaching (ELT) is high on the incumbent government's agenda. It has already spelt out plans to make English a second language at all levels of education in the country. We appreciate the government policy for its intention to reinstate English in a bid to halt the damage already done by neglecting the language over the years.

If English is made a second language in our national curriculum (it is a foreign language at the moment), its status will definitely be upgraded in terms of development of communication, IT and study skills for appropriate use both in and outside the country. These are the skills essential for our economic survival. Our young generation, particularly school- and college-goers who either drop out and look for a vocation or who will pursue higher studies, must acquire proficiency in this particular field to cope with today's highly competitive world.

Therefore, English thus upgraded as a second language will not be just a language - it will be an indispensable resource for alleviating poverty and improving the quality of life in the country.

However, to reap the utmost benefit of making English a second language in Bangladesh, we have to design, develop and introduce English language programmes that is suitable, affordable and effective.

We have compulsory English courses from grades one to twelve. These courses, though fairly well designed, are not producing the desired end result. Of the many factors responsible for the negative effect, three are most dominant: little or no opportunity for the students to use English in real-life circumstances, lack of appropriate training for the teachers, and absence of a suitable and well-coordinated ELT system in the country. To address these issues both short- and long-term steps should be taken simultaneously.

**Short-term steps**  
**Introduce short non-formal English language proficiency courses**

Side by side with the mainstream

compulsory courses, non-formal English language proficiency courses should be introduced in the country. With policy and technical support of the government, these courses will be run at the government colleges and schools on a self-finance basis.

The good news is that the government has already introduced, as part of its 100-day programme, a three-month proficiency course at some government colleges. The same course will be introduced at 64 government colleges in as many districts. This is a timely step taken to cater to the needs of the college dropouts. However, similar courses should be initiated at the secondary level to reach the same kind of benefits to the school dropouts, as well.

These short courses will be run in batches of appropriate size (each batch having 30 to 35 learners) and are aimed to provide intensive practice both in oral and written communications, IT and study skills, which is often not possible in the mainstream classes conducted by untrained teachers.

**Introduce crash training programmes**

Generally, the training courses in ELT offered at the Teacher Training Colleges (TTCs) and Primary Training Institutes (PTIs) for the secondary and primary teachers respectively are inadequate (only 50 to 60 hours in a 10- to 12-month course).

Also, the number of training colleges (about 25 including public and private) and institutes (54) cannot train the huge numbers of teachers who teach English in about 4,000 secondary and 300,000 primary schools. So, imparting training to all these teachers through these inadequate formal courses will take decades. Most importantly, there is an acute shortage of trainers who are up to the mark in Communicative Language Teaching (CLT).

As a result, the existing courses fail to prepare the teachers both at primary and secondary levels for the CLT. The short-term remedy to these problems, leading to the long-term solution, is to introduce short and effective crash courses throughout the country. Since this is an enormous task, local and private

initiatives underpinned by government support would be a step forward. Again, the good news is that outside the existing formal training programmes, initiatives have already been taken. The National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB), a Ministry of Education semi-autonomous body, with the help of English Language Teaching Improvement Project (ELTIP), has already started a three-day programme to train 20 batches of secondary English teachers throughout the country.

Most encouragingly, some NGOs have already started training courses at different schools on a self-finance basis. Foundation for Educational Research, Planning and Teachers Development (FERPTD), an NGO based in Dhaka, and Female Secondary Students Assistance Project (FSSAP) already held their first short training course for secondary English teachers in Narsingdi, Sreepur and Gazipur respectively.

With the introduction of the communicative syllabuses, textbooks and assessment system at primary and higher secondary levels, most teachers not trained in the CLT would find it difficult to teach and test their students. Being aware of the need for training in the CLT they are now becoming more and more motivated to finance training for themselves. So, these short programmes if continued permanently through private initiatives on a self-finance basis will go a long way to meeting the training need in the CLT in the country.

**Long-term steps**  
**Introduce a permanent ELT system**

Training the teachers for conducting both short and long courses is crucial for improving English language teaching and learning; and in order to give English a second language status, a permanent ELT system has to be developed in the country. However, to do that we do not have to start from the scratches. An efficient ELT system has already been developed by English Language Teaching Improvement Project (ELTIP).

Co-funded by the Bangladesh government and the Department for International Development (DFID)

of the UK, the ELTIP has made some remarkable progress in the ELT. The ELTIP has set up four Regional Resource Centres (RRCs) and 12 Satellite Resource Centres (SRCs) at government TTCs and some government schools across the country. The centres provide necessary books, journals and equipment for training English language teachers at the secondary level.

Thirty-five trainers trained in the UK and in the country also have been training the secondary English teachers on how to teach English communicatively.

The ELTIP has developed a training system suitable for teachers' professional development and language improvement in Bangladesh.

The ELTIP has introduced communicative textbooks up to the SSC and HSC levels. If trained teachers teach these books, students will learn English by practising the four basic language skills, namely listening, speaking, reading and writing. Once this 'teaching-learning strategy' becomes sustainable in the country, the students will not be required to memorise the textbook contents or depend on the notes to pass the examinations.

Practising the language skills in classrooms with the help of communicative textbooks will enable the students to perform better in the examinations.

Thus, the ELT capacities already built up by the ELTIP over a period of more than three years could be conveniently and fruitfully used in setting up any new project for upgrading the standards of English in terms of both teaching and learning in Bangladesh.

**Make the Master's degree in English language a requirement for teachers at the higher secondary level**

At present, someone having a second class Master's degree in English may become an English teacher at the higher secondary level. This 'Master's in English' is, in fact, 'Master's in English literature', whereas national curriculum provides for teaching English language at this level. Moreover, a teaching

certificate is not mandatory for the higher secondary teachers, nor is there any system of in-service training for them.

Hence, most of these teachers generally follow traditional methods (based mainly on lecture) which they have inherited from their own teachers at the university. As a result, asking them to teach the recently developed language textbook, using the CLT, is like trying to push a square peg in a round hole. This situation is responsible for the deterioration of the standard of teaching and learning at this stage. This has snowball effect on other stages, too. The dropouts at the higher secondary stage are usually primary teachers or go to tertiary stage with poor English, and in either case they are likely to become misfits. Therefore, as a recruitment policy, a Master's in English language should be a pre-requisite for these teachers. And to cater to this need, all the general public universities and some good private universities should introduce Honours and Master's courses in Teaching English as a Second/Foreign Language (TESL/TEFL) and Applied Linguistics.

**Set up a National English Language Centre (NELC)**

All the ELT initiatives and programmes, both formal and non-formal, public and private, both government- and donor-funded, are being undertaken and implemented mainly at primary and secondary levels. Similar initiatives and programmes are essential at the tertiary level too for the reason stated above. However, a serious lack of coordination is noticed among the existing programmes. There is no accreditation body to evaluate the standard of English courses offered at both public and private universities, and particularly at the language centres being run privately.

The English medium schools in the country choose their own textbooks and teaching methodology. As a result, the quality of English language teaching and learning between schools varies to a great extent.

A number of donor-funded projects are working at different levels (more than 20 projects only at

primary level). Most of these projects each have an English component to improve the ELT. But they do not have any inter-project coordination system. As a result, some of the efforts result in duplication of the ELT materials and methods.

To address all these issues, a National English Language Centre should be set up at national level. Our neighbouring countries like India, Sri Lanka, Thailand and Malaysia have English language centres at national as well as regional level.

The main functions of the centre will be:

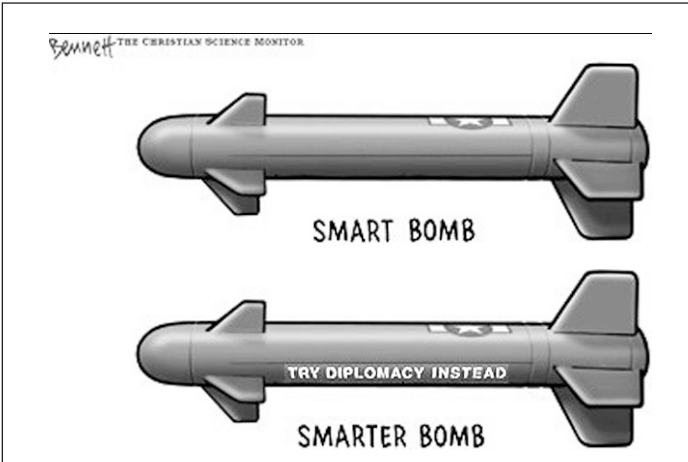
- 1) To work as an accreditation body for all the ELT programmes in the country
- 2) To assist and develop training and learning materials
- 3) To coordinate the ELT activities across different levels - primary, secondary, higher secondary and tertiary - to ensure their relevance and interdependence
- 4) To help monitor these activities at all levels and provide feedback to the Ministry of Education and relevant organisations/institutions
- 5) To liaise with the Ministry of Education and other relevant bodies to keep them up to date about with the latest developments in the ELT around the world
- 6) To carry out a publicity campaign through mass media, i.e. newspapers, newsletters, journals, radio and TV to familiarise all the stakeholders with, and promote, any new approach and methodology suitable for the ELT in Bangladesh, and
- 7) To carry out research on the ELT issues

Managing changes, especially in education, cannot be done overnight - it can be done only through a process undertaken jointly by the government and private sectors. However, if the proposed short- and long-term measures are carried out under the guidance of, and in cooperation with, an autonomous ELT organisation like the suggested NELC, the desired change - to make English a second language - will not take long to take place. And the sooner it happens, the better it is for the country.

Shamsul Hoque is former professor and ELT adviser, Bangladesh Open University

## TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR

### Lucky Afghans!



**Bomb drops, aid drops**

The US has promised an impressive US\$296 million for the reconstruction of Afghanistan. Well, if you help

in reconstruction, why destroy in the first place?  
**Obaidul Hamid, on e-mail**

### We are not interested

From now on, no VIPs should be allowed to obstruct any public thoroughfare at the expense of general public.

Secondly, we came to know that Sheikh Hasina wants to address the nation through the state media. But we are not at all interested in this political leader after the way her party castigated the former President Shahabuddin Ahmed.  
**Nasir, on e-mail**

### Norms of journalistic objectivity

According to widely recognised journalistic standards; editorial comments are reserved for the editorial page. Certainly a reader does not anticipate finding editorial comment in the headlines of news articles.  
If *The Daily Star* wishes to sug-

gest that Golam Azam is the last person in the world who should be inaugurating a minority convention, it has the right and the means to do so. But to express this opinion by putting an exclamation mark on the headline of a small news article on the front page ("Golam Azam to inaugurate minority convention!", January 22) looks unprofessional.  
**ML on e-mail**

### Taliban connection in Bangladesh?

In his article "Taliban connection in Bangladesh? Please watch your words" M Gholam Mostafa made some comments that I think needs to be pointed out:  
According to the writer Sheikh Hasina said "the present government of Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) has linking with the Taliban".

As far as I know the present government is BNP with Four-Party Alliance as under that banner they participated in the Election. Didn't some of the election slogan of that alliance was similar to "Amra sobai Taliban, Bangladesh hobay Afghani" (?). As far as I remember one of the candidates threatened to use the Taliban if required. And Jamaat always supported the Taliban. So which part of the comment that the in-term govt has linking to Taliban is wrong? Is it that as US now hates Taliban so those who supported them will just hide? Isn't that's what called hypocrisy?

The WTC death toll is not '6000' it is less than 3500 and adding the airplane passengers, the total is around 4000.

Carter's successor was not Clinton but Regan.

"The October poll-results overturned the apple-cart on Awami

League giving BNP a thumping victory" this is again a very wrong statement as AI lost to BNP-Jamaat and others. According to *The Daily Star* post election breakdown the vote parts were similar to following:  
AL: 40 per cent  
BNP+Jamaat+others: 44 per cent.  
"...thousands of our expatriates already beleaguered after September 11"...is a very untrue statement. Neither me nor any of my known Bangladeshis in US have been beleaguered in any other way but being Muslim (even that is no different from what we Bangladeshis face in our own country normally).

The only correct part of the article was that "Our leaders aren't either conversant with diplomatic parlance or incapable (Probably the writer meant "Capable") of comprehending nuance and connotation of words spoken for consumption internationally."

At the end I request *The Daily Star* to check an article before printing for historical facts and grammar. An esteemed paper should always be responsible for the articles it publishes.  
**Talat Islam**  
**Los Angeles, USA**

### Is Shahrir Kabir right?

This has reference to your commentary on Shahrir Kabir's release (January 18). While I appreciate the points you have made favouring his release or treatment in prison, I make my reservation on his intention rather on his material activities.

Apparently all his shooting, interviews can be justified as you have tried. However he is among the few whose "fundamentalist theory, Rajakar attitude, liberation spirit" makes my head spin. "Ghadani" was very active during

the first half of 90's and no slogan was raised during the second half when he became active again just before the election. Anyway let the open hearted conscious people speak on the issue. My main point is not Shahrir's case, but strengthening the Judiciary. So many black laws were made during the post independent period and without any procrastinating effort. You ask for repealing a clause or a law, whole tenure is over nothing was done, hundreds of excuses.

You are busy publishing crispy news but measurably failed to build awareness or public pressure against successive rulers to keep their political promises.

The so-called civil society was cleverly and successfully manipulated by those corruptions.  
**M M Haque**  
**Jeddah**