

## Speedy trial tribunal law Govt must ensure uniform application

It would have taken a bit of patience and tolerance on part of the government to avoid acrimony over the passage of the Special Trial Tribunal Act, 2002 at the Jatiya Sangsad. Unfortunately, although quite expectedly, the treasury bench did not deem it necessary, disdainfully dismissing opposition views on and proposed amendments to the new law. The main opposition Awami League staged a walkout as the House passed the new legislation for special tribunals for speedy trial of such major offences as murder, rape and possession of illegal firearms or explosives or narcotics. Such a display of impatience and intolerance on one side and the fact that the new law empowers the government to select cases to be referred to the special tribunals on the other naturally casts doubt about uniform application of the legislation.

The AL lawmakers have already termed it "black, controversial, discriminatory and unconstitutional", echoing Leader of the Opposition Sheikh Hasina's fear that the law would be used against the political opponents of the ruling alliance. On the other hand, the law, justice and parliamentary affairs minister has assured the House that the new law is "not for political harassment". Hopefully, he has summed up the ruling alliance's attitude towards the speedy trial tribunal law. Should there be even one instance where referral of a case has political undertone, the government's credibility would be gravely compromised. And the government should know that better than anyone else.

Having said that we cannot help wonder what the government plans to do about the huge pile of cases pending with different tiers of the judiciary. By the law minister's own admission, there are some one million cases awaiting dispensation at different courts in the country. Marking out certain offences for speedy trial is indeed a wise move. However, unless the judicial logjam is sorted out soon, overall justice delivery system would continue to be, as a recent United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) report puts, inaccessible to and unaffordable for the poor and the marginalised section of society. Hopefully, the government will soon pay attention to it sooner than later.

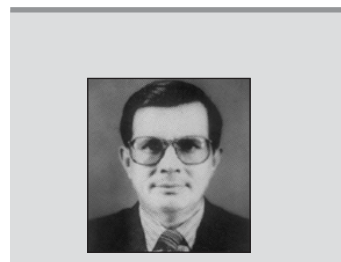
## Unplanned brick kilns Department of Environment must enforce its will

It is a very worrying news that thousands of brick kilns are back in business polluting the environment and creating severe health hazards, especially with winter setting in. We understand the need of brick kilns for our booming construction sector, but we fail to understand why there is no strict policy to regulate such unplanned and unauthorised placement of brick kilns all around the country. Though the concerned authority, Department of Environment (DOE), is reported to have taken some steps, it seems obvious that they were either not enforced or the brick kiln owners simply don't care. There has to be a proper guideline from the department about how many kilns should be allowed to operate in any particular area. And the owners just have to follow those guidelines without any argument.

It's extremely frustrating and unfortunate to learn that almost all the brick kilns in the country do not follow the Brick Kiln Ordinance, that they are fitted with chimneys without any filter, that most of the kilns don't have any proper licence to operate, that some of them use low quality coal or fuel wood. We have not seen the DOE to take any strict actions against those owners who have violated the rules, at least not to our knowledge. We can't ignore the risks these brick kilns impose on us any longer. Because of using coal with a very high sulphur content, the lands on which these brick kilns are built become less fertile, the thick black smoke causes health problems like nausea, headache, asthma etc as well as skin diseases. So the kilns cannot be allowed to operate wherever the owners feel like, they have to be shifted to a specialised area away from habitat.

The DOE deserves some kudos for being firm in making it compulsory for the owners to install 120 feet high chimneys in all the kilns, but even that has also not been effective thanks to no monitoring. We find it very hard to comprehend that owners can still get their licences renewed by giving written undertakings when none of them have made any efforts in installing high chimneys. Therefore we suggest that the concerned department sits down and takes up stringent measures to stop these kilns from operating. Otherwise we will continue to express our concern and the owners will continue to flout the rules.

# Agriculture: Merchants, middlemen and markets



ABDUL BAYES

AVAILABLE empirical evidences amply demonstrate that the developments in the agricultural sector -- with more or less self-sufficiency in staple foodstuff -- have helped to keep the economy on an even keel. Growth rate of per capita income at about 4 per cent per annum, coupled with various forward and backward linkages, paved ways for a limited but expanding diversification into new crops and for generation of more employment in non-farm activities. On the way to diversification, however, appropriate technologies were adopted. To mention a very few, discernible developments are in evidence in the area of horticultural crops (fruits and vegetables) with a noticeable increase in the area under cultivation. The area under maize production is reported to have risen from about four thousand to 26 thousand ha within the last few years. The use of single axle tractors for draught purposes point to another development. The expansion of the poultry sub-sector in the wake of burgeoning demand in urban areas boosted service sector activities. By and large, these changes demonstrate that the Bangladeshi farmers are willing to adopt new technologies to make a cost-effective response to the market signals. There are now, in evidence, new merchants, middlemen and markets in rural areas. Again, there are now in place new infrastructures, institutions and innovations replacing the old and the outdated ones, partially or fully.

### Promoting profitable poultry

The livestock sector is a pointer to some of the dramatic developments. The sub-sector accounts for three per cent of GDP and 16 per cent of agricultural GDP. About one-fourth of the population on full time and half of the population on part time basis are reported to be engaged in livestock related activities for eking out a living. There has been a tremendous expansion in the growth of poultry population at all levels on the one hand and a decline in the number of draught animals on the other. The number of chickens and ducks roughly at 110

million -- almost one per head of the population of Bangladesh -- and the number of eggs at about 30 million speak of substantial growth over the years. While time and space would not allow us delve deep into the various elements of the sector, we would discuss a few. Let us pick up the poultry first.

Four types of poultry production system prevail in Bangladesh. First comes unimproved and unorganised village level poultry production. Almost all households -- from landless to land-rich -- have birds based on free range scavenging by local breeds. The productivity is very low but the eggs -- called *deshi* eggs --

Farmers tend to bank on markets for supplementary feed, look for special space in homestead for rearing birds and also try for treatment of the birds. As against the earlier system, the service sector sets in to take care of trade. Scale of operation tends to go up and instead of selling by *halis*, eggs are now sold by dozens or hundreds. Still, middlemen or *beparis* link producers and consumers but not to the extent that the earlier traditional system demanded. To fetch a good return from additional investment, producers try to keep watch on all information: from input supply to the price of product. This system seemed to

be the cornerstone of the emergent system. Large number of sellers and competitive markets for poultry inputs and outputs are the special features of the new scenario. However, it should be mentioned here that feed quality and marketing remain as major constraints.

The last type of poultry rearing is large-scale intensive production as found in other countries of the world. It is mechanised and automated. It requires huge investment for vast tracts of lands where separate buildings would be set up for different processes (with reasonable distance), modern imported machines, air conditioned buses for

feeding and a gradual fall of the grazing land. With import liberalisation, agricultural mechanisation replaced animal power. However, the dairy sector seems to have displayed some resonance. Considerable expansion in the establishments of village milk production occurred, cooling and collection centers grew up in a number of locations. The milk from these centers are then collected by one of the three dairy companies which then process and pack the milk for urban consumers. The largest is the Milk-Vita -- a producer cooperative, the second is Arong Milk run by BRAC (NGO) and the

are collected from roadside collection points, few of which have all weather surfaces. Dhaka has no central wholesale market for horticultural crops.

### Agricultural exports?

Agricultural exports constitute roughly for one-fifth of total exports. Frozen foods (almost entirely shrimp), leather and jute account for virtually all-agricultural exports. The other agricultural exports include: vegetables, betel leaf, dry foods, horticultural products and biscuits. While Bangladesh is reported to have comparative advantage in some of the agricultural products, unfortunately exports of agricultural products could not stand up to the satisfaction.

The major constraints in the expansion of production and export of agro-processing products are different for different items. For example, processed food e.g. tomato based products/pickles lack economies of scale, face competition from imports and bear expensive loans; snack foods face shortage of raw ingredients; poultry processing face small local market and limited export opportunity, too high feed costs for commodity exports. It seems that for agro-processing sector to be vibrant, foreign direct investment would be needed.

The exports of agro-industrial products face many constraints and among those transport is at the top. Bureaucratic customs, shipping procedures and informal taxes -- called speed money -- allegedly add up to one-tenth of the total FOB value of products. Despite government's avowed interest in boosting exports, very little progress seems to have been made so far. Again, airfreight constitutes the biggest cost item for perishable crops. Poor packaging, lack of proper cooling and handling facilities and speed money for granting space etc tend to discourage exports. The facilities in the airport are outdated and with frequent power cuts, lead to increase the wastage of the perishable products.

### Concluding remarks

While growth in the non-rice agricultural production has been of appreciable extent, the institutions and policy parameters to meet the challenges of non-traditional agricultural exports and import substitution do not seem to have developed properly. It is time that joint venture projects should come up to make Bangladesh an exporter of agroprocessing products. It is time that an all out drive is directed towards the goal keeping in mind the inevitability that the golden days of the RMG are perhaps numbered.

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## BENEATH THE SURFACE

While growth in the non-rice agricultural production has been of appreciable extent, the institutions and policy parameters to meet the challenges of non-traditional agricultural exports and import substitution do not seem to have developed properly. It is time that joint venture projects should come up to make Bangladesh an exporter of agroprocessing products. It is time that an all out drive is directed towards the goal keeping in mind the inevitability that the golden days of the RMG are perhaps numbered.

tend to fetch a significant premium owing to different taste. On a weight to weight basis, the *deshi* eggs are said to be sold for twice as much as battery hen eggs. In fact, this rudimentary and traditional type of production had long been the dominant system in rural Bangladesh. This is a very low-cost but high-risk rearing system. Households make little investments on feed and husbandry and there remains great risk of losing the herds in the case of diseases.

Under the traditional scenario, the eggs are sold rarely by dozens but mostly by 'halis' (four units). Again, eggs are sold mostly to middlemen (called 'beparis') at homesteads rather than to the markets and directly to consumers. More often than not, neighbours buy eggs but pay back by eggs. Middlemen become the main source of market information and there is little symmetry in information generation. Marketing system is exploitative, so to say. By and large, the scavengers are facing small markets with growing competition from intensive production discussed in subsequent paragraphs.

With the passage of time, however, there evolved another system. It is an improved version of the earlier rudimentary type. In this case, in addition to free scavenging, the farmers are provided with Fayoumi-crossbred birds and supplementary feed. This calls for additional costs and investments but risk-averse as they are, farmers usually keep additional costs and risks to a minimum. The productivity increase is marginal and profit level is slim. Commercialisation is the key to production in such a system.

work well in rural areas mostly by women under the aegis of the micro-credit organizations.

The third type of poultry production relates to small-scale intensive type. It is a semi-automated system. In this system, individuals or groups of producers get together and establish small batteries with anything from below 100 to over 100 hybrid birds. The system encompasses a full package of vaccination, veterinary care and feeding. The system, reportedly, has grown very successfully mostly in and around urban centers and has generated a market for locally grown and processed maize-based chicken feed. This is the stage where traditional rearing gave way to modern rearing and commercialisation of poultry products outpaced subsistence rearing.

The traditional marketing chains gave way to new chains. In the peri urban areas of Dhaka, women involved in poultry rearing are reported to rely less on middlemen or *beparis* as the main source of market information. With the Village Pay Phones of the Grameen Bank, these women are increasingly depending on outside sources of market information through cross checking. They tend to call urban areas or nearby peri urban areas for information and reap home a better return through haggling. In one sense, mobile phones displaced middlemen as the arbiter of poultry product marketing. Again, the mortality rate of the chicks substantially came down as a result of the quick contacts with experts through telephones. The direct contact between the buyers and the sellers

transport, imported feed and full time care. The output is supplied to the wholesalers directly. Poultry feed mostly come from Thailand, Sri Lanka but supplied by agencies sitting in Singapore. There are a large number of importers trading for thin margin. Bangladesh has reportedly grown competitive in the production of day-old chicks. For example, few years back, the price of day-old chick was Tk 26 in Bangladesh compared to Tk.16 in India. But now the average wholesale price is Tk.18 in Bangladesh. This happened in the face of India using local chemicals and feed compared to Bangladesh, which has to heavily rely on imports. The growing competitiveness could be added, among other factors, to tariff free imports of feedstuffs and vaccines.

The poultry feed market is growing slowly. There are now, reportedly, 12 firms producing poultry feeds and monthly production is 25 thousand tons. A mechanised and scientific system of distribution began to develop. From the airport, the eggs are placed on air-conditioned buses to reach farms. After hatching, the chicks are kept for few weeks in the farm. The chicks are sold to the agents-about 100 in Bangladesh -- who sell them to buyers at local level. The local level agents sell them to farmers. In the whole integration process, development of information communication, physical infrastructure and supportive policies of the successive governments played a part.

### Milk and meat

As far as bovines are concerned, the number of oxen drastically dwindled with the rise in the cost of

third is Tudor run by Grameen Bank. Milk Vita collects and processes milk from 450 producer co-operatives and handles 29 million litres while others handle 20 million litres. However, the total trade of the three companies comes to three per cent of total production. Although Dhaka remains the major source of destination, attempts are being made to extend the facilities to small towns and cities. That would require investment in chilling centers and chilling-cum-processing plants to supply small urban centers.

The markets for milk and poultry products are reported to be generally the most efficient with very modest increase in price, spread of producers and consumers. This suggests that the market is growing competitive and close to saturation. As opposed to this, however, the market for meat is considered to be the least developed one. Allegedly there are no modern slaughterhouse facilities and hides are being damaged by poor *battoir* practices. The hides are collected by thousands of 'beparis' who act as middlemen in the chain. There is no direct contact between the sellers and the buyers.

With the establishment of Bangabandhu Bridge considerably diminishing the distance between the North and the South -- cropping patterns and the types of crops grown have been changed in northern areas. The area under fruits, vegetables and other perishable products increased substantially. A notable feature of commodity trading in that part of Bangladesh is a general shortage of physical market facilities. Most crop commodities

# Hindutva vs sanity: The real stakes in Gujarat



PRAFUL BIDWAI  
writes from New Delhi

IN Gujarat, *Hindutva* is playing for broke: all or nothing! The VHP has launched an all-out hysterical attack not just on the Constitution and all statutory authorities, but on the BJP's own national leaders. It has accused even the headline Mr L.K. Advani of having "betrayed" *Hindutva*.

For the *sangh parivar*, the coming election in Gujarat is a "make or break" affair. This time around, the state BJP has not distanced itself from the VHP's incendiary anti-Constitutional, anti-secular campaign which seeks to further inflame communal passions.

That's why both Mr Vajpayee and Mr Advani have agreed to campaign for the party under Mr Modi's leadership.

In Gujarat, an ugly tussle is on between the politics of consensus and sanity, on the one hand, and crass sectarianism, intimidatory politics and hysterical communalism, on the other. The EC will have to monitor the election process in Gujarat very, very closely to ensure that it's not hijacked by

inflamed passions.

At the party level, the Gujarat contest is bipolar: between the Congress, and a BJP which has morphed itself into a virulent adjunct of the VHP, nourished by the poison of the terrible post-Godhra violence. The VHP has branches in 55 per cent of Gujarat's 18,600 villages. It controls the BJP at

the grassroots level. Without the VHP, the BJP's

and his stormtrooper tactics, that the BJP is being radically reshaped in Gujarat.

Mr Modi has firmly refused moderation. He maintains a steady outflow of venomous rhetoric about "Italian dogs" and "Mia Musharrafs progeny". He attacks the very concepts of tolerance and social harmony.

Mr Modi believes himself to be a messianic *Hindutva* figure -- and not

economically and socially dominant -- aren't solidly behind the BJP. Their leader Keshubhai is unreconciled to Mr Modi's takeover of the party.

Following the anti-Muslim pogrom, there is reportedly an 11.6 per cent vote-swing against the BJP. Many of its leaders feel shaky. More than 20 MLAs, including Mr Modi himself, have changed their constituency. Opposing the BJP is the combative Mr Vaghela, with an

The BJP has lost every single state, municipal and panchayat election in the past four and half years (barring, with qualifications, Goa, where it failed to win a clear majority). The party has proved unfit to rule, and bankrupt on policy, organisational qualities and governance. Its claim to be a "party with a difference" stands badly exposed -- witness the obscene, naked power struggle in Uttar Pradesh, with all its

attack on all liberal ideas and institutions, and politically disenfranchising the religious minorities so as to turn them into second-class citizens without rights.

In this enterprise, Mr Modi is backed by apex-level BJP leaders, including Mr L.K. Advani, and also young, super-ambitious men without a base, like Messrs Venkaiah Naidu and Arun Jaitley.

If the Gowalkar Programme triumphs in Gujarat, Mr Modi will bid for the BJP's national leadership. He won't allow "effete", aged, "spent" leaders like Mr Vajpayee to obstruct the Programme's implementation. One immediate gainer from Mr Modi's ascendancy will be Mr Arun -- who has linked his own career to the events in Gujarat. But Mr Advani too will have to play second fiddle to the Fuehrer.

A Modi victory, which triggers off a furious inner-party struggle, will have one of two consequences. The Vajpayee leadership, already dispirited and compromised, could collapse, yielding to an aggressively communal, ultra-sectarian dispensation -- a kind of Hindu Taliban, which will push India back towards the Middle Ages.

This will be a social and political nightmare.

Alternatively, the BJP, and with it, the NDA, will come tumbling down like a house of cards. Then, at last, India could have a secular respite and return to its bread-and-butter agendas.

We must all devoutly hope for the second outcome -- in the interests of pluralism, social harmony, democracy and political decency

Praful Bidwai is an eminent Indian columnist.

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election campaign would be lifeless.

The VHP behaves like a neofascist movement or a form of mass mobilisation, much in the way that the precursors to the Nazis did in Germany, organising pogroms, spreading hatred against the Jews, stoking intensely national-supremacist ideas, and sowing the cult of authority.

Mr Narendra Milosevic Modi fashions himself as "Chhotu Sardar", a pitiful, super-communalised caricature of Vallabhbhai Patel, in the image of the Fuehrer himself. It is around his authoritarian personality, his politics of confronta-

just in Gujarat. Should the BJP win in Gujarat, Mr Modi will have a profound impact on the party nationally.

Contrary to propaganda, the BJP won't find it easy to win the election -- despite Gujarat's communal and caste polarisation. If the 1998 election pattern repeats itself -- a big if this -- the Congress' vote (35 per cent), combined with Mr Shankarsinh Vaghela's (13 per cent), will outweigh the BJP's 45 per cent.

True, the pogrom hadn't happened in 1998. But now, the Patels -- one-fourth of the population, and

energetic campaign on *shanti, salamati* and *samridhhi* (peace, security and prosperity).

The Gujarat election is a contest not just between the two parties, but between two radically different agendas: governance and development-related issues vs issues of identity and insecurity. The BJP is focused exclusively on the second; the Congress is struggling with the first.

If the BJP loses in Gujarat, after raising the stakes sky high, it will experience its rudest-ever political shock. The defeat will greatly accelerate its downturn nationally.

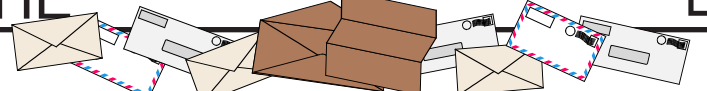
defections.

If it loses in Gujarat, the BJP will probably shrink in the next Lok Sabha to under 100 seats.

However, if the BJP wins in Gujarat -- not necessarily on the identity platform, but because of its relatively large base and the state's long history of communal and caste polarisation -- it will see this as the triumph of its hate-based politics at the core of which lies the original Programme of the RSS's most important ideologue, Madhav Sadashiv Golwalkar.

The Golwalkar Programme consists in unleashing a frontal

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



### Miss World pageant and Nigeria riot

I feel surprised when people brand Muslim youths in general as extremists, radicals, opposing progress and so on and so forth. I don't want to comment on the wisdom behind choosing a volatile country like Nigeria to hold the religiously and morally controversial event of beauty contest. But what shocks me is the extent of arrogance in publishing a seriously pejorative article about our Prophet in a Nigerian newspaper. When Muslim youths react to such irresponsible journalism, people call them different names. But are not the editor and the publishers of that newspaper responsible for all the recent casualties of communal riots in Nigeria? Mahmud Portsmouth, UK

### Advertisements

This has been on my mind for some time and I am sure it has been on the minds of many others too. Do I buy *The Daily Star* to read a front page, which is 50% filled with advertisements? The sponsor pays *The Daily Star* to publish the ad and subscribers pay *The Daily Star* to read it. Please pay attention to the subscribers as well. Fuad H. Mallick Gulshan, Dhaka

### "Army excesses at Rayerbazar"

This letter is in reference to the news item "Army excesses at Rayerbazar" (November 19). I have great respect for the army capturing the terrorists and crimi-

nals, and helping our under-funded and under-resourced police force to fight crime. However, I don't find any rationale for their rampage on unarmed tea-stall owners and customers. In fact, it seems very inhuman and primitive. Not everyone in Bangladesh is a practising Muslim. In fact, we have Hindus, Buddhists, and Christians amongst us. Even some Muslims cannot fast for medical reasons. Isn't it enough for the restaurant owners to put curtains in front of their restaurants in order to maintain the sanctity of Ramadan? We should remember that fasting by itself does not mean anything unless we can purge the evil out of us completely. Although it is foolish to compare my beloved motherland with USA, I think we have more human rights in US as non-citizens than some

Bangladeshis in Bangladesh. I can't imagine being beaten up by army or even by police even for breaking a law. Although the practice of fasting seems odd in this country of non-Muslims, I have not seen any denision, criticism, or disrespect from people here when I refused to eat in official parties during Ramadan. The rights of an individual have to be respected unless the exercise of that right directly harms another individual. M Hasan North Carolina, USA

### Army vs. civilians' right?

Whether one admits it or not, there exists two different group of people

in Bangladesh-- the armed forces and the civilians. The disparity between these two groups have been going on for such a long time that to most, it has become an acceptable practice. It's not just the Cantonment restriction (we already had a prolonged debate on that topic), but without a doubt, the armed force enjoy much higher (privileged) citizen rights, than that of other citizens.

We understand that the armed force is responsible for protecting our nation's sovereignty/security (both external and internal) and how important and dangerous their job is. I don't think any one would object if they get a handsome salary accordingly. But what is difficult to accept, is such open discrimination, when it comes to

basic citizens' rights, that only THEY seem to enjoy. What would be the harm if CMH or cantonment schools/colleges opened their wings for civilians as well? In a country where quality educational institutions and better health care facilities are a scarce resource, is it appropriate to make this distinction?

My question to our lawmakers and political leaders, doesn't this violate our Constitution? If, I am not mistaken Bangladesh Constitution clearly spells out, "No person/class will be discriminated on account of occupation or position he/she may be holding". Then how come only the armed forces enjoy various perks and privileges? MMJ

### Dhaka Baitul Aman demolition

Another example on how things can go terribly wrong when governments departments act on its own without reference to anything else. A road planning authority (in this case R & H) should have consulted with the local planning authority (the Municipality in this case) when determining the alignment of the road. If the building was already in place, considering its historical significance, attention should have been given for its continued existence. True, any land can be acquired for a public purpose. But not without looking at all other options. Surely bulldozing the buildings of significance cannot be the only option. Zarina Hossain

### Chittagong \*\*\*

The report of your correspondent on bulldozing the historic Baitul Aman at Chasara (November 20) reminds the mythical thrillers of early civilisation where a monarch used to utter a wish and supernatural forces immediately materialised the same. Of course, even in recent history we come across such fantasies irrespective of whether the monarch is a popular patriarch, a military dictator or a lawfully elected people's representative. I am curious to see whether a leader emerges in near (or even distant) future who would realise the ridiculousness of the situation. MAH Dhaka