

## DESA and DESCO come under fury

### Stern words welcome but not enough

**T**HE state minister concerned has done some tough talking to DESA and DESCO, the two state-run power service bodies. Iqbal Hassan Mahmood in a review meeting with the heads of the organisations gave them until the end of this year to improve their performance or shutter down.

The ultimatum has to be taken seriously by DESA and DESCO for three inter-related reasons. First of all, management has been dismal for whatever reasons; otherwise, how could the systems loss, especially pilferage of power and the bill default reach such unacceptable levels? Secondly, development works are caught up in stagnancy. But unimpeded implementation of projects in their hands and those in the pipeline is so crucial in terms of their future growth and expansion of quality services. Thirdly, such track-records of DESA and DESCO, if continued, could amount to courting a wholesale private sector participation in areas they are currently looking after.

DESA is under notice to realise arrear bills for the past three years by October 31 as per a cabinet directive issued earlier on. DESCO has to complete 60 per cent of the job assigned to it by December 31 this year and 'all tasks' for the current fiscal by May 31, 2004. The power ministry has rightly said that if the targets were achieved people wouldn't have suffered in the beginning of the summer season. So, project implementation in terms of capacity-building is one year behind. Minister Mahmood demurred at the fact that he didn't hear of any exemplary punishment being meted out against anyone in DESA.

The minister's chiding remarks, ultimatum and target-setting directives project the government's concern to see a turn-around in the power sector. Needless to say, it was time to take a strong position. However, the fact that DESA and DESCO have come to this desperate state, doesn't reflect very positively on the ministry itself. Yes, there has been lack of accountability and monitoring within the organisations, but if there were adequate supervision, auditing and monitoring from the top, things would have certainly improved earlier on.

Words are not enough. Simply by issuing orders, we cannot expect results as if by Aladdin's magic lamp. Administration by fiat can't do. There will have to be restructuring and reform of organisations coupled with monitoring of their activities on a constant basis from the ministries to free the utility services of corruption and ensure their optimal efficiency.

## A culpable offence

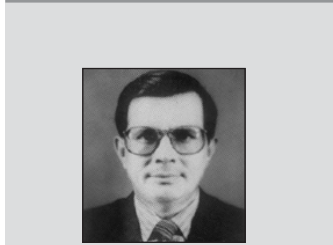
### Tree choppers be damned!

**Y**ET again, we hear of complete indifference to the sanctity of our surroundings by a group of greedy and selfish people. How else can we describe the felling of 12 thousand trees in an area spanning 24 acres of land just eight days after a nursery for medicinal plants was inaugurated there by the Minister for Environment. And that too in an area owned by the forest department. So naturally when the news came to his attention, the minister wanted to know how it happened and called an inter-ministerial meeting. The outcome of that meeting was even more revealing.

Apparently, the Deputy Commissioner of Gazipur leased the land to two private companies showing that the plot was actually owned by the land ministry! Can anything else be more confusing than this? But there doesn't seem to be any confusion in our mind that greed could have played a major role in the whole process. We hope the authority would follow up on the preliminary findings to get to the bottom of how the DC could lease out the land without informing the forest ministry. The government has to ensure punishment to those found guilty of the misdeed.

We would like to take the opportunity of commending environment minister, Shahjahan Siraj for recognising the wrong-doing and taking a quick and immediate step to set things right. But the episode was jarring enough to make one sit up and take note. But many a smaller incident is taking place surreptitiously. Maybe the minister can take a cue from this and be on guard against other possible encroachments on wooded areas, big or small. Frustratingly, in defiance of government orders and directives felling of trees has been resorted to by the vested quarters. This pathological apathy to environmental norms will have to be overcome not by exhortation but by deterrent legal measures.

## What they need is new knowledge



ABDUL BAYES

**A**LLOW me to talk about two federations of farmers. One lies in Tushvandar union of Lalmonirhat district called Tushvandar Federation of Farmers (TFF) and the other, in Mohendranagar union under the same district and is named as Mohendranagar Federation of Farmers (MFF). Both the locations are 1 to 2 hours drive from Rangpur. Farmers' cooperatives or federations are not new phenomena in this part of the world and hence should not inject any interest, whatsoever. But the reason I desired to drive there is the composition of the clients in the committee that the federations are comprised of. The members are drawn exclusively from households owning up to 100 decimals of land, called functionally landless and marginal households. It means, by and large, the federations that I am referring to are of the poor, by the poor and for the poor. In other words, these are not associations of the 'haves' but of the 'have-nots'. Quite contrast to some of the federations and cooperatives that we come across, the federations seemingly have higher levels of homogeneity. I was told that roughly one-third of the members are drawn from functionally landless groups (owning up to 50 decimals), one-third from marginal farm groups (owning 50 to 100 decimals) and 40 per cent member households have only homesteads. The federations average 350 members with women having due representations.

To become a member of the federation, the farmer groups have to be associated with at least five years with Rangpur Dinajpur Rural Services (RDRS). They should display some degree of social awareness, ability to absorb training inputs and eke out a substantial part of the livelihood from farming activities. And admitted, RDRS acts from behind the scene as 'friend, philosopher and guide' for the federations. An elected committee through direct franchise is running the federations. Women have reserved seats to be contested by women only but voted by both men and women. They can also, if they wish, contest in the open seats against their counter parts and some of them already established their

supremacy on that count.

Both the federations came into being in 1992 and at the moment own, on average, 50 decimals of land. Meantime, semi pucca office-cum training sheds, pucca seed godowns, drying facilities, rice mill and dryers have been made available in the premises of the federations. However, much of the infrastructural facilities have been financed by RDRS, possibly, to be recouped in course of time.

The federations have been fighting for the economic uplift of their members fraught with financial crisis. By

an even keel. Farms are our best friends and, perhaps, for ever. We never knew what farms could do for us. Now, these three things i.e. what, how and when do not need schools, colleges and universities to teach us. You see, recently, PETRRA-RDRS of IRR/DFID sponsored gave us some training on how to keep seeds and put seedlings. We have been keeping seeds but not the way they told us. We found that seed health is as good as human health. You see, we had no idea about seedlings maintaining distances or using one or two instead of five or more to get more output. We

found that seed health is as good as human health. You see, we had no idea about seedlings maintaining distances or using one or two instead of five or more to get more output. We

found that seed health is as good as human health. You see, we had no idea about seedlings maintaining distances or using one or two instead of five or more to get more output. We

## BENEATH THE SURFACE

Through various training and credit programmes, most of the moderate poor enabled themselves to uplift. To meet the Millennium Development Goal, we need to take account of the ultra poor that stand with no chance of a graduation... hope that innovative ideas, institutions and researches will address the problems of the ultra poor. What they need is some land and some knowledge...

the utilization reached there to talk about their hopes and aspirations, the members had learnt that credit is not the panacea to move out of pervasive poverty. "Credit does help at the initial stage to buy few bullocks, poultry birds etc. but to keep going for ever, you need something else" some male and female members put before me with certain levels of confidence. "What is that 'something else'?" I pretended to be ignorant of the subject and asked. One female member explained: "we never used the credit for agricultural production because we thought, given limited land and knowledge that we had before, agriculture would not be profitable for us. Vagaries of nature was another constraint. So, we banked on non-agricultural pursuits by using credit from RDRS. But, now we know that even 50 decimals of land can work like 100 decimals or so if we could apply knowledge about production practices. Second, we could realize that we can produce our own food at a higher cost in our own land and buy non-food items through income generation in non-farm sector. So, we told our husbands that we should directly help them in cultivation of crops so that they have two hands to reap home harvests. Of course, still we need credit but, perhaps, not so much as we need knowledge."

sowed, as we liked. But now, we feel the difference. There are many varieties of paddy we never heard of although they are high yielding and produced by our institutions like BRRI. Thus whether, water or pests management or crop diversification, we learnt from the schools at our homesteads and fields rather than from moha shikhs "the participants pinched me. I was informed that these poor farmers get together in the field to exchange views about problems and prospects. They call it field schools".

"What the federations are doing for you?" They talked of some services that are provided by the federations. For example, long before the Food for Education (FFE) scheme got under

through the federations. Likewise, the federations are also carrying out health, nutrition and sanitation programmes. The MFF has plans to perform during its tenure hung on the wall: creating voters' consciousness, giving khias lands to members, fish culture, etc. More importantly, some members of the federations have become sellers of seeds. The federations buy seeds from farmers when they need cash and store them for future. That reduced their dependency on BADC. Yield of paddy almost doubled due to new knowledge and ideas imparted through informal channels. "We are now more educated and united than before" they claimed.

An important aspect here is the



training on tailoring paid her good dividends. She now trains females and draws Tk.6000 a month. On the agricultural front, she rented in some land to grow crops. "I did not know that I can broadcast seeds in muddy fields. I always knew that I need to transplant them. Now, new knowledge gained through training brought for me good results. I am trying to grow hybrid on 25 decimals and growing BRRIধান 28, 39". Bulbuli Rani expressed. I went to Bulbuli Rani's house nearby. Unfortunately she was not at home but her husband waited to welcome me. I found two tin sheds and one shallow tube-well that the household owns. The children are going to schools and colleges. Meantime, she brought back few parcels of land adjacent to the household, which were mortgaged earlier. "Rani does the most of the work. I only support her" said Rani's husband who has been living in Rani's village as ghorjamat.

Jamila Begum (40) of MFF requires 2.5 kg of rice everyday to feed a family of five. She owns 75 decimals and rents in another 54 decimals on a 50-50 share cropping arrangement in aman season. But in boro season, provided the owner bears no costs, the share is 2:1. Jamila told me: "buddhir obave Ami gorib chilam" ("I was poor due to the lack of intelligence). Noticeably, she did not mention about the lack of land! Imbued by training, she has been cultivating mustard, potato, vegetables on her owned land. This time, tempted by the training on agriculture especially paddy cultivation, she decided to go for paddy production in rented-in land. In 54 decimals she got 30 maunds compared to 20 maunds historically observed with old technology and techniques of produc-

tion. Good seed, line sowing and economizing on seedlings, irrigation and fertilizer application resulted in increased output.

Ismail Hossain (40) of TFF read up to class V but has to shoulder a family of six. The new ideas from the training on agriculture brought him back to agriculture that he ignored once. He established a nursery that provides half of the household income. Vegetables production, reportedly, provides 20 per cent and increased food production (including sales of seeds) 20 per cent of the income. His household no longer faces food deficit.

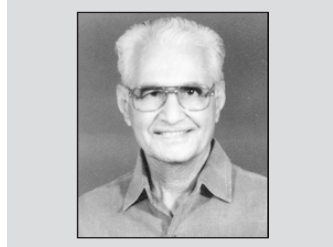
Amjad Hossain came with his wife Latifa Begum. Three years back, they lived in thatched house. Now, in tin shed. Both of them are involved in vegetable production, for home consumption in the past but for the markets at the moment. Two years back, they harvested home 50 maunds but now 90 maunds of paddy form the parcels of plots.

While I was meeting the moderate poor, a group of ultra or extreme poor women assembled in the training hall of TFF. I was told that they were called in for training on Food for works programmes. The training pertains to some basics on social awareness. With permission from the organizers, I went to meet them. There were 30 women most of whom had no homestead land. They live in others' homestead lands on account of riverbank erosions. Half of them are either separated or divorced and most of them come from areas prone to river erosion. They cannot feed their families at least two meals a day due to the lack of purchasing power.

The contrast appeared quite clear to me. The moderate poor that I met are taken care of by the NGOs and other government organizations. Through various training and credit programmes, most of the moderate poor enabled themselves to uplift. To meet the Millennium Development Goal, we need to take account of the ultra poor that stand with no chance of a graduation. I hope that innovative ideas, institutions and researches will address the problems of the ultra poor. As I could glean from their faces, they are no less smart than the group I met just few seconds before. What they need is some land and some knowledge. The vast tracts of khias lands could be allocated to them. In fact, the last Awami League government made modest attempts at that by giving this group land and a house. Give them some land and provide land-based training. That would, possibly, work to see them above the poverty line.

Abdul Bayes is a Professor of economics at Jahangirnagar University.

## Tackling sectarianism



M B NAQVI

writes from Karachi

**K**ILLING of 54 Muslims during prayers in an Imam Bargah-cum-Mosque in Quetta on July 4 was a powerful reminder that the monster of sectarianism still strikes at will; the state seems powerless. Since early 1990s this demon has devoured thousands of Muslims who differ on some points from majority. Over the years the state has been able to prosecute and sentence a handful of the killers while most were let off by courts for lack of evidence.

Authority's reaction to such killings is predictable. Sectarian terrorism is condemned in strongest terms. The police is ordered to arrest the culprits immediately -- which it seldom does. The long arm of the law is mentioned that does not spare the wrong doers. Meantime experience shows that that long arm is in fact not long enough to uncover the men who send individual killers on their murdering mission. The emphasis is on catching the culprits, not on the infrastructure that maintains, trains, funds and protects the murderers.

LEAs chime in to say that no good Muslim or Pakistani can do such things; it is the work of the 'foreign hand'. Now this is easily recognised; it is India's intelligence service RAW. The government buys it instantly. That is treated as complete explanation with little to do. Afterwards it is business as usual. Satisfied with this master explanation, no subsequent effort is expended by Pakistan's many undercover agencies or police to catch the masterminds behind the terrorists who order the killing of *Kafirs* and protect killers.

Most such murders, targeted or

indiscriminate (usually in Mosques during prayers), can often be linked to the political expediencies of some of those who politically matter. It does not seem as if anyone has made a graph, with one side showing the dates of sectarian killings against the other displaying political crises. One is not too sure if a pattern does not emerge.

Certain circumstances compel attention. First, murderers get away safely. What the LEAs do, in addition to the invoking of the 'foreign hand', is to throw a wide net and arrest many, most on flimsy assumptions. Only a

eration. Both possibilities look absurd. Look at the Quetta incident closely. Out of the three assailants, at least one was a suicide bomber. Can any undercover service find suicide bombers in a scarcely friendly country? The other two killers should also have been consciously ready to die in their effort. How does RAW buy such men? Is it not safer to assume that these were committed men who thought they were doing good (jihad) by killing those *Kafirs*, they expect to earn a Palace in Paradise.

## PLAIN WORDS

The fate of Pakistan cannot be different from Algeria, Egypt, Afghanistan, Indonesia, even Iran, if power politics in Islam's names continues. Enough people see the danger. Enforcing 'true Islam' in a predominantly Muslim country can only mean a desperate struggle for power by traditional orthodoxies. No Muslim country, with a richly plural society, can stay united and give citizens all freedoms or make progress unless it steers clear of religious controversies. State has to be above the religions of its citizens; that is the way to avoid tyranny or unending conflict among contending orthodoxies.

few are proceeded against, mostly on the basis of evidence that usually gets thrown out even in the Anti-Terrorist Courts. Far too few cases get past the High Court. The reasons seem to be that most real culprits are well protected and the police does not or dare not catch them.

Second concerns this 'foreign hand'. Heaven knows the Indian RAW and others have plenty of reasons to be mad at their counterparts in Pakistan; there is an almost ongoing war between the two sets of spooks. They would perhaps dearly like to do terrible things to each other. The question is how do the Indian spooks do such things? Do they send their own operatives? Or do they hire Pakistanis to do their bidding? Given the number of incidents about which Authority seemed sure that Indian RAW caused them, would seem to show that either the Pakistan side of the border is too porous -- because of either corruption or negligence -- or there are such an awful lot of Pakistanis who are ready to murder and maim so many Pakistani Muslims for the sake of -- what? Money? Or some other consid-

as profound failures of not only Pakistan's colonial style administration but also of the political elites and their politics? No RAW or CIA or Khad can hire suicide bombers. Pakistanis must focus on the mind of such mind killers. Who can produce such mind sets? Certainly not unsympathetic foreign states. It is a local job. The 'foreign hand' is a lame excuse of the Pakistani agencies' own failure to prevent such occurrences or to catch the murderers. Rulers by echoing the spooks shift the blame from themselves. There may be more to it.

Shias and Sunnis have lived together peacefully for a Millennium and one half in many countries, with occasional friction in the past. In Pakistan sectarian riots or murders were unheard of until well into 1980s. It was Gen. Ziaul Haq's malign talent that, after the 1983 MRD movement, midwived the birth of sectarian and other divisive movements -- and in Karachi. Army's intelligence services were their godfathers; indeed these are the moving finger that writes on the Pakistani wall. They have master-minded at least three *Jihads*: first was

against the Soviets in Afghanistan in 1980s; the second started in the Indian-controlled Kashmir in the 1990s; and the third is again in Afghanistan for helping pull the American chestnuts out of fire yet again.

Whom did they utilise? Look closely. These *Jihads* are the dropouts or graduates of the JUI-run Madrassas in NWFP, Baluchistan and some in Karachi and Punjab. They are further brainwashed during further training; the final product will however not be recognised by Maulanas Qasim Nanautwi, Hussain Ahmad Madni or

Taliban in Afghanistan. Remember also that Gen. Moinuddin Haider had wanted to extradite 200 wanted SSP members from Afghanistan. Taliban simply refused to hand over their own replicas. Whoever clearly examines the minds of the three sets of bigots will see commonalities. One might say that the same reality looks three separate things in different contexts.

Should religious intolerance and extremism continue to grow unchecked, all minorities will progressively go on being oppressed -- and alienated. For once, let the elites stop

Iqbal exemplified. Such people were and are a handful. Reality of grassroots Islam was always, and still is, sectarian orthodoxies. That in the days of less rapacious and or less tyrannical and more tolerant kings, the sects -- each divorced from state power -- learned to live with one another. When religious leaders sent power through political action, as now, that coexistence breaks down; each sect will want all of the state power in order to make itself dominant so as to enforce true (its) Islam. Hence this competition is resulting in growing extremism.

When whisky-imbibing, west-oriented elites endlessly go on with Islamic rhetoric -- Islamic solidarity, brotherhood and its many splendoured beauties -- orthodox leaders of various sects become angry. They in effect say it is we who know Islam, having read the Quran, Hadith and Nazzra. What do these Muslim Leaguers and PPP wallahs or generals know about Islam? They are hypocrites and dissemlers. History shows empty rhetoric has to be paid for; the world's carelessly uttered soon become fetters on their feet. Words take revenge. In Pakistan's case, the politics of bogus rhetoric of Islam by dissemling politicians has been followed by orthodoxes contending for supreme power. If the strongest group looks uncommonly like Taliban, well, so it is. After culture-induced historical coexistence has to give way to a scramble for power among religious politicians, eager to take power from, or at least share with, the traditional elites.

The fate of Pakistan cannot be different from Algeria, Egypt, Afghanistan, Indonesia, even Iran, if power politics in Islam's names continues. Enough people see the danger. Enforcing 'true Islam' in a predominantly Muslim country can only mean a desperate struggle for power by traditional orthodoxies. No Muslim country, with a richly plural society, can stay united and give citizens all freedoms or make progress unless it steers clear of religious controversies. State has to be above the religions of its citizens; that is the way to avoid tyranny or unending conflict among contending orthodoxies.

MB Naqvi is a leading columnist in Pakistan.

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

Letters will only be considered if they carry the writer's full name, address and telephone number (if any). The identity of the writers will be protected. Letters must be limited to 300 words. All letters will be subject to editing.

### Claw of politics over media!

The media was never free from government influence. But people still have hopes as there are at least some neutral newspapers in the country, for example, The Daily Star and *Pratham Alo*. The transmission of private channels, especially their news coverage also gained trust among common people.

taking steps to speed the trials of different important cases. But unfortunately government's attitude towards the media especially towards the free flow of news is really disheartening. I guess the political intervention in media started with the seizure of ETV's equipment. The cases against few dailies and the recent police interrogation about few private channels make the government's intention rather clear. A few days ago I read a report in the daily regarding beginning of a new satellite channel called 'Shonali TV' which was closed during the last government tenure. But we know that Ekushey Television (ETV) pleaded for licence in a press conference few days' back.

We believe if Shonali TV can get a licence, then ETV should also get it because it has already had the experience and popularity needed for a pvt. channel. But I am sceptical about ETV's plea to get a fresh licence since it was born during the last government tenure. ETV won the hearts of millions across the country; it deserves a fresh licence. But more than that, we hope the government will respect public sentiments and make the decisions unbiased. Media should be kept out of any political influences. I wish the present government would consider the public demand and permit ETV to start its programme again.

### Mo'in Ullaham Dhaka

**Points to ponder**

The huge quantity of arms and explosive haul at Bogra is of serious concern. Our political parties typically straight away drew conclusions and started blaming each other. Their comments on the issue only reflects their tunnelled vision; and the way they got entangled shows how they really care about things and tackle it. Also surprising are statements of the so-called experts who seen sanguine with our differing different chemical and other analysis. The haul, probably, meant for internal conspiracy

because with this amount one can even plot an armed rebellion. The amount involved in this case indicates final assault. Are we really in this situation? Did we miss the earlier steps in this continuing? Is this consignment meant for external use? Then who is the originator and where was it heading? How long this corridor has been used and what are the spillover effects? For a safe transit all loose ends are to be tied up and if so who were involved. For each transit passage there must be alternative arrangements. Is it a diversionary move? While all eyes are focused elsewhere something else is being overlooked. Is it intentional to malign our country? The episode is

ridiculously rudimentary and work of inexperienced hands. The security errors are grave and deep-rooted which cannot be ignored for the sake of national sovereignty.

**Tanzila Chowdhury Dhaka**

**Sending troops to Iraq**

Kudos to the Indian government for their principled stand on Iraq. We are thrilled to know that the biggest democracy in the world (albeit in the hands of a fundamentalist political party) can still make a difference by its moral position. True democracy (and not farical ones like that of Jordan, Kuwait and NWFP) is morally upright in the

long run. You can rest assured that the American system, after the initial war frenzy, will correct itself and make intelligent decisions. Democracies will have their Cheney and Modis, but they will also have Sinhas and Sen. Byrds.

**Yahya USA**

**Why are they irresponsible?**

The policing and administration of the riverine transport system has obviously collapsed. The Minister concerned should resign if he has any sense of morality and dignity of should be sacked for his total

failure and apathy. A committee should be formed with appropriate powers to administer the inland waterways transport system. Pending the formation of such a body the Navy should be entrusted to regulate, police and monitor the inland waterways transportation. Safety and law and order to jerk the system out of lethargy and hopefully demonstrate how much improvement is possible in the system. The media and the civil society must keep up the heat on the government until positive and vigorous improvement is affected.

**Rakin**  
Once-mail