

Munshiganj by-election

Untoward incidents regrettable

THE Munshiganj-1 by-election passed off last Sunday, yielding a verdict in favour of Bikalpa Dhara candidate Mahi B Chowdhury. All eyes were focused on the event for two reasons. First, the Bikalpa Dhara, a new political party, made its debut in an electoral contest by fielding a candidate who was an elected MP of the ruling BNP before quitting the party. Second, it drew the full attention of people as the other by-election (Dhaka-10) has been put on a deferred course by a court ruling. The public interest in the by-election kept growing, as it was the first test of popularity for Bikalpa Dhara, led by former President Professor Badruddoza, and once a leading light of BNP.

The Munshiganj by-election was set against a backdrop of allegations of vote rigging, and tension was apparently running high. Thus, the enthusiasm that was expected of the electorate, in view of the interest otherwise generated in the by-election, was not reflected by the voter turnout. It was a rather disappointing 45.63 per cent.

Rigging and forcible prevention of voters from casting their ballots have also been alleged and newspaper accounts of the incidents suggest their occurrence in some degree. What creates a regrettable impression is that the police prevented Sunil Sarkar, a schoolteacher, from casting his vote, thereby predictably sending a dampening signal to the voters from a minority community.

The allegations that 2000 voters from the community actually stayed away from voting must be gone into and those found responsible given deterrent punishment. Nothing like this should happen again.

Ronald Reagan no more

His memory a lasting legacy for the US

WITHIN the US, Ronald Reagan, the republic's 40th president, was revered as the father of the modern conservative movement, and, even among those who disagreed with his politics, respected as an optimistic and dignified leader, who restored America's self-belief at a time when it had come to doubt itself and its place in the world.

Within the US, Reagan's legacy has been debated endlessly and inconclusively. Conservatives, who revere him, see him as a man who governed with morality and integrity, faced down the communists abroad, turned around the economy at home, and reaffirmed traditional values. Liberals are less enthusiastic about his tenure, noting that he left office with a record-breaking fiscal deficit, and that his policies had increased inequality and unemployment, and further marginalised those at the bottom end of the economic and social spectrum. They also point to the scandals, such as Iran-Contra, that plagued his administration.

Outside the US, Reagan's legacy is no clearer. While conservatives credit him with the fall of the Soviet Union, the verdict of history remains ambiguous. However, what is unambiguous was the destructive nature of the proxy wars the US fought in Central America, its role in the rise of religious extremism, and its retreat from Lebanon after the death of 241 marines, all on Reagan's watch.

Perhaps the most fitting tribute we can pay to Reagan today is to acknowledge that he embodied a genial optimism and civility far removed from the ugliness of US politics today.

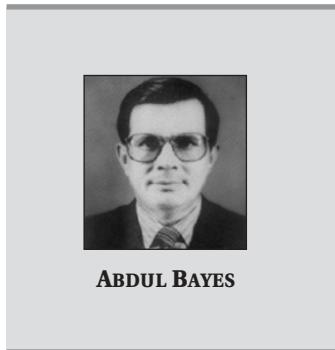
First anniversary greetings

Wishing New Age all success

WE join the paper's patrons in celebrating New Age's first anniversary and wish its management, staff, and workers the very best in overcoming all possible challenges in producing a quality newspaper in Bangladesh. While there is no end to new newspapers hitting the market on a regular basis there is an obvious need for more quality newspapers in the country, especially in English. New Age can be credited with having brought a new competitive environment to English language journalism and many new talents to the profession. Within its first year, New Age has proven to be a paper with promise and vision. It has maintained a consistent quality and shown a laudable steadfastness in upholding press freedom.

We at The Daily Star sincerely hope that New Age will achieve greater success in the coming years, and become an invaluable addition to the English language newspapers that we now have.

Pockets of poverty and points to ponder



ABDUL BAYES

IT is now a widely accepted fact that Bangladesh has witnessed substantial improvements in overall poverty reduction over the past few decades. Empirical evidence tends to support the submission. For example, a forthcoming book, *Rural Livelihood Systems: Changes and Challenges* by Mahabub Hossain and others points to a poverty reduction in sample households in rural Bangladesh of one percentage point per annum between 1987 and 2000. The World Bank and other donors' documents also report the decline almost by the same magnitude. Alongside this good news, however, the bad news is that during the same period of time, large inequities in living standards exist across geographical space as well as among socio-economic groups.

Missing the map

Past or recent research on poverty mostly hovered around its extent, determinants, and dimensions. The distribution of poverty across space, allegedly, received very little or no attention. That omission, I suppose, might have led to a misallocation of resources reserved for poverty reduction. The resources for the poor, in the absence of data pertaining to

pockets of poverty, allegedly went to satisfy political agendas rather than economic emancipation. For example, no matter what the poverty level in a particular region appeared to be, the availability of projects or cash resources for the mitigation of poverty might have flown under the umbrella of political considerations. Thus, the spatial dimension of poverty is an issue for policy analysis particularly for the rural sector, where livelihoods are dependent on the natural resource base, which in

Pockets of poverty

S.P.Kam and Mahabub Hossain of IRRRI, along with others on board the research, came out with the mapping of poverty. They have shown the concentration of rural poverty and observed that the highest incidence of poverty (greater than 47 per cent) is in the depressed basins in Sunamgonj, Habigonj, and Netrokona districts; the northwestern districts of Kurigram, Nilphamari, and

Not surprisingly, perhaps, the researchers observed income inequality and entitlement to land (land ownership and tenancy) as the prime propeller of poverty. Given the same level of income, the higher the inequality in the distribution of income, the higher the incidence of poverty. Thus, the gini-coefficient for per capita income (per cent) and landless households (per cent) was found to be statistically significant. Again, the higher the degree of landlessness, the higher the

tenancy market. And allow me to add another dimension. The experience of the Seed Health Improvement Project (SHIP) is that proper preservation of seeds helps raise output by 10-12 per cent. Poor farmers in some areas reduced the demand for rented land, thus paving way for the new entrants in the tenancy market. Technology appears to abhor a link with tenancy.

The upazilas with low levels of education are concentrated in

coverage is still low in poverty stricken areas like coastal areas, depressed basins in the Sylhet and Faridpur Belts, and in the Chittagong Hill Tracts.

Electricity? At the upazila, the coverage of electricity varies between 0.3 per cent to 80 per cent of the households. Poverty mapping shows that access to electricity is very low in regions with high incidence of poverty.

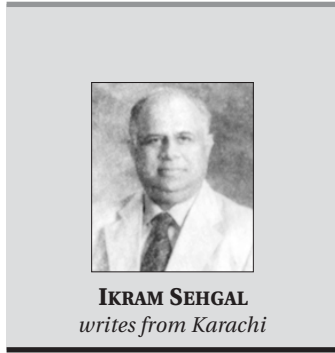
Maps and managers

Besides these factors mentioned by the authors, there are some natural factors that go to contribute to pervasive poverty. But let us talk about discrimination-driven or man-made poverty. There are many ways that government can come up with strategies of reducing poverty. Given the poverty map on the desk, policy makers could quickly determine why, where, and how the resources for poverty reduction should go. If, for example, ground water irrigation is a constraint, then arrangements should be made for the use of surface water. If access to electricity is a deterrent, provisions should be there to increase the access. Likewise agricultural research in those pockets could claim a larger share of the research budget.

The poverty mapping done by IRRRI helps the policy makers in two fundamental ways. First, identifying the pockets of poverty. Second, getting information about the determinants of poverty in those pockets to act upon. I think the poverty mapping exercise could go a long way to helping formulate workable strategies for poverty reduction in Bangladesh.

Abdul Bayes is Professor of Economics, Jahangirnagar University

Securing Karachi



IKRAM SEHGAL

writes from Karachi

THERE are signs that our rulers have started the process of making the necessary adjustments and political compromises to secure this city from boiling over into disaster. Karachi's civic services are normally stretched to the limit - if they are overwhelmed because of civil disturbances disrupting services, mass reaction will make society as we know it disappear into a cauldron, not unlike that into which Mogadishu has descended. Ethnic and sectarian clashes are already not a matter of conjecture anymore, sporadic clashes have already taken place. Terrorists have cleverly manipulated the city's schisms to their advantage. Immediate remedial measures are necessary to restore the rule of law to this great metropolitan city.

Power centers proliferate in Sindh, viz (1) Governor's House run by the MQM nominee Dr Ishrat ul Ebad and the perennial advisor to all Governors, Brig (Retd) Akhtar Zamin Naqvi, presently enjoying maximum power in Karachi, and by extension over the Province, acting virtually as the Chief Minister (CM), (2) CM Ali Mohammad Maher, who exercises power only as much as is his inherent ability and/or is allowed to him by the powers-that-be, (3) Karachi city's government is run presently by the Jamaat-i-Islami (JI) through the City Nazim Naimatullah, (4) the present Corps Commander 5 Corp Lt Gen Ahsan Salim Hayat exercises quiet

influence (as he should) in contrast to the political wheeling-dealing of his predecessor, Tariq Waseem Ghazi, and last but not the least, (5) power brokers exercising remote control from Islamabad, but overlapping from their own disciplines at will into sectors of their motivated interest. As an example of how usurping/encroachment of power affects the situation adversely, the recent by-elections would have been won by the MQM anyway, but

and the Chief Minister virtually powerless, the situation is tailor-made for intervention by those who wish ill for Karachi and Pakistan. The Intelligence Bureau's (IB) primary function is to provide intelligence on internal security. Because of the military's involvement in civil government since 1999, the ISI and MI have also become involved in this, and since 9/11 both have been focussing on countering terrorism also. IB's finest hour was during Maj (Retd)

powers that we have been nurturing all along. Requiring the electorate to exercise their preference would be an ideal route to follow, in the present state of acute polarisation created by political, ethnic, and sectarian tensions, it would be suicidal for the Federation, on the other hand, the political leaders must be free to play their political role among the masses to preserve the peace. It stands to reason that a political government should remain in

Musharraf's clearance) is a correct example of preferring the national interest over personal feelings. The PPP could cobble together a coalition with MQM, a government of consensus along with PML and JI as suggested by CH Shujaat Hussain to ensure stability in Karachi. PPP's refusal should have been anticipated -- at least it clears the deck for the present PML-led coalition to have either Imtiaz Shaikh or Arbab Ghulam Rahim as the CM. Despite

AS I SEE IT

Terrorists must be fought by a single authority with absolute power to act independently, but with all the resources of the State available to that entity. The cover of a political government is necessary to explain the need for draconian measures to the masses, as was done by the PPP in 1994-95. That is the only way to secure Karachi from sliding into anarchy.

the Honourable Governor's ham-handed intervention resulted in blatant over-kill and the electoral results becoming controversial.

When the MQM chose not to take part in the Local Bodies elections three years ago, they left the field open for the JI, PPP, and even PML to make a comeback in the political vacuum. Grabbing the opportunity with both hands, JI has done a commendable job running the city's administration, thus eating into MQM's once-monolithic presence. Running a party by remote control may be a virtuous performance of MQM's mercurial leader in self-imposed exile Altaf Hussain, but it cannot go on forever. There are leadership problems at the local level within MQM needing the Supremo's attention, or better still, presence. With MQM in a certain amount of disarray, JI, being the biggest beneficiary, is not going to easily loosen its present control over the city. Case in point, the largely successful strike called by the MMA on Friday. With Governor's House at loggerheads with the City Nazim

Masood Sharif's tenures as DG when the militancy within Karachi was decimated by superb information gathering, only made possible because IB operatives risked life and limb to penetrate militants' cells. While the US must be giving hi-tech support to local human intelligence (hum-int) to ferret out Al-Qaeda or Al-Qaeda's associates, hum-int can never be replaced by electronic intelligence (el-int), case in point the lack of credible guerrilla/terrorist information in Afghanistan and Iraq. Hi-tech can kick the door open, but you need boots on the ground to walk through that door. Collection of information may be satisfactory, collation of that information and disseminating it speedily to the right quarters seems to be the problem.

Does all this call for Governor's rule? Certainly not. That would derail the nascent democracy whose existence is already precarious in Pakistan. By the same token we cannot sack the city government -- that would be a negation of the devolution of

power.

Karachi is bigger than more than 100 nations in the world, Sindh Province is bigger than 150. Putting an ineffective frontman in Sindh into a position of authority over the lives of 30 million human beings and/or ruling by proxy, even with all political and economic conditions conducive, is like playing Russian Roulette Pakistani-style (five rounds in the chambers in place of one), a gamble that is outright dangerous. Almost anybody can replace Ali Mohammad Maher, the obvious preference should be to give legitimacy to democracy by giving the reins of the Provincial Government to the majority party, Ms Benazir's PPP. CH Shujaat Hussain initiated the right dialogue by meeting Makhdoom Amin Fahim of PPP and Qazi Hussain Ahmed of JI in the NA last Thursday to offer a government of consensus in the Province. PPP's strong opposition to the President may not be palatable to Islamabad, the courageous decision to act politically (not possible without

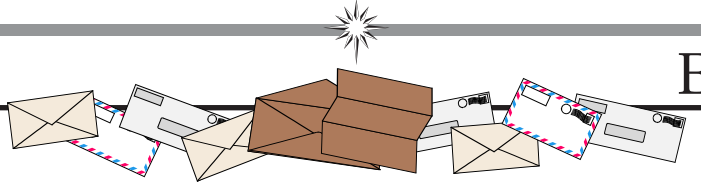
the "Jam Sadiq Ali" baggage (and who doesn't carry baggage among the parliamentarians in Sindh) one would be inclined to support Imtiaz Shaikh over Arbab Ghulam Rahim. Sindh needs a strong hand who knows the provincial ropes, having learnt his Sindhii politicking from the late Jam Sadiq Ali and having served as a senior bureaucrat in the Provincial Government, Imtiaz Shaikh has the experience and ability to do the job.

If the PPP had led the coalition, another appointee of the Federal Government as Governor would have been necessary. Ebad's domination of security affairs because of the CM's non-involvement has made justice in Karachi hostage to party politics. Governor Ishrat ul Ebad must confine himself strictly within his constitutional parameters. Instead of imposing emergency or Governor's rule, the need is to have a non-partisan Deputy or Lieutenant Governor answerable directly to the President and PM for the Province's security. As far back

as Feb 27, 1990, in *The Sindh Factor-III*, on Mar 6, 1990, in *De-Beirutizing Karachi*, on Aug 2, 1994 in *Resuscitating a City, Let no one urite Karachi's Epitaph*, and on Dec 15, 1994, in *Apocalypse Now*, I have repeatedly suggested the need for a Lieutenant Governor for Sindh, specifically looking after the security of the Province, this is long overdue. All the law enforcement agencies (LEAs) in the Province and the city, including Rangers, Police, other paramilitary forces, and their constituent intelligence units, should directly report to him. The Lieutenant Governor should have the power to call on the Armed Forces in "Aid of Civil Power" whenever necessary. It would be best to appoint a serving three-star general, preferably someone who has already done his Corps tenure. Having combat experience i.e. hearing shots being fired in anger would be useful. Conversely we could also go with a senior police officer, the present IG Police Syed Kamal Shah would be a good choice. Shoaib Suddle is another potential candidate. The Lieutenant Governor could use a portion of the Governor's House as a symbol of his authority, working through a Crisis Management Center from where he can act to interdict/intercept events before they happen by acting on the collated intelligence swiftly in real-time, and if they happen, to react positively to contain collateral damage. A good commander and a good command structure will ensure that Karachi becomes too hot for terrorists to operate in. Terrorists must be fought by a single authority with absolute power to act independently, but with all the resources of the State available to that entity. The cover of a political government is necessary to explain the need for draconian measures to the masses, as was done by the PPP in 1994-95. That is the only way to secure Karachi from sliding into anarchy.

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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.

Cricket

I read with avid interest the write-up of Megasthenes "Of and for cricket" (D.S. 29/5/004) which took me down memory lane.

While discussing cricket commentators of yesteryears, the writer perhaps inadvertently forgot to mention Berry Adhikari (I hope I have not mis-spelled his name) who was one of India's most profound and proficient cricket commentators.

Discussing Lala Amarnath, India's great all-rounder for nearly two decades, it is on record that he became India's Test captain by an accident.

He captained India against the formidable West Indies team in 1948 when Vijay Merchant, the Indian run-machine declined the captaincy due to personal reasons.

Lala besides playing for India in the Jardine-led England's visit to India was also selected to play for India in 1936 under Vizzy's

captaincy and later selected again in 1946 (when India was given Test status) under Nawab of Patuadi (Sr.) stewardship. He also toured Australia in 1947 and played against Don Bradman's unbeatable team which then had players like Arthur Morris, Sidney Barnes, Ray Lindwall, Keith Miller, Ian Johnston etc.

Lala's most memorable innings was on that tour was his magnificent 228 against Victoria, a strong state side.

He was in the series in which Vijay Hazare, another batting stalwart, made history by becoming the first Indian to score a century in each innings in the fourth Test played at Adelaide.

The Indian team's tour of Australia in 1947, unfortunately, was marred by handicaps when Vijay Merchant, Mushtaq Ali and Rusi Modi, all key batsmen, made themselves unavailable and the young Fazal Mahmood opted out, for just before the start of the tour

Pakistan came into being and Fazal stood by his new country.

Robert Kadet

34, Mehediabagh
Chittagong

The gravity of the situation

Our over-enthusiastic politicians have to learn one grave lesson from the recent launch disasters. Keep your center of gravity low for stable equilibrium.

What is this center of gravity? Any college textbook has the definition, but it is the application in daily life which matters. We are weak in applied science in the under-developed countries, as the pocket and stomach keep us preoccupied. The concentration is more on the self than on public service. Multiply by several thousand public service providers, and the image that comes clearly is that of Bangladesh.

Our corruption and poverty indices are stuck at the bottom layer. Our political social workers are playing with the leftovers. Is this a vague statement? Yes, that is the way the politicians speak. To one who believes in micro-sheba to our *chasi bhaais* and sisters. All are looking for macro-credit of self-achievement.

Besides the center of gravity, there is another point: the centre of a circle. Centralized sheba is not good for national health. Center means the ego, opposite to selflessness. Attract attention to the self or to the project in hand? We are moved by stones - with the name etched on it. Posterity haunts our dreams.

Where is the centre of this vast universe? No one knows. Lately even he scientists tend to conjecture that hyperspace has no center. The definition of time is also getting more and more complex, as mysticism leaks into science. The effect of an endow-

ment is not radiated from a center. It is diffused in the society, and becomes a culture, good or bad. Our local culture is changing, but the leaders are shy to point it out, as detached views are avoided. Negative collusion prevails in the society. It is malice, not goodwill.

During our lifetime we have met with some mature and wise personalities who never seem to be ruffled or excited (inner capacity pouring a glass of water into the sea does not change the level of the sea). This calmness (of the mountains and the deep sea) is foreboding to ordinary minds, and generates some mysterious kind of respect and humility. Ambition destroys such ambience. These personalities are the real hidden leaders, and their center of gravity is low. Make a list of self-effacing politicians, here and abroad.

Keep a low profile, and search parties would be active. Too much publicity spoils the service mood. Political commercialization is the

style of the day. Philosophy is not a dry subject, but it is there in the background as cementing bond. It determines the approach to an issue - the rest are nuts and bolts (technical). Before entering the jungle, the recommendation is to go around the perimeter for reconnaissance. It is necessary to listen to second and third opinions while planning public services. This is universally recognized "service before self."

We are familiar with the aphorism "Give away the profits, and retain the losses." A big order for us tiny mortals from under-developed to developing, and then to specialization (the usual seven stages?). If the politicians are in the acquisitive stage, discarding is not possible (grab, grab, grab).

A leader follows the people? Yes, he follows the wishes of the people, and leads to their realisation. In Dhaka, the other side of the coin is missing. There is a subtle difference, which only personal

equations can illuminate. While facing the people, it is necessary to put up a front? The heart of the matter is not in the front is in the background!

Apart from the center of gravity issue, there are some other pre-qualifications for success in public life: the silent practice of self-sacrifice; and to be willing to suffer for principles. These virtues must have public visibility for credibility. There is no purging without personal suffering; although the latter has several forms.

Also, compromise at high level of leadership is fatal, and harms the community. It is easy to cheat one's own self with illusory arguments. The ultimate result is harming others, which is an unpardonable sin. The punishment of this violation is familiar to the carriers of the virus-loss of health and peace of mind, which money cannot buy. Moral: Do not cheat the people.

It is time to decide: to refurbish the

background, or perform diversion shows on the stage.

A Mahasen
Dhaka

Mobile phones for government offices

I refer to the letter (DS May 26) on providing mobile telephones for government officials. The bureaucracy has to keep pace with technology.

Landline telephones are going out of date (if not already the case), as FIXED wireless telephone network may become cheaper (capital, operation and maintenance) and easier to operate and maintain.

The government may review the future policy of fixed line telephone system in Bangladesh. ITU may advice on feasibility.

MD Abad

(Retd. BCS)
Dhaka.