

## Another newspaper editor murdered

Enough is enough

WORDS cannot express our shock and outrage over the brutal killing of Dainik Janmabhumi Editor Humayun Kabir Balu in Khulna on Sunday. Once again we have been provided with awful proof of the mortal danger under which journalists must ply their trade, and the apparent inability of the authorities to provide them with any semblance of safety and security. When will the authorities finally take this matter seriously, and put in place measures to ensure that journalists, especially in the south-west, do not have to live in fear of such attacks?

The killing of Humayun Kabir brings to thirteen the number of journalists murdered in the south-west in the last ten years. In addition to this, forty-two journalists have been seriously injured in the region in that time, and countless more harassed and intimidated. Most astonishingly, the authorities have so far failed to bring even one person to book for these rampant killings. Not one. It seems as though the government is powerless to stop outlaws, gangsters, or any entrenched interest group from enforcing their reign of terror in the region with impunity.

The danger to journalists around the country, and especially in the south-west, is very real. This can only have the effect of silencing the voice of the media and discouraging them from pursuing controversial stories that uncover crime and wrong-doing. In short, the laxity of the government means that journalists must think twice or even thrice before uncovering misdeeds, and our entire democracy suffers as a result.

The Press Club has expressed its disgust with the government over the killing of Humayun Kabir and has stated that there is no point to pursuing the matter with the government. We are tempted to share this point of view. The government has shown a marked lack of urgency in the past when it has come to prosecuting such cases, and appears either unable or unwilling to do so effectively.

If one were to assume in light of unresolved murder cases pertaining to journalists that a vested interest is at work to ensure that journalists remain intimidated and do not pursue stories that could be embarrassing to them, would one be too wrong? We fervently pray that the government prove us wrong there by finding the killers of Humayun Kabir.

## Garment workers' plight

The suicides should be an eye opener

IT is disquieting to learn that some fifty job-lossers in the garment sector have committed suicide in Gazipur district over the last five months. Though the deaths have not been confirmed officially, enough details have transpired to establish the fact that jobless or sacked garment workers are in a desperate situation, as many sweater factories have scaled down production.

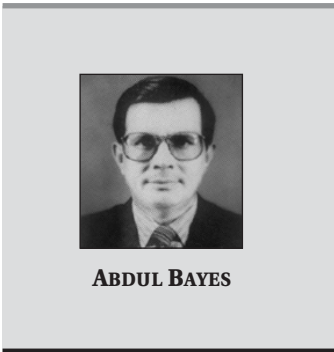
Bangladeshi products have lost a lot of ground in the international market which is evident from orders decreasing by around 40 per cent. The price hike of raw materials has also been a big jolt to the local sweater factories.

The reports of suicides, however, have brought into light certain aspects of employment in garment factories that need to be examined closely. The sacked workers have actually been thrown on to the streets, with absolutely no other avenue for employment being available to them. There is no safety net or rehabilitation scheme that could help them absorb the shock of losing jobs. The factory owners' responsibility seemingly ends with the act of retrenchment. There is apparently nobody to think about the bleak future of the garment workers who have been playing a pivotal role in the country's premier foreign exchange earning sector.

Vocational training in some other field could help them keep afloat. Similarly, there should be something called severance benefits which the employees need to absorb the shock and difficulties associated with sudden loss of jobs. It is not only a question of providing some support to the poor men and women, but also of giving the whole job structure a more humane face. The leaders of the organisations representing the garment manufacturers and exporters seem unaware of the tragic deaths which is unfortunate. They better keep tab on the situation so as to be able to provide a social safety-net for the job losers with the government support thrown in.

The suicides should also be an eye opener to the likely post-MFA scenario, when there will be a quota free regime and, consequently, a much harder competition for the garment exporting countries.

# Facets of food security



THAT even when national food security is achieved, some individuals may still go hungry is an old but, perhaps, not an obsolete observation. That's why in India, Bangladesh, and some other countries, self-sufficiency in food is generally not equated with food security for individuals. At individual level, food security is a function of exchange entitlements, which, in turn, are a function of land endowments, employment, productive pursuits, prices of food grains, etc.

In a recent research paper, Mahabub Hossain, Firdousi Naher, and Quazi Shahabuddin take on searching for the food security issue in Bangladesh. The authors delved deep into the dynamics of food security and examined its changes over time.

### Verge of vulnerability

Take the case of Bangladesh in particular. The country reached a milestone at the end of 1990s by producing food grains ahead of the requirement estimated at 454gm/person/day. Yet, allegedly, sufficiency has failed to subscribe to security. Again, the sustainability is a growing concern. For example, domestic food grain production is prone to floods and droughts and could drive towards production shortfalls. Growing population pressure has been a factor scaring security. Increased cereals production has not led to a

parallel increase in other non-cereal crops. Nearly 40 per cent of the population lives below the food consumption-based poverty line, lacking sufficient resources to afford a diet of 2,122 kilocalories (kcal) per person per day, along with other basic necessities. And needless to mention, normal diet in Bangladesh is seriously imbalanced tilting heavily towards cereals for calories.

### Costly comfort

The authors argue that the rapid increase in cereals production -- 3.15 per cent between 1971-2000 -- was partly through a reduction of area and production of pulses and oilseeds that are important sources of protein and micronutrients for the poor. Excepting vegetables and fruits that depicted some resonance in the reign of rice -- perhaps due to higher productivity and profitability -- other crops were fenced out of the frontiers of agricultural production. Fisheries seemingly fared well with a rapid growth (7 per cent) in the 1990s. Meat and milk recorded marginal rise despite increased demand. Occasional imports of rice and wheat, despite the claim of self-sufficiency, shows that self-sufficiency, sometimes, slips back. Thus, self-sufficiency in cereals came at a cost of producing other crops and secondly, such a comfort could turn out to be costly if proper steps are not taken in due time.

### Consumption patterns

The total consumption of food continues to increase in rural areas but the total intake is still 11 per cent lower than the recommended doses. Over time, substantial decline in the consumption of wheat and pulses could be in evidence, but there is a respectable rise in the consumption of vegetables (including potatoes), fruits and fish.

While the richer section of the society are gradually reducing their

severely stunted and 12 percent severely underweight. The level of child malnutrition in rural areas is strikingly high compared to urban areas. Within rural areas, malnutrition is high in the districts of Sylhet, Comilla, Faridpur, Tangail, Jamalpur, Noakhali, and Chittagong. Theses regions account for half of the malnourished children in the country.

The proportion of nutrients consumed by men are higher -- often

more than one and a half times -- than women, thus reflecting gender disparity in nutrient intake. Surprisingly, the intra-household distribution of nutrient intake over the last 15 years depicts a downward direction. This happened in the wake of a rise in income earning opportunities for women and the so-called women empowerment.

The authors note a substantial increase in real wages following a fall in rice prices. The poor mostly buying rice from the market bene-

**BENEATH THE SURFACE**

Research should have two objectives. First, among cereal crops, what is urgently required is the development and the dissemination of production technology especially with respect to yield and quality improvements. Second, with rice crops reaching a respectable position, research should focus on non-rice crops especially high value agriculture. That would demand continued facilitation of the import of seeds and production technologies.

dependence on cereals to diversify consumption, the poor are still spending most their incremental incomes on rice. This shows that the intake of unbalanced diet worsened over years for the poor.

It appears that both rich and poor in Bangladesh reduced consumption of pulses -- substantially by the former and dramatically by latter group. During 1991-2000, the poor also reduced consumption of fish. Thus, consumption of protein-rich food declined mainly due to a rise in prices and partly due to a lack in nutritional knowledge. For example, as a ratio to rice prices, pulses prices were three times during 1975-2000, fish prices about 9 times, and oils prices four times. Admittedly, demand for these products outweighed supply to cause a rise in prices.

### Aggrieved girls

Chronic malnourishment is astoundingly high in Bangladesh with 20 per cent of boys and girls

between 1992 and 2000. "Since wasting results from acute food shortage in recent times, its faster decline vis-à-vis that of stunting is indicative of improving food secu-

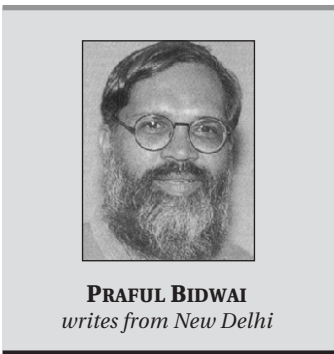
fited and this also shows that their access to food increased over time. And finally, seasonal changes in food grain prices also declined to show that vulnerability in market exchange dwindled over time.

### Policy points

By and large, the upshot of the research findings is that Bangladesh has yet to achieve comprehensive food security that resolves the problem of inadequate food intake and chronic malnutrition among the poor. Solving this problem would require decisive action by the government, the private sector and individual households. "A more efficient PFDS can play a major role for food security of those receiving transfers. Appropriately targeted income transfers, credit programmes and insurance mechanisms in times of crisis may have very high payoffs in reducing poverty and improving food security. These interventions should be part of a broader social protection strategy of safety nets that is both

# Speeding the Indo-Pak peace process

## Nuclear CBMs aren't enough



WITHIN barely a month of the swearing-in of Manmohan Singh government, the India-Pakistan dialogue process has taken off. The clearest indication of this is the June 20 agreement on nuclear confidence-building measures (CBMs), followed by a meeting between the two Foreign Ministers in China in a "very cordial, friendly and warm atmosphere."

Clearly, both governments have decided to impart a serious momentum to the peace process. That's why there were preparations including a "secret" meeting between National Security Advisers J.N. Dixit and Tariq Aziz. The coming Foreign Secretaries' meeting should lead to a comprehensive discussion of many issues.

This should put at rest fears, especially in Pakistan, that the United Progressive Alliance government won't have the same commitment to reconciliation with Pakistan as Mr Vajpayee's regime.

There is across-the-board support in India for a peace dialogue.

Civil society solidly favours it. Many UPA constituents and supporters have been keen on it. They took sober positions when the NDA, including Mr Vajpayee, was hysterically threatening Pakistan with an "aar-paar ki ladai" (battle to the finish).

The peace process's resumption is good news indeed.

Amidst these developments, a note of caution might sound off-key. Yet, that has become neces-

Foreign Secretaries and upgrade the existing hotline between their Directors-General of Military Operations.

Secondly, they will soon furnish to each other details on the timing of missile test-flights and paths. This will mark a minor improvement on the practice they followed even before 1998.

However, these are, strictly, not confidence-building but *transparency* measures. They cannot gener-

1999, and in January and June 2002.

The only way of reducing nuclear risks is *non-deployment* of nuclear weapons -- by keeping warheads *separated* from delivery systems (missiles, aircraft, etc.). Once nuclear weapons are deployed, there is a definite risk of their *use* -- unauthorised, unintentional, or by design. The two should have agreed to non-deployment for one to three years. They didn't.

Second, it's urgent to halt the

addressed four specific risks: use of nuclear weapons through *miscalculation* because of faulty information processing; *unauthorised* use of nuclear weapons by "rogue" groups or fanatics; *accidents* and *fires* near nuclear weapons; and *rumours* of imminent use and the resultant panic response. They did none of this.

These have been serious accidents in both countries' military and nuclear installations. Good NRRMs can address these risks --

The CBMs' long-term downside is that India and Pakistan stand to appear "responsible" nuclear weapons-states so they get to keep their nuclear weapons. That's why there isn't a single word about nuclear disarmament in the agreement, not even as a long-term goal.

Equally important is the clause jointly calling for "regular working-level meetings to be held among all nuclear powers to discuss issues of common concern." India and Pakistan want a place in the Global Nuclear Club - itself the greatest danger to world security. They have no intention of promoting disarmament.

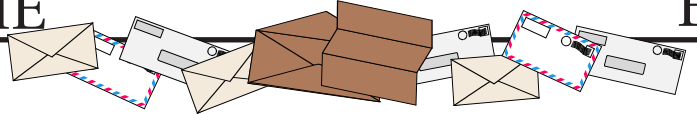
We should know better. True safety and security lies in the total elimination of nuclear weapons. NRRMs are best a transitional step to that goal.

Experience shows that CBMs don't create trust. Rather, it is the pre-disposition to trust that guarantees that CBMs will work effectively and promote greater trust. India and Pakistan agreed to conventional CBMs in the 1990s including prior warning of military exercises and a commitment not to violate each other's airspace. These were breached because there was no pre-disposition to trust.

Under today's more favourable climate, India and Pakistan should have aimed high. They didn't. Their CBMs could fall below the threshold.

Praful Bidwai is an eminent Indian columnist.

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



### How old are we?

Genuine neutral apolitical national analysts have now started pointing out that the we do not look at Bangladesh from the date of its emergence in 1971: but that old Bengal has a rich and diversified history of thousands of years, which the political leaders are sidetracking to keep the spotlight on party glory.

That is the basic problem with new political players in the game small footprints in history. That is the reason the two major political parties are fighting tooth and nail even after three decades after liberation -- Bengalees fighting Bengalees. Live a plain life, and think big. Our local politics had never been broad-minded, for accommodation. This internal crowding effect is the bane of narrow minds. The approach to political culture has to be reviewed, first by the non-politicians, and then pressure the political leaders to throw out the myopic outlook.

This step has to come soon, or the politicians face being cornered for a while. The forces of history are stronger than contemporary rhetoric.

Politics is a tool, like religion. It is not the message, but the channel, because the majority of the citizens might not be interested in digitalization of politics. But its ultimate analogue output at the national level. Buddhism, for example, never mentions religion or god, but it works for the non-violent adherents, through the right actions indicated in the eight-fold path. Ultimately, it is the impact of an individual on the society or social environment: the cumulative effect defines the nation.

Today we are still engrossed in ad hoc and transient issues, and do not allow the dust to settle down. The political dust could be very pervasive, resulting in asthmatic politics. We are coughing, barking and profaning, pruning and propping. Bangladesh has become a

political sanatorium of moribund ambitions. There are two handicaps: political terrorism and political hostage syndrome.

The level of political culture is not improving. There are cultures beyond mere political cultures. Politics can add to history, not subtract, or take away. No erase and rewrite-add footnotes. Who rewrite history? It is a loaded question. Toyenbee set a path: the rest is up to the players. Players cannot debar other players.

Islam travelled late into Bengal: introducing several implications, which have to be clearly proposed by the local students of cultural history. The presentations are rather opaque, and need clarifications for consistency, starting from the British period, right through the East Pakistan generation.

The question which naturally springs up in many informed minds is whether the political leadership leads or laps. It has to

lead, as it forms the ruling regimes. Lag is due to inertia effect, opposed to the five wheel effect. The seriousness of this indirect responsibility is being ignored in business of day to day mundane matters and issues.

Newly emerging nations need stronger leadership with firm anchors, to prevent drifting, and erosion of confidence in public minds. The nation is drifting for decades now, with the designated path still hazy in many. The right interventions are rather lukewarm, as the neutral camps of opinion are ignored. Therefore the media has an important role to play to indicate the sense of direction.

Old order changeth, yielding place to new. In Bangladesh, some local forms of resistance are unique. This aberration is not being stemmed. Leadership without long-term vision is fused with perils.

Since 1947 the Muslims in the

subcontinent have been trying to find their identity, and put a formal stamp on it. So far unsuccessful. The young generation is not reflective in this age of fast changes, based on materialistic instinct. The latter is deliberately being cultivated in the Western way of life, which is influencing the have-nots in the third world.

**A Mahseen Dhaka**

### T&T not market-oriented

It is very difficult for a government organization (in a democratic country!) to be market-oriented. One example is the BTB, which has usurped the fixed line telephone network in the country, and is allegedly privately making money by keeping the supply lower than the astronomical demand. An autonomous BTR Commission appears to be a puppet against powerful vested groups in the regime.

Here are some practical action plans for immediate action flow by the Cabinet (repeat, Cabinet): print and issue the Telephone Directory (suspended for the last few years on the plea of digital projects). Update/reprint (or issue Supplement) at regular intervals, as was done in the earlier decades. Now maintenance of database is easy with the use of computers. The retail price should be subsidies; but one free copy may be issued with a new installation of line/number. The price of privately published Tel Directories is very high. - issue Compact Disc (CD) of this Directory for sale (subsidized) for use by those who have PC (subscribers and non-subscribers). The private sector is quite capable of handling this contract. - insert the Directory on the Internet web site for global reference; including free display on the PC screens of the subscribers within Bangladesh. The SOEs do not believe in free gifts! I had to waste my time for these

common sense ideas (but the professionals and consultants have better ideas, for which they are paid highly). This project cost may be recovered by realizing several crore Taka outstanding bills which the honourable MPs are defaulting (press reports)! What a country -- none can tame BTB! Reprisal is so easy just disconnect the line!

**Md-Abad Dhaka**

### Budget -- why street demos?

The BNP is accusing the AL of street demonstrations. But I cannot understand why street demonstrations are needed after a budget is presented in the parliament. To 'celebrate' the budget. What is the big idea in trying to mould public opinion through such amateurish propaganda? I am not aware of such practices in any other country: while, of course, protest demos are common. We cannot excel in

indoor politics, except through the backdoors!

It reveals the mindset of our politicians, coming from the same developing society. Politics here is street-cultured, from the freedom *andolon* days. Why we cannot change and reorient the very approach to politics? This basic change in outlook cannot come incremental from the political playing fields (addicted!) a revolution is necessary for whitewashing the gray areas of the polluted political minds.

Our problem is simple (but the solution is difficult): one-track minds cannot identify change of approach to any issue. We are victims of the weaknesses of conservatism and traditional thinking. Generation-shift is required. The old guards have to be replaced--they are standing in the way.

**Alfa Ahmed Dhaka**