

## Women's representation

National aspirations unmet

THE Jatiya Sangsad's enactment of a law on women's reserved seats in parliament has three elements. First, the quota has been raised from 30 to 45; secondly, without marking any break with the past, the reserved berths will be as usual filled out through indirect election; and thirdly, the selection or nomination of the women members to the reserved quota will be proportionate to the respective strengths of the political parties in parliament. In other words, the principle of proportional representation has come to replace what used to be a winner-take-it-all clean sweep of the women seats by the ruling party or coalition. This is a new feature, apart from the raised number of women parliamentarians.

All this is a slight improvement upon the past dispensation, which is essentially subjective, cosmetic and apologetic in nature having nothing to do with any objective improvement of the women's political representation at the highest possible level. This is virtually maintaining status quo. As a matter of fact, in terms of the expectations raised in the backdrop of an opportunity presenting itself for legislating an entirely new dispensation, this is a big disappointment.

We have been consistently in favour of direct election to the women's seats. Unfortunately, a disingenuous argument to the effect that it involved a fresh exercise in delimitation of constituencies for women stood in the way of adopting the direct election method. The continuation of the old system, even with a slender embellishment, means that the women members would be handpicked by political parties as opposed to being elected by people.

The nominated women MPs had virtually no role to play except for helping in government formation, or raising the decibel of the ruling party's voice in the parliament as *yes persons*. It neither gave dignity nor power to the women.

The 14th amendment has failed to meet the aspirations of women for political empowerment which has been so persistently and legitimately articulated by women activist groups and endorsed by civil society leaders including the independent media.

Sooner a further amendment to the law is made the better.

## Buckling under zealot pressure?

It must stop before snowballing

A section of ultra-orthodox elements has long been objecting to participation of women in outdoor sports. Not long ago, they tried to stop a girls' football tournament in Dhaka. Timely interference by the government saved the day for the organisers.

It seems the forces opposed to women's presence in the sports arena are still active, as is evident from their successful attempt to get women out of a long distance swimming contest in Chandpur. The name of the organisation that the zealots have founded speaks volumes for their plans and programmes. The self-styled "Anti-Islamic activity resistance committee" had threatened to launch a movement if women swimmers were allowed to take part in the long distance event. They arranged a protest rally and submitted a memorandum to the Deputy Commissioner of Chandpur demanding exclusion of the event for female swimmers. Their demand was accepted. But what about those poor girls who have been knocked out of the tournament for something they are hard-put to accept? The swimming careers of the six girls, who were ready to enter the fray, have been badly jolted.

This is capitulation. The problem with accepting such a demand is that there is no knowing where the obscurantists will stop or what they will ask for the next time around. Swimming is a popular sport and pastime all over the world, and is believed to be a physical exertion of the most beneficial kind. It is more than a sport. Our boys and girls have a natural ability to swim and are doing pretty well in regional contests. It is a decent sport which has nothing that can be objected to. But, well, the orthodox have their own interpretation of the sport.

Now, it is time to have a closer look at the recent developments. Should we leave our women out of some popular sports and games only because some people feel that women should stay indoors? If not, then the government and all concerned should take a firm stand on the issue and neutralise the threat with timely and effective steps. It is not a good thing that sports and religion are being mixed up by the ultra conservative elements.

## The biotechnology debate

DR S K BHADRA

THE debate on merits and demerits of the use of transgenic crops in our country first started in 1998 and in the last five years quite a good number of commentary articles written by scientists, journalists and NGO workers appeared in our national and regional dailies. Very recently Nazrul Islam has expressed his view on the possible disaster that may arise with the introduction of biotechnology in our agriculture (*The Biotechnology Trap*, *The Daily Star*, 1 Nov. 2004). According to him the experts including technocrats and decision makers of our country are working in favour of some multinational companies (MNCs) and for that they are arguing for introduction of biotechnology in our agriculture. In this perspective I like to mention here some points. It is true that every technology has merits as well as demerits. But only the judicious application of a technology can bring its benefit for us. Atomic energy in the form of atom bomb is catastrophic but we cannot

ignore the benefits human society received with the peaceful uses of atomic energy. Only in agriculture sector a good number of crop varieties have been developed with the use of radiation, which are widely used even in our country. So we cannot put any straight negative comment on the application of biotechnology in our agriculture.

Biotechnology as such is a vast subject and GMO technology (Genetic Engineering) is only a part of it. In his article Islam has focused the only possible adverse effects of the introduction of GM crops in Bangladesh. Our country is densely populated and we must hunt for new technology that can help us in solving our food and nutrition problem. In this process there is no scope of ignoring our farmers' interest. Yes, our farmers are very poor and we must take care of their interest and not the interest of MNCs. And it is the responsibility of our national agricultural institutes such as Bangladesh Rice Research Institute, Bangladesh Agricultural Research Institute to see our national interests related to agriculture. I

## Political culture of renaming



AMM SHAWKAT ALI

THE recent decision of National University (NU) authorities to name NU as Ziaur Rahman National University has been termed by noted academics as "unfortunate and morally unacceptable" (*The Daily Star*, October 23, 2004). It is said that the senate of NU decided to rename this institution. The proposal in this regard was moved by the Vice-Chancellor of NU at the 10<sup>th</sup> session of the senate that had barely filled the quorum.

Giving his reaction to the proposal, a noted academic was reported to have said that it would make Ziaur Rahman "controversial". Other noted academics also adversely reacted to the proposed move for renaming. The reactions include (a) renaming would not increase the dignity of Ziaur Rahman, (b) renaming institutions should not be made at the whim of an individual or group and further that such a practice reflects poor quality of political culture and (c) the VC of NU has engineered the move to change the name to consolidate his position in the ruling party etc. One of the academics also said "we have witnessed the practice during the rule of Awami League and now under this government". Is that right?

### The legacy from Pakistan days

Changing of names of established roads was initiated when Bangladesh

was part of Pakistan. Thus the old Madan Mohan Basak road in Wari was changed to the Tipu Sultan road although Tipu Sultan had no contribution in that locality. Chitta Ranjan avenue near Sadar ghat was renamed Liaquat avenue. The list can go on. The practice continued after the birth of Bangladesh.

Nari Shikka Mandir near Hatkhola was renamed after 1971 as Sherebangla Balika Mohabidyalaya. This educational institution

authorities of the erstwhile Nari Shikka Mandir. The irony is that the name of the institution was not changed during Pakistan days.

### Global practice

There is nothing wrong in naming important places and institutions after the names of great leaders of nations or great individuals of distinction. Examples include George Washington University, Jawaharlal Nehru University, John F Kennedy

leader of Awami League in recognition of his contribution to the liberation war. It is now called Shah Amanat airport.

Some of the names of institutions and important places named after individuals, however, remain unchanged. This is what it should be. The examples include Osmani airport, Osmani medical college and Osmani auditorium. The Novo theatre named after Banglabandhu has, however, been renamed as Bhasani

### Resistance to renaming

A retired secretary to the government recalls some instances of resistance to renaming of important places by politicians. In 1974, he was one of the two deputy secretaries in the ministry of communications which consisted of (a) railways and (b) roads and highways including ports. An application to change the name of a rural railway station of the then Narayanganj subdivision was

Rahman's attention to that part of the petition which stated that the said application for renaming the railway station was not accepted by the minister for communications in 1974. Ziaur Rahman also did not agree to the proposal for renaming the station.

### Institutions are not built in a day

Akhter Hamid Khan, the well remembered architect of the two-tier cooperative network, in one of his writings, cautioned against the faster growth of what was than known as the integrated rural development programme (IRDP). In support of his contention he said "Human beings are dispensable but not institutions". His cautionary note was in a different context. However, the message is relevant. If institutions or places of public importance are forced to change their names on political or partisan grounds, the result is intellectual decadence. This is not to say that institutions or places of public importance should not be named after public leaders. Indeed, this should be done but not as part destruction of images or building up images for narrow partisan interests. There are only a few individuals in Bangladesh who are remembered as institutions because of their outstanding contributions to the nation or the society. Naming institutions is one of the ways of paying tribute to them. Changing the names on political grounds amounts to distorting history and very much in bad taste. It is believed by many in Bangladesh that the existing state of decadence of institutions of the state is the direct outcome of decadence in political psyche.

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was established by Lilabati Nag, daughter of Rai Bahadur Girish Chandra Nag. Her husband Anil Chandra Rai was a freedom fighter during British colonial rule.

Available information indicate that Lilabati graduated from Bethun College Kolkata in 1921 and had obtained her masters degree in English from Dhaka University in 1923. In the same year, Lilabati established a school called 'Dipali' at Abhay Das lane. The same school now is known as Qurumunnessa government girls' high school. On February 2, 1928 Lilabati established Nari Shikka Mandir to Sherebangla Balika Mohabidyalaya has not contributed to the image building of the late AK Fazlul Huq who was larger than life when he was alive. He is all the more so even today. Many people rightly believe that if he were alive, he would not have agreed to this change of name. On the other hand, Lilabati is still remembered with great respect by the college

airport, Subhas Chandra Bose airport and what have you. In India, many of the roads still bear the names of Mughal days and also of British colonial days. The roads or institutions in most countries have not been renamed with every change in government.

### Bangladesh scenario

In contrast, the political culture of renaming institutions and important places is all-pervasive. In 1973, by an act of parliament, a trust was established for national awards to individuals and institutions for their contribution to different fields of crop, livestock, fisheries and environment. In 1977, the act was amended by an ordinance to rename Banglabandhu award for agriculture as President's award.

After 1996, the law was further amended to restore Banglabandhu award. It is said that the present practice is to call it President's award. After 1996 again, the Chittagong airport was renamed after a local

Novo theatre. The old PG hospital, later converted into Banglabandhu Medical University has also not been renamed yet. Same is the case with Bangabandhu Agriculture University at Gazipur. The old Institute of Post Graduate Studies in Agriculture (IPSA) was upgraded into Bangabandhu Agriculture University after 1996.

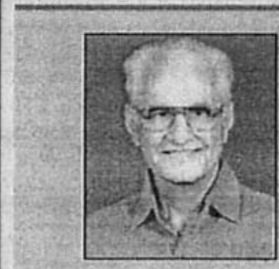
### A senseless political culture

In the case of NU, as stated earlier, one academic has termed it as a reflection of poor quality of political culture. Indeed it is so and more than poor. It is senseless. The major political parties would do well not to continue the practice else it will become a never ending game of renaming institutions and important places at tax payers' cost, public or international confusion excluded. It has also been said that renaming should not be done at the whim of individuals or groups.

received. The proposal was to name it after a local freedom fighter who was killed during the war of liberation. There was also a counter petition addressed to the minister, then late captain Mansur Ali. Both the applications were sent to the railway board for their views. The railway board, after local inquiry, sent their views. The minister ultimately decided not to change the name as the railway station was named after the village where it was located and it had existed there since the British colonial days.

It was a strange coincidence that Ziaur Rahman visited the village in 1977. He also addressed a public meeting in an open field near to the railway station. Some of the local people gave him a petition requesting the change of name of the station. It was the same old case in which the minister declined to interfere. Ziaur Rahman asked the deputy commissioner about his views. The DC silently drew Ziaur

## A new India policy needed



M B NAQVI

urises from Karachi

LET'S face facts. The Composite Dialogue, despite much contrived goodwill on both sides, is going nowhere. Even PM Shaukat Aziz's meeting with Indian Premier failed to make a breakthrough, largely because Pakistan wants India to accept a constitutional change in Indian-controlled Kashmir. It is time Islamabad realised when three and a half wars could not loosen India's control over Kashmir, mere diplomacy stands even less chance of achieving that goal. All aspects of Islamabad's India policy, including the one of encouraging Islamic insurgency in Kashmir, have not achieved much. Insistence on trying to reward or rework it runs the risk of an eventual all out war. If durable peace cannot be made, one way or another, collisions and war cannot be avoided in coming years.

The bottom-line of what PM Shaukat Aziz said to his Indian counterpart is tantamount to a return to the well-worn position of Kashmir being the core issue: unless progress is made on it, other seven issues cannot be resolved. It was a position that had been specifically given up in order to get Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee to agree to restart the Composite Dialogue. Can this reversion to the long held but barren stance deliver the desired goodies? One of the more dangerous implications of the policy of staking everything on the aim of somehow wresting Kashmir from India can only be on the basis of threat of war by Pak Army. Can war achieve the desired result? The answer is no. Long before such a war, non-stop arms races with India

remain the outstanding reality. It has given Pakistan a skewed Budget structure that crowds out not only development, but reduces social sectors' current spending also. It has made the society military-dominated and prevented democracy from taking roots. It perpetuates Pakistan's all-round backwardness. It is now increasing poverty. Despite this huge cost, Kashmiris have not come an inch closer to their *Azadi*. More of it can lead to Pakistan's destruction.

stance. Once he recommended the solution-seeking method of removing a possible solution from the agenda that India found unacceptable, he was giving India a virtual veto. Then, asking the people to debate possible alternatives to Pakistan's traditional stance on Kashmir was tantamount to throwing the plebiscite idea out of the window. When the head of a state offers to give up a stand in public he kills it. Its revival will not be taken seriously and will lack credibility.

ingly accepts. For, that to happen, the Kashmiris, rather than Pakistanis, should propose one or more possible solutions. The Indians will only accept a solution if it does not militate against their basic interests and even stances.

But it is also important that Pakistan's basic interests should not suffer. Just as the quest for a political solution is required to be of a win-win kind, if possible, the new relationship with India too should be equally beneficial to both sides. Moreover,

future, we have to end these arms races and develop the economy in a manner that increases employment and actually ameliorates the conditions in which common people live. That is a decision we must take for its own sake and now there is an opportunity presented by the experience of the year-long negotiations with India.

The net outcome of the talks so far is that no Kashmir solution is available that replaces India's sovereignty over the Kashmir territories with

India and Pakistan simultaneously giving maximum autonomy to their respective Kashmir, everything to be delegated to them except a few subjects, and making all borders (LOC included) soft -- is a better version; it is Altaf Hussain's basic idea clothed with attractive raiment. This formula too will entail a lot of negotiations. The raiment will need to be strengthened with policies pledged by both countries to be watched over by each other and the civil society in either country.

But the formula will go nowhere unless both countries agree to change their relationship radically from being inveterate enemies to close friends of the kind France and Germany now are. Just as the latter two did, these two will also need to implement a thoroughgoing programme of reconciliation between the peoples, the armies, bureaucracies and academia; it will have to travel from grassroots up to the highest echelons in all fields. Close bilateral economic cooperation, with a view to mutual enrichment -- far more than free and preferential trade -- should extend to the whole region. The SAARC can be the instrument. The two should perfect a partnership that may drive the regional integration which may eventually become a cognisable international entity.

All this is not meant to be an exercise to make Pakistan an awe-inspiring great power. The main objective is to resolve domestic polarisations and to improve the material standards of living of peasants, workers, the salaried and the lumpen proletariat. 'Greatness of a nation' is an airy-fairy concept when it does not hide the ugly face of imperialistic militarism. Although material improvement in living standards are very valuable and desirable for their own sake, they are not the final destination. The ultimate purpose is lift human beings to a phase where they, free of the worry of where their next meal come from, can meaningfully exercise their freedoms and live a richer and hopefully creative cultural existence.

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## PLAIN WORDS

The policies hitherto pursued have had a baleful effect. Politically aware Pakistanis realise that their polity's troubles arise from the unending arms spending. If we, the people of Pakistan, want a better future, we have to end these arms races and develop the economy in a manner that increases employment and actually ameliorates the conditions in which common people live.

It is time we saw the limits of actual possibilities on Kashmir clearly. If Pakistan would become more obstreperous on Kashmir, India will invade Pakistan and the much-tombed atomic weapons will not come into play, as they did not in 2002 and for the same reason of not being deterrent enough to a nuclear India. Kashmiris, by their own exertions, might achieve something, provided they struggle non-violently. But if they continued to employ guns, they run the risk of their own decimation: by using violence they are permitting India to employ its superior violence-making machine and they have shown they shrink not from employing overwhelming force against a largely unarmed populace. Use of violent means either by Pakistanis or Kashmiris now look like inviting a war between India and Pakistan. War and violence has now to be eschewed completely as futile and dangerous.

Anyway the form the policy carrying the germs of war took the form of demanding a UN-supervised plebiscite to decide the future status of J & K State so that its people can exercise their inherent right to determine their own future. President Musharraf had given it a more than merely implied good by this

If war is out of the question, and about, Kashmir -- as indeed it is -- an alternative relationship with India becomes a must. There will then be no point in staying distant or isolating Pakistan from other friends of India. Now that Pakistan is forced to change stance for many reasons, it will be far more logical and politic to cultivate good relations with India. Let's gain what we can in free trade and economic cooperation with it. It will make eminent sense to make India committed to as many schemes of economic and cultural cooperation as possible. The closer Pakistan gets to India, the less likelihood there will be of India's hardliners spitting fire and brimstone against minorities; India's secularism and democracy will be strengthened. That is in Pakistan's enlightened self-interest. It will also discourage more than merely incipient fascist forces in both countries.

Anyway, it is basically a new situation. Pakistan has inexorably and increasingly to withdraw from the earlier full support to Kashmiris' right of self-determination -- through the plebiscite way. Now, obviously and as the President says, the only likely solution that can be arrived at is the one that India will

both Pakistan and India need to ensure that Kashmiri people's interests do not suffer. Anyhow, Pakistan needs to keep in view its own domestic situation sharply in focus, both political and economic. The new relations with India must be of a kind and so pursued as to be compatible with solutions of all its domestic problems. These problems, on their own, require new policies. Primacy goes to economic hardships being borne by people because unemployment and poverty are growing at an accelerating rate. Inflation, combined with growth of poverty, creates an intolerable situation. Crimes of all kinds are growing in number as well as extent. Hopes of a better tomorrow are diminishing in common folks. These are clearly the results of the budget structure that has evolved over 57 years which allocates maximum resources for national security, firmly subordinating human security. Life for the common Pakistani was never so hard.

The policies hitherto pursued have had a baleful effect. Politically aware Pakistanis realise that their polity's troubles arise from the unending arms spending. If we, the people of Pakistan, want a better

something better. Pakistan cannot go out and conquer Kashmir; that makes war out of the question. If war is out of account, all that remains is to choose between two possible policy options: live without any settlement on Kashmir that will involve on present indications, continuation of arms races, despite India being able anyway to increase the disparity in military strength while bilateral relations remain strained. This will involve frequent crises and tensions and exigencies of Kashmir situation may propel the countries into conflict. This will mean war remaining built into the situation the way it is today.

The second option is to change the nature of Indo-Pakistan relationship after making a settlement on Kashmir on terms that are acceptable to India. MQM Chief Altaf Hussain's proposal to accept the LOC as the border may be painful if stated baldly. But it is realistic and is based on the only basis that will be acceptable to India. His "for the time being" makes no sense. Once a border has been made a border, it will have to remain a border. Any attempt to change it will become aggression -- and pointless if war is to be avoided.

In the context, the Manmohan Singh formula, if one can call it that --

## OPINION

believe our decision making body includes the experts from such institutes.

Islam has pointed out the negative impact of the introduction of green revolution and biotechnology in agriculture. Is it so? Was it possible to feed the increased population if the high yielding varieties of crops particularly of rice and wheat were not developed or introduced and acclimatised. For example, according to one estimate, global rice production must reach 800 million from 585 million in 2003 to meet the demand in 2025. And the agricultural scientists are looking for adoption of both conventional and high technologies to reach this goal. In the mean time the plant breeders and physiologists at IRRRI outlined a new plant type (NPT) and advanced significantly. Improving nutritional quality of rice has been identified as one food-based approach to remedy nutritional deficiencies prevailing in large parts of the developing world. In this context, the genetically modified golden rice, engineered to contain the vitamin A precursor B-carotene in the endo-

sperm, has been celebrated as a biotechnological breakthrough. Further it has been identified that exploiting the genetic diversity and the associated nutritional properties of autochthonous land races provides an option for addressing nutrition-related health hazards. So it is important to identify the problem and then to solve it with integrated approach. There are convincing examples that the application of biotechnology in conjunction with conventional techniques have yielded promising results.

It has been pointed out that the introduction of green revolution has come from the idea of commercialisation of agriculture. But so far report goes without green revolution it was not possible to feed the increased population of the world. Even if we look at our neighbouring country, India the picture becomes clear. It is only through green revolution India turned to be a self-sufficient/food surplus country from a deficit one. And the credit goes to the eminent scientist, Dr M S Swaminathan, for green revolution in India. It is true that famine or starvation of poor people is

not only related to total food production but also to uneven distribution of food. It is a different issue and government policy needs to be reoriented for that. But to feed increased population, our food production must be increased and here lies the development of efficient technology.

Islam has expressed his dread that with the introduction of biotechnology in our agriculture there will be further genetic erosion in our traditional crops as the farmers will concentrate more on monoculture. Biotechnological devices, on the contrary, offers opportunity of widening genetic diversity as mutation breeding does. Here the decision makers need to direct the authorities concerned to frame laws and programmes for conservation of the land races and widening genetic diversity. It is pertinent to mention here that recently made global treaty on sharing plant genes as ratified by 55 countries, has come into force. This can be considered a milestone in the context of upholding farmers' right and conservation of land races.

It has been presumed that if GM

crops are introduced our farmers will have to purchase its seeds at every sowing time. It has also been mentioned that such crops are unable to produce their true types and therefore it is non-renewable. This is not true as in case of our major crops such as rice, wheat, pulses (self-pollinated crops) once a variety is developed either through hybridisation or transgenesis, that can be maintained by the farmers. Only in case of hybrid variety (still such variety has not been released in Bangladesh in case of self-pollinated crops such as rice or pulses) seeds need to be provided at every sowing time. Even in case of self-pollinated crops such as brinjal and tomato it is very easy to supply hybrid seeds to the farmers as a single pollination can yield hundreds of seeds.

In Bangladesh at this stage the question of using of pesticide and herbicide resistant variety is not very important. We must concentrate on the development and release of improved varieties only in terms of yield, quality and disease resistant. With regard to the trial of Bt cotton in India it may be pointed out that the

experiments are still in progress and the results received so far are different depending upon environment. In such experiments genotype-environment interaction cannot be ignored. And know many scientists in India are now engaged in development of insect resistant cotton varieties by modification of genetic system through transgenesis.

Islam has rightly mentioned the allergic and toxic effect of some GM foods. Any GM crop before release in a country needs to be screened both at field and laboratory for testing its suitability in terms of its performance and quality. Even in case of many naturally existing field crops such as grass pea (Khesari) toxic substance has been reported and it is only through genetic manipulation necessary correction has been done. It is therefore important to concentrate on the proper and judicious application of biotechnology in our agriculture. Without depending only on foreign countries if we evolve new varieties ourselves as per our need then there will be no question. And in this connection we need to initiate collabora-

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