

BSS controversy

Let's get to the bottom of this

We are taken by surprise and quite perturbed by the controversy that has erupted over the recent news report issued by BSS, especially considering that it involves such a politically sensitive matter as the alleged meeting between a high-ranking minister of the Indian government and the son of the leader of the opposition.

BSS ran a report on March 17 stating that Indian Defence Minister Pranab Mukherjee had met with Sajib Wazed Joy and the political secretary to the leader of the opposition Saber Hossain Chowdhury in a closed-door meeting in New Delhi.

This account was quickly contradicted by Mr. Wazed, who has since added by way of clarification and verification of his claim, that he has not even set foot in India in the past ten years. Mr. Chowdhury has also unequivocally rejected the allegation.

BSS subsequently ran a second report on March 19 reconfirming its earlier account, claiming that Mr. Mukherjee had himself confirmed that the meeting had taken place.

Since then the Indian Defence Ministry has categorically refuted the BSS story, terming it "incorrect" and "baseless" and in direct talks with the daily Sangbad, the defence minister has himself personally and directly rejected the account as untrue.

We are thus now faced with a classic case of contradictory stories, only one of which can be the correct one. No one except BSS and the involved parties can know for sure wherein lies the truth in this matter, but there can be no argument that the direct refutations have compromised the credibility of BSS and requires the agency to take immediate steps to clear its reputation.

To maintain its credibility and public trust, especially the trust of the news organisations who rely on the accuracy of its reporting, it is now incumbent on BSS to come clean and go public with the source of its information and the measures taken to confirm the accuracy of its information.

BSS not only saw fit to run a story of a highly explosive nature, but even after the story had been refuted by one of the involved parties, it ran a second report reconfirming the earlier account. For the sake of its own reputation and for the good of Bangladeshi journalism as a whole, BSS must without hesitation come out and prove the veracity of its controversial and incendiary claim.

Budget for public universities

Proper utilisation of available funds to unlock newer possibilities

THE Association of the Universities has demanded an increase in the budget for the public universities. The point is relevant in view of the growing concern about the standard of education in the universities and the need for upgrading it. Obviously, the universities need better facilities like fully equipped laboratories and libraries to meet the requirements of the students.

However, the performance of the universities also needs to be evaluated correctly insofar as utilisation of the available resources is concerned. The process of internal auditing has to be strengthened to ensure accountability and transparency. Recruitment of teachers and other staff members is also reported to have been based on partisan consideration leading to relegation of the merit criterion. And then there is the perennial problem of teachers going abroad and overstaying away from universities to the detriment of higher education in home country. So, the drain on the financial resources is evident. And the universities are not on record for having adopted any effective measure to avoid such unnecessary expenditure.

The finance minister has advised the universities to raise funds from private sources. That is precisely how most universities in the West, especially in the US, are run. But this will depend on proven transparency in terms of current spending and sustainable financial discipline in the universities without which potential donors may not feel encouraged to do their bit in the development of the universities. Moreover, the money donated has to be exempted from tax as an incentive to the promoters of higher education.

Finally, the question of raising tuition fees has to be reviewed in light of the changed circumstances. This might be a politically sensitive and socially unpopular move, but there is no denying that time is ripe enough for some sort of readjustment of tuition fees. There is no point in being hesitant in this regard considering the ever increasing costs of running a university and the need for tuning into a changing world of knowledge-based societies.

The demand for higher budgetary allocations for the public universities has its point. But they cannot thrive on subsidies only. The universities need to have their own development plans based on fund raising from private as well as their own sources.

Food for thought



ABDUL BAYES

THE International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), the Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS), and the Bangladesh Rice Foundation (BRF) jointly organized a seminar recently in Dhaka on food security. Besides domestic and foreign scholars, senior cabinet ministers also took part in the deliberations to delve into the developments of and deterrents to food security (FS) in Bangladesh.

The whole day seminar was packed with policy-related papers and hence could claim a departure from the conventional wisdom of thoughts.

Joachim von Braun -- DG of IFPRI -- presented the keynote paper titled: "Food Security: Emerging Issues and Challenges." He sketched a global policy perspective on FS and then hinted at the pertinent policy parameters that might apply to Bangladesh. Finally, he highlighted some promising national and global actions. Allow me to draw upon some of the seminal observations.

Malignant malnourishment

Estimates show that in 2002, there were 852 million undernourished people worldwide. Most of

them live in the developing world (815 million). Half of them hail from small farms who cannot grow or buy food to meet their family's requirements. Another 22 per cent are landless rural people, 20 per cent live in urban areas, and the remaining 8 per cent depend on natural resources for eking out a living. The progress towards reducing undernourished people has been slow and -- excluding high performers China and India -- the number of the malnourished

far, could possibly stem the rot.

Scathing scores

How fair the fruits of the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) could be reaped home? En passant one needs to recall that the MDG had 8 goals addressed to health, nutrition and food issues based on consensus and to be carried out heart and soul in both developed and developing countries. In a rating of progress on a scale 0-10 (where 0 means no progress and

gladness, iron deficiency anemia reduces gross domestic product by 8 per cent annually, due to reduced school performance and productivity." The solution to endemic hunger lies not in growing traditional food crops. Attention needs to be placed on crops of high micro nutrient density that will complement existing nutrition interventions and provide a sustainable and low cost way of reaching people with poor access to formal markets and health care system. Develop-

the view that despite being a vulnerable economy, Bangladesh witnessed progress in crucial areas like population growth, macro-economic management, market led policies and economic reforms, disaster management, and food production. But notable progress in the areas of poverty reduction, hunger, and nutrition are yet come. Still one-third of the population is undernourished and poverty reduction progressed at only 1 percentage point per year.

BENEATH THE SURFACE

The time has come for decentralization and devolution of the decision-making process, accountability, participatory democratic process, and facilitation of the local community actions. Government, civil society organizations, and markets and business should form a hunger task force to face the chipping challenge. Government expenditures and development assistance should be targeted with a focus on reducing hunger, on growth and rural development and on strengthening the mechanism for coordinated action, especially on poverty and nutrition.

in the rest of the world hardly changed. The good news is that the percentage of undernourished people in the developing world declined almost dramatically from 28 per cent in the 1980s to 17 percent in 2002. But an uneven distribution of the reduction bears out the down-side of the so-called "success." Asia performed very well, with East Asia cutting the proportion by more than half. Latin America and the Caribbean saw very modest success, while Sub-Saharan Africa is still lying in limbo.

Thus, suspicion looms large over the probability of success of the Millennium Development Goal for reducing food insecure people by half by 2015. A significant change in policies, institutions and investments, in tandem with goals set so

10 means full progress) of reaching the goals by 2015, available evidence tends to show that as of 2005, poverty reduction had a score of 4, followed by hunger with a score of 3, and health with 4. This implies that the world's efforts at meeting the MDG objective will need a major thrust in the years to come.

Hidden hunger

Hidden hunger due to micronutrient deficiencies continue to pose a huge global health problem. Some two-billion iron-vitamin A- and iodine-deficient people in the developing world are reported to fail to reach their full potential and are subjected to impaired livelihoods, illness, and death. Quite obviously, women and children emerge as major victims. "In Ban-

ladesh attained, relatively, rice price stability through market reforms and private sector imports in the face of production short falls. One could notice that the difference between the highest and the lowest price of rice was 50 per cent during 1973-1980 compared to 6 per cent during 1981-1990. Increased food production and the growth of non-farm activities had imparted positive impacts on the poor.

Actions ahead

Joachim von Braun suggests a 7 point package to deal with hunger and malnutrition: (a) move from political rhetoric to reality on the ground through positive actions; (b) reform policies and create enabling environment; (c) increase agricultural productivity

of food insecure farmers; (d) improve nutrition for the chronically hungry and vulnerable; (e) reduce vulnerability of the acutely hungry through productive safety nets; (f) make markets work for the poor; and (g) conserve natural resources.

Giving up grievous governance

Governance has a direct bearing on the level of poverty and malnutrition. On the heels of heightened hunger and malignant malnutrition, concerned countries should change their tone of governance. It is not a top down, corrupt, and unaccountable governance that would deliver the dividends from setting the MDG targets, but a change in the gear of governance should be in order. The time has come for decentralization and devolution of the decision-making process, accountability, participatory democratic process, and facilitation of the local community actions.

There is also a dire need to develop partnership among actors for cutting hunger and malnutrition. Government, civil society organizations, and markets and business should form a hunger task force to face the chipping challenge. Government expenditures and development assistance should be targeted with a focus on reducing hunger, on growth and rural development and on strengthening the mechanism for coordinated action, especially on poverty and nutrition.

Abdul Bayes is a Professor of Economics at Jahangirnagar University.

The assassination of Shah AMS Kibria

We will not accept any partial investigation

ASMA KIBRIA

HERE are a number of important developments regarding the investigation into my husband's assassination on January 27, 2005. It has been almost two months since his death. I am deeply concerned at some recent news items. There seems to be an effort to limit the inquiry and to block a complete and independent investigation into the attack and the events leading to his death.

FBI involvement and the current investigation

Newspapers carried a report yesterday that an FBI team will be arriving this week to investigate the assassination of my husband Shah AMS Kibria. We are heartened by this development. However, we are also concerned about a number of issues.

As I have stated earlier, we will not accept the Bangladesh government's investigation and its findings without the participation of the FBI. From experience with earlier political murders, there is no reason to believe that the current investigation would be complete or impartial, nor that there would be any transparency given the BNP-Jamaat-e-Islami government's failure to make

findings of earlier investigations available to the public.

We demand that a successful FBI investigation must thus be a fresh one, starting from the beginning; it must not take the results of the government investigation as a starting-point. The information in the current report

out the order to kill Shah AMS Kibria, but also the persons who gave the order, regardless of their position and authority;

2. The circumstances of my husband's death, i.e., the failure of the government to provide helicopter transport and medical treatment after the grenade

the killing of my husband. Reportedly, the involvement of leaders at the national level has not been mentioned in the investigation or reflected in the charge-sheet, but the investigating team has stated (in a *Daily Star* report of March 17, 2005, p.1) that they were unable to identify the mastermind behind

"No confessional statement from Qaiyum will be taken."

"However, another police source has indicated that Qaiyum has confessed his involvement in the killing of Shah AMS Kibria. However, he will not be sent to a magistrate for a confessional statement under Section 164 of the

grenades.

It should be noted that the fear of implicating powerful persons within the ruling party may explain why the investigation has so far remained confined to district level BNP operatives. In this regard I would once again draw your attention to the daily *Janakantha* report of March 10 (p.1) that suggests that the investigation has stalled because the next step may lead to a powerful political figure.

Given these events, we are left with no choice but to continue our campaign to ensure a full and unrestricted investigation into my husband's killing. The report of any investigation - even one with FBI involvement -- must be made available to the public. The investigation must fulfill these basic conditions: transparency, independence, accountability, and completeness. We will not rest until we are assured of this, and I would request all people of conscience in this country to support us in our peaceful campaign for justice.

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may be used, but must not be taken without question. In this regard we would note that the long delay in bringing in the FBI raises new concerns regarding the destruction of critical evidence. There is speculation in the press that the reason for the delay was to allow time for the evidence to be tampered with.

We have no information on the specific terms of reference that would guide the involvement of the FBI in the investigation into my husband's murder. However, we would like to emphasize the need for an investigation that looks into:

1. The identity of not just the lower level operatives who carried

explosion, and the role of individuals including that of the Speaker in this regard;

We would once again emphasize the need for transparency -- the results of the FBI investigation should be made available to the public.

Reports on the current investigation

I have had to rely on the newspapers for information because the government has not made any official information on the investigation available to me.

The newspapers have reported that 10 local BNP leaders have been arrested and charged with

the attack.

Is it plausible that such an assassination would be carried out without orders from some higher level? Is not the Habiganj BNP under the direction of regional and national BNP leaders?

There are some very interesting newspaper reports on the reasons for the failure to obtain a confessional statement (under Section 164 of the Criminal Procedure Code) from the main accused, AKM Abdul Qaiyum, a BNP leader of Habiganj. The Investigating Officer (in the Kibria Assassination case) Mr. Munshi Atiqur Rahman has stated that the grenades used in the attack were brought from Dhaka by Qaiyum, but that he (Qaiyum) refused to disclose the source of these

the Code of Criminal Procedure. This is because he has become quite unbalanced. There is a danger that in a confessional statement he may try to implicate innocent political leaders and workers, so no such statement will be taken from him."

(The daily Bengali newspaper *Ajker Kagoj*, March 21, 2005, p.11) (translated from the Bengali).

Also, according to the daily *Prothom Alo* newspaper, the Investigating Officer, Mr. Munshi Atiqur Rahman has stated that the grenades used in the attack were brought from Dhaka by Qaiyum, but that he (Qaiyum) refused to disclose the source of these

The author is the widow of the assassinated finance minister.

More writings and information on the killing and subsequent investigation can be found at www.kibria.org.

TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE

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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.

Role of India

Raj Chengappa from "India Today" was quoted in the Sunday, March 20 edition of your daily as saying, "We are surrounded by failing states and problems, you know, whether you look at Nepal or Sri Lanka or Bangladesh and, of course, Pakistan. What is the sort of role you think India should be playing in the region?"

I find Mr. Chengappa's question to Dr. Condi Rice almost comical and I don't know which planet he has been living in but the last time I checked, a recent riot in the Indian state of Gujarat cost thousands of Indian lives, mostly Muslims. There is ongoing conflict in the Indian state of Tamil Nadu and a separatist movement in North Eastern India. No nation is perfect and although India is economically and technologically superior to its neighbours, it has no right to refer to

its neighbours as failing states when it clearly has a number of serious problems of its own. My suggestion to Mr. Chengappa is to recommend that his government clean up their own backyard before criticising those of others.

Abz

Better alone!

According to the Awami League as reported in DS of 19 March '05, Bangladesh will become a friendless state(!), as they could not perceive or understand the straightforward and bold stand the popular prime minister took when she dwelt on the unwanted and untoward interference by some diplomats and donor countries in our internal affairs including domestic politics! There is nothing wrong in it if she (the Hon'ble PM) has expressed feelings against

On e-mail

Esports or sports?

Many of our viewers don't watch TV nowadays. That's why many don't know about the performance of announcers and reporters of BTV. They have terrible problem of pronunciation.

None of them are smart. I was watching BTV. I heard the announcer saying "Now you will watch 'esports' show."

What the hell? As BTV is a state run channel, it represents the government as well as the country. The government should keep in mind that BTV world is being shown abroad too.

Cantara Wali Ruhu

DU

Hartal

I was reading an article regarding hartal. I have been staying outside the country for the last fourteen years. There are so

many problems that we face abroad. Life is not at all comfortable in a foreign country unless you have a good job. I could not go to my country for the last ten years and could not see my parents, brother, sister and relatives. Sometimes we (Me and my wife with two daughters) think we will go back to Bangladesh for good and do something there.

Unfortunately, we cannot make up our mind because of hartal, bomb blasts and the resultant insecurity.

I do not understand how 50% of Bangladeshis, of which 20% are educated, follow a party like the AL which does not care at all for the country or its people. To the leader of the opposition -- you have been defeated in the election and should try to do something positive that will help you win next time. Try to face the reality. Why are you calling hartal day after day? Don't you have love for the country? What Mr. Kerry is doing now? Is he calling hartal?

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