

# Storm hits BJP



ARSHAD-UZ ZAMAN

## THE HORIZON THIS WEEK

**L.K. Advani has done a remarkable service, something not really expected from him, by bringing out in the open the entire gamut of sub-continental politics. It is the greatest push forward to resolving once for all the bitterness and distrust that have plagued relations between the two giants of the sub-continent.**

**M**R. Lal Krishna Advani, president of the main opposition party of India and until recently the ruling party, has resigned. Advani has since been reinstated as party president. He tendered his resignation while visiting Karachi, his birthplace and the first capital of Pakistan. Standing in front of the mausoleum of Quaid-e-Azam (the Great Leader, a title bestowed by the Father of the Nation of India Mahatma Gandhi) Muhammad Ali Jinnah, he declared that Jinnah was a secular person.

No wonder the news has taken by storm the entire Indian political spectrum. Lavishing praise on Jinnah, Advani stated: "Many persons find a place in history, but there are actually very few who make history. Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah was one such rare personality."

What has galloped the politicians of BJP is that Advani is supposed to be the proponent of Hinduism, the fundamentalist brand of Hinduism. Taking a leap further he went on "the saddest day of my life was the demolition of the Babri mosque." It may be recalled that Hindu fanatics egged on by the BJP, and Advani leading them, demolished the mosque built by the founder of the Mughal Empire Babar.

It is remarkable that L.K. Advani has made his public mea culpa in Pakistan, while there is a new wind of friendship blowing between the two nations. Advani's remarks will be sweet music to Pakistani ears. It will enormously strengthen the hands of Pakistan President Pervez Musharraf, who has taken big risk in pushing the peace process forward and included the third

party, the Kashmiris. According to reports, Advani's followers have been very upset by his description of Jinnah as "secular" for he is supposed to be the architect of the partition of India in 1947. Jinnah's life is an open book and there is no trace of religious fanaticism. He studied law and became a very successful barrister. Throughout his life he was a dandy, immaculately dressed and often in sharkskin suits, and in London fancied him as an actor. He used to sport a monocle. He enjoyed a glass of whiskey. He switched to Shalwar Kameez and a Karakuli cap branded Jinnah cap shortly before the partition of India. During his political career in the thirties he had been called "the Ambassador of Hindu-Muslim unity." When that effort failed, he went to London and resumed law practice. It is when in 1940, the famous Lahore resolution was adopted that Muslims of India entreated Jinnah to return to India and take over the leadership of the Muslims. The incorruptible Jinnah responded positively.

The civilised Mr. Jinnah could not imagine the bloodbath that would be let loose between Hindus and Muslims. Entire trainloads of refugees would arrive across the border, but as corpses. This is one of the goriest chapters of Indian history following granting of independence by Britain. Shortly after assuming the reins of power Mr. Jinnah delivered a remarkable speech, which was the boldest secular statement.

Secularism is the main pillar of the Indian constitution. The multi-

ethnic, multi-religious and multi-linguistic society of India can exist only as a secular state. This was clearly understood by the founding fathers like Gandhi and Nehru. The Indian National Congress, which led the struggle for independence, stood foursquare behind secularism. With the passage of time this idea was faced with wear and tear. As the hand of the federal government started weakening and state government continued to exercise more and more power, the hold of secularism and that of the Congress party started slackening. Religious fundamentalism reared its ugly head. The huge Muslim population of India felt the squeeze.

Those opposing L.K. Advani are standing on shaky ground. India is a secular republic and is destined to continue her forward march. Secularism and Hindutva cannot co-exist. Hindutva is all that is obscurantist and backward looking, from which resurgent India is striving to break free. India has achieved remarkable progress in the last few decades, and in the twenty first century, which is supposed to be the Asian century, has a place of pride.

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# Diversification of agricultural products

## Meeting the evolving demands

MD SAYEED HOSSAIN

**D**IVERSIFICATION of agricultural products has become imperative to meet the increasing demand for food and also to keep pace with the changing food habits particularly among the urban people where fast foods are growing popular. The main ingredients of fast foods are potato and chicken. Rice, the staple food of the country lags behind the increasing demands due to population boom. The country produced 2.75 crore metric tonnes of food during 2004 with the deficit of 30/40 lac tonne. So diversification has become imperative to bridge down the demand-supply gap. Besides, to ensure nutrition and balanced diet for the people food diversification is inevitable. Diversified agricultural products may add more value by way of export. But the success of this diversification will depend on the effective integration of agriculture to industry. Industrialisation is the mother of development and if the agriculture could be effectively integrated to industry then the real development will take place. The much-talked about issue of the country is that our RMG sector is under threat due to withdrawal of quota as per WTO agreement. But at the same time withdrawal of subsidy on agriculture by the developed nations as conceded in WTO meeting held in Switzerland from 28-07-04 to 01-08-04 may create ample opportunity for export of our agricultural products. Besides, we have competitive edge on agricultural products, as our land is very much fertile and labour is comparatively cheaper. However, we may apparently take into consideration the potentiality of few items such as potato, maize, cotton, pulse, onion/garlic, vegetables, date juice, coconut, tomato, pine apple, guava, fish etc and other products along with paddy and wheat which are discussed in brief considering their prospect and potentiality.

Potato: Potato has huge demands for its diversified usage. It

**F**or integration of agriculture to industry, investment friendly environment to attract foreign direct investment as well as local investment should be ensured, where obviously the government and other related agencies should take the lead. Evidently the present market is largely "Buyers' Market". Private entrepreneurs should come up to establish export houses for marketing indigenous products in different countries. Our Embassy people in different countries may take the lead to promote our export as a part of country's economic diplomacy.

grows almost all over the country but in some areas, the lands are most suitable for potato cultivation with competitive edge over other crops. In 2004 the country produced 40lac metric tonnes of potato. Processed potato has better export prospect with more value addition. It may be noted that in EU and US chain stores such as Macdonald, KFC and others largely use potato. Our policy makers as well as the prospective entrepreneurs should come up for tapping the export potentialities of potato in overseas countries.

Maize: Couple of decades back people in this region was not habituated to eat wheat. But now the scenario is completely changed and wheat has now become the second staple food after rice. Similarly, demand for maize is growing day by day and also getting popularity and importance due to its variety of usage. Beyond human consumption, maize is the main ingredient of poultry feed. But maize is mostly imported to meet such huge demand. As per the information of Agriculture Directorate there is an annual demand for 10 tonnes of maize of which the poultry sector alone needs 9 tonnes but the country produces only 3 tonnes. Production of maize is more profitable due to its low cost of Tk 4.00 against sale price of Tk 8.50 per KG. To save the hard earned foreign currency production of maize in a large scale has become imperative.

Cotton: The RMG sector of Bangladesh is in the realm of stiff competition in a quota free regime where the inherent advantage/protection of Quota is withdrawn from January 2005 making the prospect of our RMG export very challenging. One thing is crystal clear that to make our RMG export competitive under WTO, development of backward linkage industries is a must. But such development will largely depend on the availability of indigenous raw materials i.e. cotton. If we look at the success story of industrial development in China, India and Pakistan definitely their textile sector would be in the focal point, which happened due to the indigenous production of cotton. Hence, for the growth/survival of our RMG sector in the long run, cultivation of cotton has now



become imperative for which the authorities concerned should take the lead.

Vegetables: In Middle East and other countries where Bangladeshi people are working as wage earners there is good prospect for export of vegetables, white fish, dry fish, biscuits, chanachur, sweets, pickle etc. As per EPB 48 kinds of vegetables and fruits are exported to 15 countries but the volume is even below 10 percent of their requirement. India, Ceylon, Kenya, Egypt, Thailand, Mexico, Brazil are the main exporters of vegetables. As per the recent study of the Agro-based Industries and Technology Development Project (ATDP), around 0.4 million Bangladeshis are working only in the United Arab Emirates having the potentiality of export market for USD 3.40 billion where Bangladesh annually exports only worth USD 0.02 billion. Similarly, in Japan there is a big market of USD3,000 million for vegetables. It is evident that in many countries the price of vegetable is at par with fish or meat. In this context, BRAC model may be followed which has achieved good success in the export of vegetables to 10/12 countries. They also obtained European Retail Parties Good Agriculture Practice (EUREPGAP) certificate first in Bangladesh. Without this certificate vegetables cannot be exported to EU. But for export of vegetables from Bangladesh the main hindrance is the non-availability of cargo space for airfreight. The authorities concerned may take the initiative right at the moment.

Spices: For import of pulse, onion/garlic, mastered seeds and

other spices the country spends about Tk10,000 crore but in the past we had abundant production of those items in the country. Lands of certain areas are quite suitable for such crops viz the greater districts of Jessore, Kushtia Faridpur, Pabna etc. As per Bureau of Statistics, annual requirement of onion is 4/5 tonnes but the indigenous production is only 1.5 tonnes leaving the deficit of 3.5 tonnes.

Betel leaf: Betel leaf is also one of the cash crops having enough export potentiality to Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, and UK etc. The export market may also be extended to other Middle East countries, US, Australia, Malaysia, Singapore etc. In KSA each betel leaf is sold for REAL 0.50, in UK pound 0.25, for USD 0.50 in US, EURO 0.50 in EU and Rupees 2 in Pakistan. Bangladesh annually exports betel leaves worth Tk1.00 to 1.50 billion to Saudi Arabia, other Middle East countries and Pakistan which may be substantially increased due to the inherent advantages as it grows abundantly almost all over the country.

Keeping in view the inherent advantages, jute plants may be used for production of paper. Though efforts were being made earlier but desired result could not be achieved due to lack of technological advancement. Hence, technological adjustment/innovation is needed right at the moment for tapping the potentiality. However, it is learnt that the government is contemplating to import suitable machines to make the project a success.

Food processing: Processed foods such as tomato ketchup, jam/jelly from guava, pineapple and

banana product have huge export prospect because of the inherent advantages of price competitiveness. Tomato and many other vegetables may be produced round the year if research and development work is undertaken by the concerned agriculture department. There is no denying the fact that without revolution in agriculture it is not possible to create revolution in industry. This actually helps increase income of the cultivators, which in turn will create savings and also raise consumption. Bhutan being a small country availed of the opportunity of its inherent advantage of huge production of orange/apple and other fruits. The jam, jelly, juice of orange/ apple of Bhutan are highly marketable in many countries of the world including Bangladesh. But unfortunately we cannot process our huge quantity of seasonal fruits. The authorities concerned should find out the impediments and also come up with immediate solutions. Government should give priority to establishment of agro-based industry in EPZ. Incentive may also be given to those industries.

Date juice: Date juice is a very tasty drink. Foods prepared with date juice are also very much delicious and popular. Date juice can be bottled for marketing with some preservative or alcohol may be produced from date juice for export. Once such market is created there should be simply a revolution in this sector. Date trees are abundantly grown in the greater districts of Jessore, Khulna, Kushtia, Faridpur, Rajshahi. Similarly palm juice can be marketed.

However, for integration of agriculture to industry, investment friendly environment to attract foreign direct investment as well as local investment should be ensured, where obviously the government and other related agencies should take the lead.

There is no denying the fact that effective marketing has now become imperative for successful launching of any product and this needs to be addressed with top most priority. Evidently the present market is largely "Buyers' Market". Private entrepreneurs should come up to establish export houses for marketing indigenous products in different countries. Our Embassy people in different countries may take the lead to promote our export as a part of country's economic diplomacy and may contribute substantially towards tapping the potentialities. Reputation of exporters as well as of the country is the hallmark and the most decisive factor to earn the confidence of foreign buyers. The authorities concerned and related agencies as well as the business community should ensure fairness in deals.

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# Another university of science and technology in the offing

PROF. DR. ABUL KHAIR

**F**OUNDING a university in Bangladesh no longer surprises its citizens as there are more than 20 in the public sector and over 50 in the private. But founding a science and technology university in a coastal terrain like Noakhali, is significant. A newly accured coastal system may render this university a versatile field station to study the pattern of changes in the seashore and harness its opportunities.

Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia laid the foundation stone of Noakhali University of Science and Technology (NUST) in October 2003. It is the fourth in the row of twelve such universities. The government decided in 1998 that they would establish universities in the twelve erstwhile greater districts where there was none. Academic activities have already started in the first three -- Patuakhali University of Science and Technology, Hajee Mohammad Danesh University of Science and Technology at Dinajpur and Moulana Bhashani University of Science and Technology at Tangail.

The aim of founding a science and technology university as defined in the project programme is to mould merit into strong work force and to develop centre of excellence to create and disseminate knowledge.

Noakhali University of Science and Technology is being built at Sonapur, eight kilometre South-West of Majidee. Its construction work was formally inaugurated on 24 March, 2005. Law minister Barister Moudud Ahmed graced the occasion as the chief guest. Education minister Dr. M Osman Farruk, local MP Mr. Md. Shahjahan, UGC chairman Prof. Dr. M Asaduzzaman and member Prof. Monirul Hoque attended as special guests.

The site of the university is part of the land of a vast Char that stretches on the south to Char Jabbar, Char Bata, Char Wapda and Char Clark before it reaches the feebly flowing Bhulua river beyond which continues Hatiya and then the Nijhum Dweep. Like the district itself Sonapur has a long history of erosion and accretion caused by the mighty Meghna on the west and the Bay of Bengal on the south.

The landscape here is amazing particularly because of thin population and thin plantation. The area is not fertile as a result of salinity.

**The construction work of the university at Sonapur is going on in full swing under the supervision of Education Engineering Department. The BRTC of BUET has been appointed as the consultants. Precautionary measures against the calamities such as tidal surge, earthquake, Tsunami, cyclone, flood and salinity are being considered in depth. The Head of the Department of Architecture, BUET has developed a master plan having a profound theme and thought of a modern university.**



Paddy fields bear the signs of poor harvest. Trees are new and not grown as robust as they should be. Tall trees do not mark the horizon. Ponds appear in large numbers but most of them dry up during the summer. Poor harvest and low vegetation growth is related to non-availability of nutrients in the sandy soil. Low or high tech methods including indigenous measures may turn these arid fields to rich farmlands. It will be appropriate for this university to watch all these factors along with also many other issues on academic foundations.

Noakhali University of Science and Technology will follow the semester system for its four-year undergraduate programme. A student would take 160 credit hours at least or 170 at most. The four-year degree will be completed in eight semesters -- each will be over twenty weeks. The first sixteen weeks will be engaged for lectures, lab or field works. Students will use the next eighteen days for reading preparatory to examinations. These will be held

and the results declared within the next ten days. Semester-1 will begin on 2 January and end on 21 May. The university will go for a break from 22 May to 4 June. Semester-2 starts from 5 June and finishes on 22 October.

A long vacation for 71 days will be effective from 23 October to 1 January while the teachers may go for an eight-week holiday. For a fraction of the community the first nine weeks of this vacation will be employed to run a short but intensive semester in which students will repeat a failed course or take a course anew to remain in access of the 160 credit hours. Courses will be run in this semester on demand and supply basis. The number of classes per week for a course here will be doubled. Exams and results will be completed in the last week. During this long vacation admission for Semester-1 will also be finalised.

An ongoing course in a semester will be emphasised by quizzes, mid term tests, internship, field-work and term final examination.

The courses will be graded on the gains of these evaluation components. Three to four books will be prescribed as the texts for any course although the teacher will follow one in toto. The lecture schedule will show the length of materials to be covered in each lecture. A lecture not given due to a valid reason will be given on a weekend day to makeup. A three credit hour course will have three deliberations, lectures or lab exercises, per week. The duration of a lab period will be twice as much of a lecture period and that for a fieldwork will be four times as much. Thursday and Friday will make the weekend although offices will remain open on Thursdays. Everything will be raised in and approved by proper bodies in the course of time.

A number of subjects are named to be included in the inaugural list in which the prominent ones are Coastal Engineering and Management, Fisheries and Marine Science, Soil Science and Agro Technology, Forestry and Wood technology, Garments and Textile Technology, Electronics and Telecommunication Engineering, Pharmacy, Nursing Science, Leather and Footwear Technology and Management and Information System.

The University will equally be an place of opportunity for all the students. They will find opportunities to develop their cultural abilities and sportive feats. Job or studentship like teaching and research assistance or lab demonstration may be available for meritorious students. Initially the university will run a research centre to cover the research facilities for the inaugurated departments. Adaptive research may be carried out through this centre based on some burning issues related to the coastal system.

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Prof. Dr. Abul Khair is Project Director, Noakhali University of Science and Technology.

# Amnesty report on 'gulag of our time'

BILLY I AHMED

**A**MNESTY International has called on the Bush administration to close its prison camp at the US Navy base in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, calling it "the gulag of our time."

The human rights group's Secretary General Irene Khan called for the closure of the infamous institution. About 540 men are detained in the prison camp for as long as three years, most without trial, purely on suspicion of having links to the Taliban regime or Al Qaeda.

Khan was speaking at a press conference to launch Amnesty's 308-page annual report for 2004, which accuses the United States and its main ally Britain of betraying the cause of human rights in pursuit of the so-called "war on terror."

"Not a single case from some 500 men has reached the courts," Khan said. She accused Washington and London of both masterminding and ignoring acts of torture. "A new agenda is in the making, with the language of freedom and justice being used to pursue policies of fear and insecurity. This includes cynical attempts to redefine and sanitise torture," said Ms. Khan.

US troops have committed appalling torture, and sexually abused detainees, Khan said, and evidence has since come to light "that the US administration had sanctioned interrogation techniques that violated the UN Convention against Torture."

"When the most powerful country in the world thumbs its nose at the rule of law and human rights, it grants a license to others to commit abuse with impunity," she warned.

Neither the Bush administration nor the US Congress has called for a full and independent investigation of the abuses of prisoners at Abu Ghraib, or into the evidence suggesting that such practices applied to other prisoners held by America in Afghanistan, Guantanamo and elsewhere. "Instead, the US government has gone to great lengths to

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restrict the application of the Geneva Conventions and to 'redefine' torture," Khan said. "It has sought to justify the use of coercive interrogation techniques, the practice of holding 'ghost detainees' (people in unacknowledged incommunicado detention) and the 'rendering,' or handing over, of prisoners to third countries known to practice torture. The detention facility at Guantanamo Bay has become the gulag of our times," she said. "Entrenching the practice of arbitrary and indefinite detention in violation of international law. Trials by military commissions have made a mockery of justice and due process."

Khan added the UN Commission on Human Rights "has become a forum for horse-trading on human rights. Last year, the commission dropped Iraq from scrutiny, could not agree on action on Chechnya, Nepal, or Zimbabwe, and was silent on Guantanamo Bay."

The section of the annual report dealing with the Middle East and North Africa the report explains, "Citizens bore the brunt of the casualties as the war in Iraq intensified and the death toll rose. Tens of thousands of men, women and children were reported to have been killed or injured since the armed conflict began in March 2003. Both the US-led occupying forces and armed groups operating in Iraq -- often with the declared objective of resisting foreign occupation -- continued to violate international human rights and humanitarian laws with impunity."

"Throughout the year there were reports that scores of civilians had been killed unlawfully by the US-led

forces during bombardments of Fallujah, Najaf and Samarra, and in various operations in Baghdad."

The report further states: that hundreds of civilians have been killed in "indiscriminate or direct attacks by armed groups" opposing the US occupation.

Elsewhere in the Middle East, "human rights violations continued to be justified by the global 'war on terror' as security forces across the region responded to attacks by armed groups they accused of links with Al Qaeda."

In the section on the Americas, Amnesty turns once more to the way the US-led "war on terror" has undermined human rights. The report explains:

"President Bush's refusal to apply the Geneva Conventions to those captured during the international armed conflict in Afghanistan and transferred to the US naval base at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, was challenged by a judicial decision in November. The ruling resulted in the suspension of trials by military commission in Guantanamo, and the government immediately lodged an appeal. The US administration's treatment of detainees in the 'war on terror' continued to display a marked ambivalence to the opinion of expert bodies such as the International Committee of the Red Cross and even of its own highest judicial body. Six months after the Supreme Court ruled that the federal courts had jurisdiction over the Guantanamo detainees, none had appeared in court. Detainees reportedly considered of high intelligence value remained in secret detention in undisclosed locations. In some

cases their situation amounted to 'disappearance.'"

The US has also continued to pressure governments throughout the region to sign unlawful immunity agreements shielding US personnel from surrender to the International Criminal Court: "Of 12 countries that had refused to sign, 10 had some military aid suspended as a result. In November the US Congress threatened to cut off development aid to countries that refused to sign."

In a more piercing statement, William Schultz, the executive director of Amnesty International's US branch issued a direct warning to top US officials.

"The apparent high-level architects of torture should think twice before planning their next vacation to places like Acapulco or the French Riviera," he said, "because they may find themselves under arrest as Augusto Pinochet famously did in London in 1998."

The American establishment press has reacted to the human rights report issued by Amnesty International with a combination of indignation and verbal mud slinging. The editorial boards of the Wall Street Journal and the Washington Post have taken particular offence at the statement by Amnesty International's secretary general calling the US-run prison camp in Guantanamo Bay "the gulag of our times."

This Amnesty International Report, which covers 149 countries, highlights the failure of national governments and international organisations to deal with human rights violations, and calls for greater international accountability.

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The report can be read at the Amnesty International web-site.

Billy I Ahmed is a researcher.