

## Blowout again!

**Fix responsibility, prevent recurrence**

As it is, one explosion in a gas field is a disaster, and two, within less than six months in the same gas field is totally unacceptable. It is the same company, Naiko, in the news once again and Tangrailla is still burning. Will it be wrong to ask whether we have the right people with required expertise for the job or are we the victims of shortcut and sloppy work?

The explanation of the drilling company is something bordering on the unbelievable. From the reports in the media, the blowout appears to have been caused, once again, by poor technical planning, lack of timely action and absence of constant supervision. That there was lax supervision there is no doubt, something which also the advisor to the ministry has recognised in his initial reaction to the media.

The report of the investigation committee headed by the Additional Secretary of the Ministry of Energy & Mineral Resources, on the first blowout in Jan 2005 had categorically blamed the company for serious negligence as well as fault in the drilling plan. BAPEx came in for criticism also. It is incomprehensible that a relief-well, being dug to sort the problem arising out of the last blowout, will suffer the same fate!

We are told that almost 500 crores taka will go up in flames by the time it is doused. What one cannot expect is the facile manner in which losses and compensations are spoken about, as if it is the loss of gas, which of course is a very important factor that counts for everything in the equation. Equally important, and something we often tend to overlook, is the adverse impact that such disasters have on the lives of the people of the affected area as well on the flora and fauna which might take many many years to be recouped. For all that one can say some of the losses may not be recouped at all.

In the past we had raised serious reservations regarding competence of some of the companies prospecting for gas in Bangladesh. We suggest the government take a comprehensive review of work in all our gas fields and their safety procedures, before more such incidents occur.

## A patently irreligious act

**Wrath against a defenceless community**

THE Ahmadiyyas have come under attack again. This time in a more virulent form. It began with dousing petrol on an Ahmadiyya mosque and torching it in the small hours of Thursday night at Kandipara in Brahmanbaria town. The community people themselves put out the blaze before the police and the firefighters arrived on the scene.

Almost simultaneously, at least two dozen homemade bombs were burst at Bhadughar within Brahmanbaria municipal limits and Shuhilpur under Sadar upazila. Khatm-e-Nabuat may have denied having had anything to do with it, but there is no question about the orchestrated attack in Brahmanbaria being the outcome of sustained, open incitement to religious frenzy against a particular community.

If the series of assaults on them, especially on their mosques, had not taken place in various parts of the country earlier on, there is no gainsaying the fact that the Brahmanbaria cocktail blasts and arson would most possibly have been averted.

There was the usual run of post-incident medical treatment for the victims, police placement and law and order alert of all kinds, but the question that exercises the mind a lot is this: why was there a local intelligence failure to foresee what was coming and to preempt it? Generally the administration must be seized of the need to provide security cover to Ahmadiyya-inhabited areas in order that no untoward incident can take place in them. The police couldn't arrest anyone in that small area, which is bound to surprise people.

Let us not forget that lately Bangladesh has come under international spotlight not for all the right reasons. One of the points of criticism related to religious intolerance of a handful against the Ahmadiyyas which is out of steps with our age-old traditions of religious harmony and peaceful co-existence of different faiths. We must not allow anybody to spoil our natural image.

M. ABDUL LATIF MONDAL

THE Election Commission (EC) of Bangladesh, it is learnt, has very recently approved a format of affidavit in line with the eight-point directive of the High Court, in which the candidates for the parliamentary elections will have to submit the required information to the Returning Officers (RO). The RO will make the information public through the media to inform the voters of the candidates. According to the EC source, the new measures will be effective from Sunamganj by-election slated for July 20.

It may be mentioned that upon a writ petition filed as Public Interest Litigation (PIL) on April 23 last by three lawyers of the Supreme Court asking for vital information from the candidates seeking election to parliament, a High Court bench on May 24 directed the Election Commission (EC) to make it mandatory for the candidates of parliamentary elections to furnish certain vital information to the EC along with their nomination forms. Earlier the High Court bench concerned issued a rule on the EC to explain why it should not be directed to take measures to collect information as mentioned in the writ petition. The EC did not challenge the rule by filing any reply, and the court delivered its verdict after ex-parte hearing of the case.

According to the verdict of the High Court, a candidate seeking election to parliament will have to furnish following information along with his/her nomination form through affidavit: (1) his academic qualification with certificates, (2) whether he is accused in any criminal case, (3) whether there was any past record of criminal case against him and the result thereof, (4) his profession/occupation, (5) his source or sources of income, (6) whether he was member of parliament (MP), if so, the role he played individually or collectively in fulfilling

the commitments to the people, (7) statement of assets and liabilities of himself as well as of his dependents, (8) particulars of loan taken from bank / financial institutions personally, jointly or by dependents or loan taken from bank by the company in which he is chairman, managing director or director. In addition, the court directed the EC to hold joint projection meetings and to

night. Disclosure of statement of assets by a candidate himself and his dependents will enable the voters of a constituency to judge the financial integrity of a candidate (particularly of an ex-MP seeking reelection). Many voters may not like to vote for a candidate who has amassed wealth illegally.

Second, as a result of disclosure of criminal records, a candidate with

crimes, make a number of commitments in their election manifestoes. Besides, the party leadership forcefully assures the implementation of various commitments made by their nominees in their respective constituencies, if they are voted to win. But most of the commitments made by them to the people remain unfulfilled even if they win the elections. This happens during every parliamen-

Regarding the first point it may be said that clause (1) of article 66 of the constitution has prescribed the qualifications and disqualifications for election to parliament. But the information to be furnished by a candidate for parliamentary elections along with his nomination form as per directives of the High Court is in no way connected with the qualifications or disqualifications for

constitution, parliamentary elections will be held during the tenure of non-party caretaker government. The constitution provides that the non-party caretaker government shall give to the EC all possible aid and assistance that may be required for holding the general election of members of parliament peacefully, fairly and impartially. Such a congenial atmosphere is an added advantage for the EC to discharge its assigned responsibilities effectively.

We may recall that the Indian Supreme Court's directives of March, 2003, the Election Commission of India made it mandatory for each candidate for parliamentary and assembly elections to furnish certain vital information along with his nomination form.

Information to be furnished by the candidates for parliamentary and assembly elections along with their nomination forms include, among others, disclosure of all their criminal records; statements of all assets and liabilities of the candidates themselves and their family members; and the educational qualifications of the candidates. The Supreme Court further directed that the non-disclosure of the required information would be a ground for the rejection of nomination. It may be noted that there was a long legal battle in India to make it mandatory for the candidates of parliamentary and assembly elections to furnish the aforesaid information along with their nomination forms.

To conclude, the government and the political parties in Bangladesh should render all possible cooperation and assistance to the EC to implement the directives of the High Court. Anyway, this is going to be an acid test for the new Chief Election Commissioner.

M. Abdul Latif Mondal is a former Secretary to the government.

**As a result of disclosure of criminal records, a candidate with criminal records will no longer be able to hide his hazy past. This is likely to discourage the voters to vote for a candidate with criminal records. A good lawmaker has to be knowledgeable about the constitution and important laws of the country... Here lies the cause for emphasis on educational qualifications of a candidate. The government and the political parties in Bangladesh should render all possible cooperation and assistance to the EC to implement the directives of the High Court.**

compel all the candidates in a constituency to stand on a platform to answer the queries of the people. The court also said that the EC would ensure that information it has received from the candidates is passed on to the voters so that they can take the right decision in electing candidates.

Now the question may arise as to why it became necessary for the High Court to issue the above directives to the EC?

First, criminalisation of politics, which started in the early days of independence, has gradually become a hydra-headed monster. Black money and muscle power have continued to reign over general elections. Money plays an important role in securing party nomination, particularly from the major political parties. In the major political parties serious struggles arose for securing nomination and finances played a major role in it. There is allegation that some major parties gave nomination to candidates who donated huge amounts of money to the parties. Many candidates revolted and changed their parties overnight when they failed to secure party nominations. A BNP leader became AL leader and an AL leader became BNP over-

criminal records will no longer be able to hide his hazy past. This is likely to discourage the voters to vote for a candidate with criminal records.

Third, lawmaking is the main responsibility of the MPs. A good lawmaker has to be knowledgeable about the constitution and important laws of the country; he should be conversant with the working of the government; he has to enrich himself with the working and proceedings of parliaments in other countries. Here lies the cause for emphasis on educational qualifications of a candidate.

Fourth, available information suggests that during the British regime and for some considerable period thereafter the political parties used to nominate persons to contest elections from among the ranks of lawyers, litterateurs, insolvent patriots, hereditary landlords and others. But there has been a qualitative change. The main criterion now for nominating a candidate by a political party is his ability to win the election by any means. A candidate without any socially recognised profession/ occupation is not likely to be favoured by the electorate.

Last but not the least, the political parties, particularly the major par-

ty election. Henceforth, an ex-MP seeking reelection will have to disclose whether he attended the sessions and sittings of the House to serve the nation in general and the electorate in particular or just saved his seat by attending sittings in the House once or twice during a period of 90 consecutive sittings. He has to satisfy his voters that he fulfilled the commitments made to them during the previous election(s). To sum up, people will judge him by his past performance.

Some people have raised certain points on the aforesaid directives of the High Court. The points include: (1) Was it necessary to issue those directives when the constitution itself prescribed the qualifications and disqualifications for election to parliament? (2) Why has the HC issued those directives to the EC and not to the government? (3) Whether an uneducated person shall be ineligible to contest parliamentary elections? (4) What will be the decision of the EC in the case of a candidate who does not have his own source of income or his income ceiling is not liable to taxation under income tax rules and regulations? (5) Will it be possible for the EC to act in accordance with the directives of the High Court?

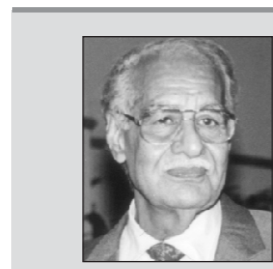
election to parliament. The information is just for the consumption of the voters to judge the merit of a candidate in their constituency.

As for the second point, it may be stated that in order to ensure free, fair and impartial elections, the constitution declares that the EC shall be independent in the exercise of its functions and be subject only to the constitution and any other law. The involvement of the government or of the legislature is necessary when any amendment(s) to the Representation of the People Order, 1972 of Bangladesh is called for. Pursuant to the powers given by the constitution, the EC has approved the format of affidavit in line with the directives of the High Court in which the candidates will submit the required information along with their nomination forms.

Regarding points (3) and (4) it may be restated that relevant information is required for the electorate to judge the merit of a candidate and it has no relationship with the qualifications or disqualifications for election to parliament.

As for the fifth point, it is stated that the constitution has made it mandatory for all executive authorities to assist the EC in the discharge of its functions. According to the

## Hurriyat's trip up



**KULDEEP NAYYAR**  
writes from New Delhi

HERE must have been a communication gap between Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and his minister of state Prithvi Raj Chouhan. The Prime Minister said in a letter to Atal Behari Vajpayee that by inviting the Hurriyat leaders, Pakistan had violated an understanding not to let the Indian nationals go beyond Muzaffarabad. But Chouhan claimed at a function at Jalandhar that the whole world had appreciated the government for allowing the Hurriyat leaders to visit Pakistan. Apparently, Manmohan Singh wrote the letter when his minister of state was away to Jalandhar.

Whatever the embarrassment to New Delhi, the Hurriyat delegation has not weakened the peace process in any way. Many options to tackle the Kashmir problem have come to the fore. At the same time, the UN resolutions and the demand for a plebiscite seem to have been thrown into the dustbin of history. Islamabad has, no doubt, shown again the cosy relationship it enjoys with the Hurriyat. The plus point is that Islamabad has realised the slogan for an independent Kashmir is what has taken the Kashmiris

away from the pro-Pakistan sentiments. It looks as if Pakistan has made the Hurriyat give up the demand for independence and accept the status of an autonomous state.

This idea needs to be pursued. Article 370 of the Indian Constitution guarantees a special status to Kashmir. Pakistan should accord a similar status to its part of Kashmir, something like Article 370. It can lead to New Delhi and Islamabad

for terrorists. Yasin Malik's disclosure that Information Minister Sheikh Rashid Ahmed trained 3,500 terrorists during the days of insurgency provided an interlude. But there was nothing new in it because Rashid had already boasted about it in a book that he wrote in Urdu a few years ago.

However, the controversy over Rashid's involvement made people miss something important that President General Pervez

to it to abandon terrorism was expectedly rejected because the jihadis had the support of the ISI, the government's own arm. This dual policy of the establishment has not changed because those who are responsible for violence in Kashmir still have their headquarters of operation in Pakistan.

Indian opinion is, therefore, at loss to understand the Hurriyat endorsement of Pakistan's stand on certain matters. That LoC would not

country the Hurriyat has not been able to win over even Jammu. The 'Azad Kashmir' leaders vainly searched for some representative from Jammu in the Hurriyat delegation. They had to conduct even their limited talks in Urdu because they spoke Punjabi which the Hurriyat did not understand. Still, whenever the Hurriyat talks about Kashmir, it includes Jammu automatically. How does the Hurriyat expect Jammu to join it when it has never taken into

partition. The Hurriyat could have filled the vacuum after the Sheikh. But its insurgency reduced Kashmir to a law and order problem. It preferred to have contacts with Pakistan than India. One, it was out of necessity because of the Hurriyat's dependence on arms and shelter. Two, the revolt against New Delhi was bound to alienate India. Yet, the Hurriyat could have sustained its lobby in India. Some NGOs stayed in touch with it. But they were never taken into confidence. That still is the attitude of the Hurriyat. They have hardly contacted anyone in India after their return from Pakistan.

They have gone the wrong way in the past. Indications are that they have not changed. One of its leaders has said that they will be meeting the heads of mission of different countries at New Delhi. This may not help. In fact, ambassadors of many countries were present at the opening ceremony of Hurriyat's office in Delhi some years ago. The office was meant to explain the Hurriyat point of view to India.

What the Hurriyat leaders do not realise is that they spoil their case by trying to involve outsiders. Indian opinion is important, not the western. Nonetheless, the Hurriyat deserves appreciation for having retrieved the Kashmir problem from the Pakistani forays to make the valley its part. But they have frittered away the advantage by indulging in rhetoric that its doors are open if New Delhi wants to talk to them. This attitude is in sharp contrast to the Hurriyat behaviour towards Pakistan.

Kuldeep Nayyar is an eminent Indian columnist.

## BETWEEN THE LINES

**The Hurriyat could have filled the vacuum after the Sheikh. But its insurgency reduced Kashmir to a law and order problem. It preferred to have contacts with Pakistan than India. One, it was out of necessity because of the Hurriyat's dependence on arms and shelter. Two, the revolt against New Delhi was bound to alienate India. Yet, the Hurriyat could have sustained its lobby in India. Some NGOs stayed in touch with it. But they were never taken into confidence. That still is the attitude of the Hurriyat. They have hardly contacted anyone in India after their return from Pakistan.**

transferring all subjects, except defence, foreign affairs and communications to parts of Kashmir they have. Subsequently, borders between the two Kashmiris can be softened to mollify the Hurriyat and Islamabad which do not want to recognise the LoC. The unfortunate part is that the slogan for an independent Kashmir, if and when given up, may bring back the pro-Pakistan sentiments which dominated the valley before Hurriyat leader Yasin Malik raised the standard of a sovereign state.

People in India, however, expected the Hurriyat leaders to persuade the Pakistani establishment to demolish the training camps

Musharraf said in Australia: no act of violence, however big, could derail the peace process. Prime Minister Manmohan Singh had said the opposite at a meeting with South Asian Editors at New Delhi earlier this year. He had warned that any terrorist attack like the one on parliament would demolish the peace process beyond repair. Islamabad should not take it lightly.

Had the Hurriyat demanded the dismantling of terrorist camps or seen its destruction when its leaders were in Pakistan, they would have earned credibility in India which they lack at present. The Hurriyat was not able to meet even the jihadi leadership in Pakistan. The appeal

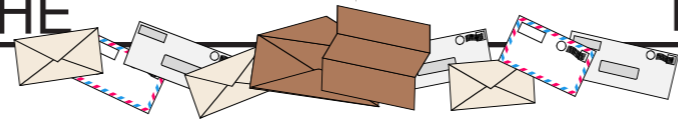
be acceptable as the international border is on Islamabad's agenda. So is the demand for a chair for the Hurriyat at the meeting between the two countries during the talks on Kashmir. The Hurriyat leaders should realise that the closer they get to Islamabad, the farther they will go from New Delhi. One of their leaders has said that they are now going to attend to Indian opinion. They should have done it long ago. It is not too late but it will be an arduous process because India generally associates them with Pakistan and violence. They will have to present a different picture of themselves.

But why talk about the entire

account the aspirations of the region?

The Hurriyat may have received an "official status" from Islamabad. But it cannot claim to speak for Jammu. In fact, it has yet to establish its representative character even in the valley. There are so many elected bodies which represent certain elements in the state. The Hurriyat has failed to take them along. Sheikh Abdullah is the only person who came to symbolise Kashmir. He represented the whole of Kashmir, including Jammu and Ladakh. He did not have to produce any evidence. He proved it when he swept the polls in 1977, the only fair election held in the state since

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



Letters will only be considered if they carry the writer's full name, address and telephone number (if any). The identity of the writers will be protected. Letters must be limited to 300 words. All letters will be subject to editing.

### Star Cineplex reply

This is in reply to Nayeem Islam's "Cineplex disappointment" that appeared on Friday, 24th June in the Daily Star.

Star Cineplex, the first multiplex cinema theatre in Bangladesh is working through local bureaucracies and red tape to import the latest Hollywood blockbusters. Bangladesh lacks the distributor network found in the developed countries, including our neighbour India and the studios send their films to these countries without the letter of credit, certificate of origin and pre-inspection requirements.

Bangladesh, in addition to having to fulfil all these requirements is not considered a lucrative market with only one Cineplex and is not recognised as a first tier country for the world premiers. Due to delay in customs and red tapes and the lines at Censor Board it takes three to four months before a movie can be released in Bangladesh once it has become available for our market.

Further, while English language films like "Bride & Prejudice" are barred, and legally imported Holly-

wood content regulated, pirated DVDs and CDs are thriving openly in local markets in Dhaka. The grey market of movie piracy is costing the Government hundreds of crores of taka in revenue each year as this is the principal cause of keeping public away from Cinema halls.

We encourage the public as well as the government to declare war against piracy as it was done in countries like Singapore and India. If movie lovers boycott pirated DVDs and start visiting the theatres we are willing to put all our efforts to bring in the latest Hollywood flicks. However we are in the process of offering you some latest Hollywood blockbusters like "Sahara" and "XXX2" by September provided we get permission from Bangladesh Censor Board.

**Mirka Kristina Rahman**  
Managing Director  
STAR Cineplex  
Bashundhara City Mall, Dhaka

**Pakistani visa**  
We refer the letter above by a Mr. Jafar published in your daily on 21/04/2005.

We fully agree with his views that of late the High Commission of Pakistan in Dhaka has become too much selective in issuing visa to the common applicants. In most cases they are disappointed, as visas are not issued to them despite having valid travel documents.

It is strange that this should be the case when India and Pakistan are showing positive attitude in developing people to people contact and family and friends reunion by not only relaxing the travel restrictions but also introducing cheaper means of communication by linking up the capitals, cities and towns ignoring problems like Kashmir, nuclear competition etc.

They have very correctly and appropriately realised that those are too thorny to be resolved quickly; but for that the lives of billions of people living in the sub-continent should not suffer. After all, the people are of the same origin that got divided for political reasons. One senior political leader perhaps correctly observed that, while borders could not be changed, people could be easily allowed to

cross the same by lifting restrictions which in turn will help promote peace, trade, commerce, business and tourism. And towards meeting this end they are working hard.

What could not be achieved in 60 years, the positive attitude of both Manmohan Singh and Parvez Musharraf did in several weeks allowed direct bus communication between Muzaffarabad and Srinagar on April 7, 2005. This was a historic event, acclaimed locally and internationally.

In the above backdrop, it is essential that no stone be left unturned in improving relations between Bangladesh and Pakistan. And for this, the first step should be to relax visa restrictions, followed by finding ways and means to develop cheaper means of communication. The fare is too high for the common people to afford. This should be reviewed bilaterally, at least for the visitors and tourists.

**Kamal Ahmed, Shamim Ahmed, Imtiaz Haider and Zulfiqar Haider**  
Dhaka

### Religion is not a private matter

India's popular actor and politician Sunil Dutt is no more. Obituary notes and reports on the life and work of the late hero were published in different newspapers and magazines.

Sunil Dutt, whose life was full of struggle and achievements once, said, "I cannot understand why people use religion to cause divisions among people. Religion is beautiful but very private. For a country like India secularism is the only way of life."

I do not agree with the late Dutt's observation. Religion is not private. All the religions of the world have their own codes for its followers. Instructions and injunctions of a religion are not merely applicable to one's private life but to one's social, economic, and national life as well. Religions have been prescribed to protect social order and moral values.

Secularism doesn't mean blending of all the religions together to form an assorted religion. Secularism, as I understand, ensures one's

right to practice one's religion freely while allowing one to enjoy one's democratic right without discrimination, and under a state framework.

**Prof M Zahaidul Haque**  
Sher-e-Bangla Agricultural University, Dhaka

### Is this fair?

I am writing about the TV advertisement of a cardiac hospital, which has become very popular recently. Although the advertisement has received a lot of praise, I think its concluding line is grossly unfair towards women. Praising the doctors of our country and their efforts, a patient who underwent surgery at the hospital tells his son, "Amar desher shonar chheler aache na?"

My question is, are only the "chheler" (sons) of our country worth praising? In Bangladesh, women have been very successful in the field of medicine (not to speak of other areas where they are equally successful). There are female cardiologists working at the same cardiac centre that claims to owe its success to the "shonar chheler". I think that the term used should be "shonar

shontan", praising the children of our country, rather than the sons only.

It is high time that the unfair custom of considering men to be superior and hence responsible for the country's success, and considering women to be mainly responsible for household chores, came to an end.

It is unfortunate that the advertisement of a reputed, modern institution should portray so primitive and discriminatory a concept. I have heard others arguing that the dialogue in the advertisement was not targeted against women. However, it still does display an unfair perception, which we all should try to brand as obsolete. The popularity of this advertisement may turn out to be a means to promote discrimination against women, whether or not that was intended by the company. The media can, and should play a major role in raising awareness against this custom.

**Tania Hossain Firoz**  
Dhanmondi, Dhaka

### BTV -- the media boss

The incident that rocked the University of Dhaka was tragic and a direct

result of negligence of the authorities. The issues that the students brought up during their protests were indeed valid ones; and they were important enough to receive wide coverage on all the national media. All -- but the BTV.

It was astonishing to see that BTV did not even mention the event! Once upon a time there was only one TV channel and back then censorship might have made sense. But now, with two other channels covering important issues in their (more informative) news, what is BTV trying to accomplish? In this day of competition, BTV cannot remain the media-fossil it has been so far. Because, the new entrants, with their swift, investigative and in-depth reporting and flashy presentations, will simply overtake BTV.

**Samira Rashid**  
Independent University  
Dhaka