

## PM's timely call

### Imams can help isolate the extremists

PRIME Minister Khaleda Zia has described the Islamic militants as enemies of the religion they claim to belong to. We cannot agree more. She has also very rightly called upon the Imams of mosques to play an assertive role in isolating the militants through speaking out against them.

We appreciate some of the steps taken by the government to contain the wave of Islamic militancy which has already claimed lives, apart from creating a general sense of insecurity among people. Much more remains to be done. We commend the police for arresting some militant operatives here and there almost every day, but the worrying news is that the banned organisations like the JMB or Harkat, who should have been on the run themselves, are keeping us on the toes. They even have the temerity of issuing threats on the lives of Supreme Court judges. The government drive against them is not yet vigorous enough to break the back of the evil forces, as the law enforcers have failed to arrest the top leaders of the militant outfits.

Now, the Imams of mosques, whose services have been sought by the prime minister to counter militancy, should rise to the occasion by taking a clear and conscientious stand against the subversive elements in the true spirit of Islam. They can do so by raising their voice against wanton violence which Islam doesn't approve of. Silence on their part would amount to acquiescing in the sinister design of a vicious minority to transform society through bloodbath. Nothing can be farthest from religion than such a plan.

The prime minister can now see the forces working against our best national interest. The crying need of the hour is unity among the political parties, and here the prime minister has a very crucial role to play. After all that the extremists have done in the recent months, it would no longer be wise for the government and the opposition to play any blame game which only creates opportunities for the forces of intolerance to cause damage to the nation but to face them head on.

## CEC introduces pre-censorship

### Curtailment of public's right to know

THE new rule introduced by the CEC requiring journalists seeking information to submit questions to him only in writing is thoroughly misconceived, and we would like to make clear that we view the rule with absolute abhorrence. This, in effect, is a form of censorship, and will limit the access of journalists, and thus the public, to the workings of the EC, and can therefore be considered an attempt to curtail the freedom of the press and the public's right to know.

The CEC seems to think he is doing the press a favour when he talks to them. To the contrary, the press is assisting him communicate to the nation. When he limits or restricts their access to him, he is curtailing the people's right to know.

More troublingly still, the CEC has proffered no reason for this new rule. Is he overwhelmed by press inquiries? Has he been misquoted or misrepresented in the media? Is there any problem with the press corps? If so, we urge him to share these issues with the media, so that we can work together to correct them. We would be happy to co-operate.

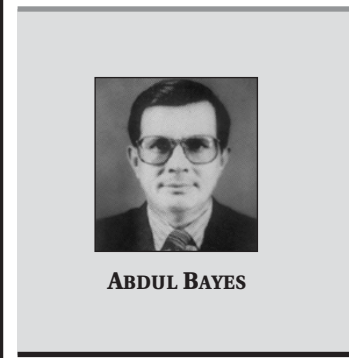
We understand that as a judge he is not used to the glare of the press and such close scrutiny. But Mr. Aziz is no longer a high court judge, he is now the chief election commissioner and his duties and the public's expectations for him are quite different. We urge Mr. Aziz to keep in mind the delicate nature of his post and the over-riding need for the public to retain confidence in him.

CEC's is a tough job. Mr. Aziz can expect to face partisan criticism that is undeserved, and whoever ends up on the losing side of the election he oversees will undoubtedly blame him and attempt to cast doubt on his performance. The one way for him to ensure credibility and ensure that he is not unfairly castigated is through total transparency of the process.

As the election draws nearer, the need for information for the public will become greater. Let us suggest that if it is too much for him to deal with multiple approaches for information he could fix a time every day for press briefing.

The bottom line is the new rule is unacceptable, and, if not reversed, will do severe damage to his credibility.

# Beyond the boundary of economics



YUJIRO Hayami -- the famous Japanese economist that I referred to before -- this time writes on a relatively 'unheard' or 'unseen' aspect of agricultural growth and rural development. He compares the growth performances of Asia and Africa and tries to identify differences from the angle of sociology or anthropology. I picked the issue because economists have the habit of hanging around only the economic factors in explaining variations in economic performances across countries or regions. Usually, a multidisciplinary mind remains missing and hence, more often than not, the conclusions derived tend to become erroneous. Yujiro Hayami's research piece upon which I am now drawing would show that even social values and norms account for the prevailing differential performances across regions.

### Grain production

He makes broad comparisons in agricultural performances between East Asia and Africa, to tell us that the differences in the two regions are deeply rooted in traditional social structures and norms in rural communities. But before that, he confirms the contrasting agricultural growth performances between Asia and Africa. Between 1963 and 2000, in

terms of total grain output, East Asia's growth of 3 per cent per annum was the fastest. Empirical evidences, however, appear to show that the rate was not faster than the growths in South Asia and Latin America. But when placed on a productivity scale, East Asia's performance puts up a different picture. For example, the grain output per capita in East and Southeast Asia increased at an average rate of 1.2 per cent during this period -- double the pace of South Asia and Latin America. Africa, on the other hand, recorded a decline of 0.4

in land productivity while the rest came from expansion in area under cultivation. In fact in a land scarce and population abundant country like Bangladesh, increased land productivity should continue to be the key concern. Any way, the land productivity in Africa during the same time grew at 1 per cent per year implying, perhaps, that a less than one third of the increase in per hectare yield emanated from increased land productivity. The contrasts clearly confirms that Asia could win over its woes and emerge as a leader by means of adopt-

tribes and, therefore, the development of private property rights as a means of facilitating long-term investments in land infrastructure has lagged." Hayami argues that the lag in the shift to sedentary agriculture underlies the lag in investment in basic infrastructure such as roads and irrigation system. Underdeveloped infrastructure militated against the adoption of a green revolution of Indian type that depended heavily on irrigation and supply of modern chemical inputs.

**Exploiting agriculture**

**To be effective in furthering agricultural growth, Asian governments as well as international aid agencies must try to incorporate into their development programme the incentive mechanisms implicit in patron-client relationship within village as well as between village leaders and local government officials so as to maximise municipal level collective actions for the supply of local public goods. It is however important to guard against the danger of patron-client relationship turning to be basis of collusion for rent seeking activities.**

ing innovative agricultural practices -- say under the aegis of green revolution -- while Africa languished in the absence of such modern agricultural practices.

Africa failed to embrace land-saving production system "despite the fact that this region's resource endowments have moved from the land-abundant to the land-scarce regime. For several hundred years before the early 20th century, the population growth rates in Africa were much lower than in Asia. As a result, population density in Africa, especially East Africa, has traditionally been much lower than Asia, so that shifting cultivation and nomadic grazing have commonly been practiced. Much of farm land has remained in communal possession of

According to Yujiro Hayami, both Asia and Africa were engaged in exploitation of agriculture through state interventions in procurement and marketing, over valued exchange rate, export tax on agricultural commodities etc. For Africa, however, government failures surpassed market failures. In Asia, the exploitation of agriculture also witnessed substantial investments in agricultural research as well as for roads and electricity for increasing agricultural production. In Africa, in contrast, politicians attempted to compensate for exploitation by distributing subsidised credits and inputs to particular rural elites instead of providing public goods. "The selective distribution of such private goods to specific rural

supply of land infrastructure as rulers' responsibility, even though its importance has been rising rapidly in recent years.

### Dolls and development

In Africa, the egalitarian redistributive system aimed at guaranteeing subsistence of community members under mobile production system during the land abundant regime has been working as barrier to the technological innovation and capital accumulation needed to shift to sedentary land saving system under rapidly rising land scarcity. On the other hand, Asia has been advantaged by the patron-client reciprocity norm moulded under traditional land scarcity that tolerates wealth accumulation by industrious and innovative villagers so long as they

behave as legitimate patrons in guaranteeing subsistence poor clients. Under this system, the patrons have been able to accumulate individual wealth, while they able taken leadership in building community-level infrastructure and, also, in lobbying for government's provisions for infrastructure.

### Hayami-hypothesis

This hypothesis, if valid, implies that, to be effective in furthering agricultural growth, Asian governments as well as international aid agencies must try to incorporate into their development programme the incentive mechanisms implicit in patron-client relationship within village as well as between village leaders and local government officials so as to maximise municipal level collective actions for the supply of local public goods. It is however important to guard against the danger of patron-client relationship turning to be basis of collusion for rent seeking activities, not only at the local level but also at the national level as demonstrated by the failures of President Marcos and Suharto.

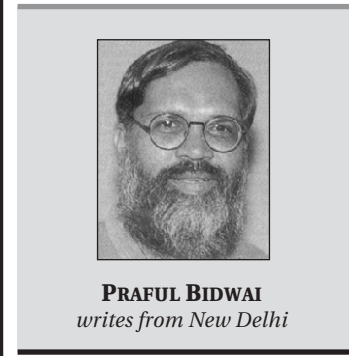
### To be Asian

The tide over the agricultural backwardness in Africa and to rise to the level of Asia so to say, Africa needs to strengthen agricultural research, extension and training activities so that farmers would be able to grasp the benefits of land-saving production system. The traditional norms in rural communities of Africa, although slow to change, need to alter to the call of the crisis. Beyond the boundary of economics lie sociology and anthropology to know about African agricultural pale performances.

Abdul Bayes is a Professor of Economics at Jahangirnagar University.

# Curtains on Laloo-Rabri Raj

## Social justice politics still thrives



THE people of Bihar have delivered a crushing verdict against the Rashtriya Janata Dal-Congress coalition. The result is unusual for five reasons. First, the vote got sharply polarised just eight months after the last elections. Such changes normally take years.

Second, the Janata Dal (United)-Bharatiya Janata Party has won a convincing victory, claiming 60 percent of Assembly seats. This hasn't happened in Bihar (or Uttar Pradesh) for a quarter-century. The RJD's greatest-ever victory (167/324 seats) in 1995 pales beside this.

Third, contrary to normal trends, the JD(U)'s sweep comes on a remarkably low voter turnout -- 46 percent, or 17 percentage-points less than the past 15 years' average. The turnout was depressed by overzealous Election Commission official K.J. Rao, with a dampening effect on OBC, Dalit and Muslim voters.

Fourth, Mr Ram Vilas Paswan's Lok Janashakti Party (LJP) shrank because he refused to support either

the RJD- or JD(U)-led alliance in forming a government in February/March.

Seventy four percent of those polled in a Centre for the Study of Developing Societies survey blamed Mr Paswan for this. Four-fifths of all electors (including 63 percent of LJP voters) criticised him for insisting that a Muslim alone should become Chief Minister. This was seen as blatantly opportunistic.

shaky, dysfunctional and potentially unviable. The UPA took a shortcut -- and paid for it. Democratic decency *pays more* in politics than Machiavellian tactics.

What social dynamics underlie the Bihar mandate? What do the results signify for Gangetic heartland politics?

The verdict is a *forceful mandate* for ending the 15 year-long rule of Mr Laloo Prasad and Ms Rabri Devi. The

voters didn't, nor did 85 percent of Kurmis, 63 percent of Dalits, and 56 percent of Muslims. Only 13 percent felt that Laloo-Rabri Raj was good. Thirty five percent felt it was "bad all the way" and 37 percent said it began well, but deteriorated.

The Bihar government became the worst-rated regime among 11 recently polled states. Laloo-Rabri Raj symbolised malgovernance and collapse of public services.

**The Congress cannot revive itself in Bihar/UP unless it relates to "social justice" politics, in particular the self-assertion of MBCs, a leaderless but restive constituency. The Congress' best chance to grow in the Gangetic heartland lies in basing itself on marginalised groups and reviving Indira Gandhi's pro-poor "populist" model of 1967-71. This demands that it change its economic and social policies and stop banking on upper caste-dominated multi-class coalitions. It's unclear that the Congress is willing to change. If it doesn't, it could again go into decline.**

Finally, Governor Buta Singh turned many uncommitted voters against the RJD-Congress. In March, he was seen as partisan in rejecting the JD(U)-BJP's claim to form a government and recommending President's rule. This was recently confirmed by a Supreme Court judgment. Mr Singh's sons also interfered with the running of government.

The United Progressive Alliance committed a blunder in not giving Mr Nitish Kumar a chance to form a government in February/March. He may not have gathered the necessary numbers. But he shouldn't have been precluded.

His government would have been

electorate's growing disappointment with Laloo-Rabri Raj has lowered the RJD's vote-share from 33 percent in 2000 to 25 in February, to 23.2 percent now.

Contrary to conventional wisdom, the RJD has never depended upon the Muslim-Yadav (M-Y) vote *alone*. As a broad coalition of the poor, it would attract sizable Dalit and MBC (most backward classes) votes. These have eroded, as did even its M-Y base.

This time, the greatest erosion probably happened in the RJD's MBC votes and those of Pasmanda (backward) Muslims.

A survey in March showed only the Yadavs wanted the RJD back in government. Sixty four percent of all

The development agenda -- which 60 percent of Biharis identify as most important, compared to 24 percent in Haryana -- took a beating. Corruption became rampant. Public finances worsened. Disorder spread.

Mr Laloo Prasad's greatest attraction for the poor lay in giving them a voice, or dignity and empowerment. Here he concentrated the best features of the politics of "social justice" which dominates Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. He was a great mass-mobiliser.

But Mr Prasad never translated social justice slogans into *policies*. By early 2005, defeat stared him in the face. The Congress, with its limited upper caste-based strength, couldn't

reverse this.

Mr Nitish Kumar's campaign won over significant numbers of MBCs -- especially Sahus, Telis, Kewats, Mallahs, etc -- and Muslims. He led what might be called a "coalition of extremes," its core based on the Kurmis and the upper castes.

The Bihar result is emphatically *not* a victory of the BJP. The party's ideology wasn't a factor in the election. The battle was fought along

caste lines.

What triumphed was the *very same politics* that Mr Laloo Prasad represents, under another leader. Mr Kumar is as deeply rooted in subaltern self-respect politics as Mr Yadav. This derives from the dual phenomena of OBC and Dalit self-assertion.

The election result will disappoint those who loathed Mr Prasad precisely *because* he represented "populist" social justice politics. Mr Nitish Kumar belongs to the same current as Mr Prasad -- Bihar's Lohia/Karpoori Thakur Socialists. They are both Mandal's children.

Mr Kumar has a purely *expedient* relationship with the BJP. He's not communal although he was, deplo-

ably, near-silent over the Gujarat carnage.

The NDA would be gravely mistaken to regard the Bihar results as signifying its revival. There are no electoral battles around the corner that it can win. The NDA doesn't count in West Bengal, Kerala, and Tamil Nadu.

However, Mr Nitish Kumar's triumph will marginalise Mr George Fernandes within the JD(U). If the NDA flounders, and the BJP's crisis worsens, as is likely, Mr Kumar could well look to forming a "Third Force" front.

The results are a setback for the UPA, although not a grave one. Its national-level stability isn't in danger. The Left will back it after the recent reconciliation of differences over Iran.

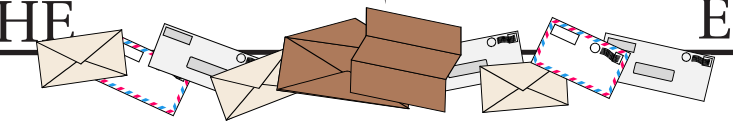
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This demands that it change its economic and social policies and stop banking on upper caste-dominated multi-class coalitions. It's unclear that the Congress is willing to change. If it doesn't, it could again go into decline.

Praful Bidwai is an eminent Indian columnist.

# 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.

### Better late...

The prime minister has been very judicious to ask Mir Nasiruddin to step down, after his disappointing failure to resolve the yearly Hajj flight issue. The minister was always a poor performer with hardly any performance including in his own constituency. We thank the PM for her wise decision.

The PM should have acted earlier after the debacle in the Chittagong mayoral election.

The donors, WB, ADB, our well-wishers and some of the opposition parties expressed serious resentment regarding the Herculean size of the BNP-Jama'at cabinet, a burden on the poor tax payers. The huge amount of hard cash spent to maintain the world's biggest cabinet comes from the funds allocated for expenses in connection with governance. It is never helpful to the common man. Only a small amount

is allocated for 'development' and the main share of it comes from donors. The donors or foreign agencies were not always accurate and our government in most cases, "publicly" deplored or discarded the didactics. But we (lay men) know for certain that they rightly criticised the big size of the cabinet of the world's poorest country.

There is no other country like Bangladesh (that we know of); where so much is expended for running a democratic government. Our ministers and politicians are not only dependent on the bureaucrats, they, for obvious reasons, are obliged to please them at every stage of their function/duty.

Had the present government heeded the dictum on reducing the size of the cabinet and the ministries thereof, a huge expenditure could be avoided; consequently the excess amount could be utilised for the

suffering masses.

The prime minister had excluded a few ministers (mostly surplus) before. Recently, she has fired two 'for failures', but there are still many-- some redundant and some ineffectual.

May we hope that the PM will disburden herself and the country from the 'white elephants' and as a far-sighted leader she will bear in mind, "Better late than never".

**Tajul Islam**  
Gulshan-1, Dhaka

### Religious extremism

Thank you very much for publishing my letter in The Daily Star. I hope that the politicians and the government officials concerned will pay attention to this matter.

I request you to publish more articles against religious extremism and help to build Bangladesh as a peaceful country.

**Dr. Farid Majumder**  
Darmstadt, Germany

### Saarc Summit

The Thirteenth Saarc Summit was held in Dhaka on 12 and 13 November, after two postponements. There have been two positive developments.

a) Afghanistan has been accepted as a full member, and b) Commitment on South Asia's free trade has been reaffirmed.

We hope the regional grouping will make further progress in the near future and cooperation among the member-states will be further enhanced.

**Sumaiya Binte Zaman**  
Mamarat International University, Dhaka

### AL stand on Saarc Summit

Saarc is the solitary organisation for

the South Asian nations. So it has an important role to play in the economic, political, cultural and social advancement of the South Asian people. The delegations of the member states generally assemble every two years to find out ways for mutual development through cooperation. So, and for various reasons, the Dhaka Summit had great significance for the region as a whole. Despite two postponements, Bangladesh has been able to organise the Saarc Summit successfully. But our main opposition party, the Awami League, unfortunately did not agree with the idea of holding the summit and refrained from attending it. Not only that, its leadership criticised the holding of the summit and was quite vocal against the security measures adopted by the government. The party was even critical of adorning the late president Ziaur Rahman with the Saarc Award for his outstanding contribu-

tion to the formation of the regional grouping. By all actions and reactions, the AL displayed that the party was not in favour of holding the Saarc Summit.

Undoubtedly, people were awaiting peaceful completion of the summit. I think, the AL has missed the opportunity to show their political broad mindedness to the people and the honourable foreign guests by attending the assembly.

**A.B.M. Mosleh Uddin**  
Chittagong University

### A disappointment

It was a massive disappointment to learn about the cancellation of the O and A Level Award Ceremony 2005. As a student, I was certainly looking forward to it but what frustrated me was the timing and reason of the cancellation. If ever there is one thing that students aim for, it is certainly The Daily

Star Award because, after all, it is a very prestigious one. But my question is why was it cancelled? I am not saying that helping the "Monga"-affected people is a bad thing, but I feel DS could have done it anyway. I am sure DS could have arranged both the things. The "Monga" didn't happen like an earthquake and this is not the first time that famine has struck the northern parts.

The programme was cancelled at the very last moment. From a student's point of view, I find the decision immensely frustrating, as we were ready to attend the grand ceremony.

**Sajid Abdullah Choudhury**  
Phulbari House, Dargamahalla, Sylhet

### Brian Lara

Brian Lara is no doubt a great batsman who has rightly been scaling

dizzying heights in today's cricket. He has now amassed more runs than any other batsman in Test cricket. He deserves a round of applause for his great feat.

However, what strikes me is that we are perhaps not doing justice to the players who got the opportunity to play in far fewer number of Tests in the past. For example, Don Bradman could play in 52 Tests only, and there were great players who played in even fewer number of Tests. So it's really difficult to judge the true merit of a player.

Take, for example, the case of Sunil Gavasker. He faced the deadliest bowling as a member of a side having a marked weakness in that department. So how do we rate him? It seems general principles are not always enough.

**Mansoor Raja**  
Dhaka