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Water savings in rice cultivation

The Principle Scientific Officer of the Rice Research Institute, Gazipur, published an article on the subject in an English daily on 18 December. This is a valuable and interesting information on water usage for rice farming. His work needs to be appreciated and recognised by the authorities for its potential of savings in the cost of rice production! However the cost benefit of the projected savings by lowering water usage needs to be carefully and as far as possible accurately worked out.

The pay off is between the cost savings for less water usage as against the extra cost of importing rice to replace the production shortfall which is projected at one and two percent of rice output per hectare for two different types of water usage and the different quantities of water needed for each

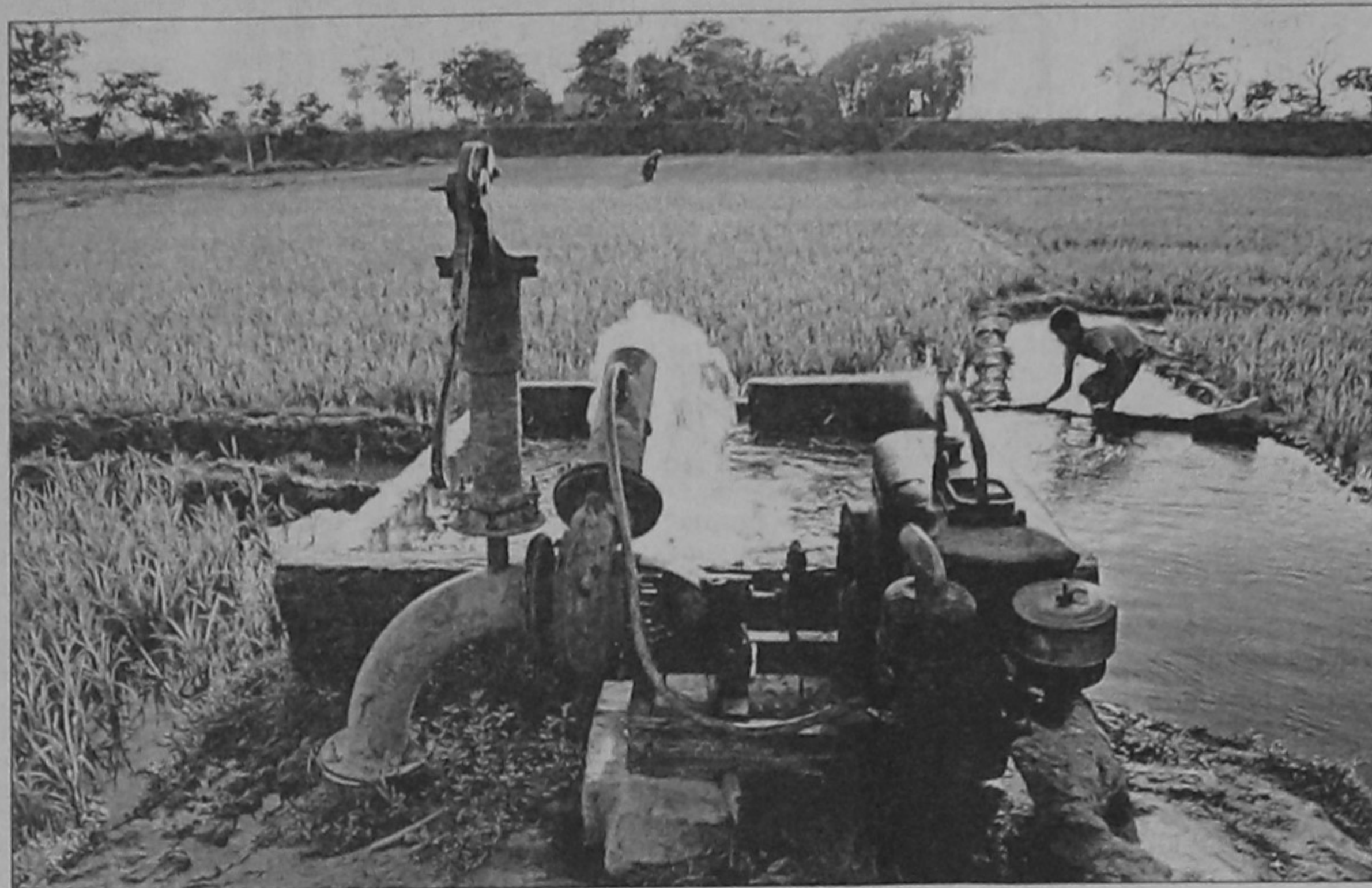
type of irrigation. This exercise needs to be carefully and fairly accurately projected for the cost benefit calculation to establish a realistic basis. Provision has to be made for normal cost inflation parameters, as well as the future trend of foreign exchange fluctuation of taka vis-a-vis US dollar or the Euro, as well as the financial differences if the shortfall in rice output is compensated by equivalent import of rice or wheat.

This detailed study is a must. It is an important and necessary corollary to the author's water saving proposal; which cannot be viewed in isolation, being a multi-discipline study. This will need quality input and forecasting of factors involving rice farming techniques and its future trend, water supply and its usage and related projected costs of water needed for rice cultivation, and the

economic issues and exchange futures to arrive at the cost of imported equivalent quantities of rice or wheat! Such a detailed study on the above guidelines is a matter of national importance; as rice growing determines the very life and livelihood of Bangladesh!

The BIRRI should carry out this study, jointly in collaboration with our other universities who can give important inputs on water supply for irrigation and the price and cost of input projection and exchange ratios forecast over an accepted period. In my opinion this important techno-economic study to set the needed benchmarks of costs and benefits needs to be identified in the national interest, before the idea is spread and implemented across the country.

S.A. Mansoor
Retired engineer
Dhaka



LITON RAHMAN / DKNNEWS

Theft of artefacts

In all humility I express my sincere appreciation of the resignation tendered by Mr. Ayub Qadri shouldering the responsibility and lapses of his ministry. His ministry was responsible for a decision which was against the popular sentiment. But what about the actual guilt of the theft which took place at a place where all the authorities/departments were under one separate ministry.

Everybody, including the ever-alert media, is maintaining silence on the swindling at ZIA.

Aziz Rana
One-mail

It is regrettable that two of our national treasures--the Vishnu idols-- are lost due to the negligence of the government. Despite immense risks and nation-wide opposition by conscious people, the government took the most undemocratic decision to send the artefacts to France.

Thus, it has no right to blame anybody else except itself. Mr. Ayub

Qadri's resignation is regrettable not simply because he felt guilty about what happened, but equally because, by doing so, he was trying to hide from public wrath.

Nobody is above the law and no one has the right to play with the nation's wealth--whoever he may be.

Rafi Ahmed, D.Phil (Oxford)
Professor of History
Elmira College and Cornell University

"Make internet a commodity"

Thank you very much for your interview-based article on the "High Internet Tariff" in December 17, 2007 on the Star Business Page. This issue needs mass awareness and campaign to make Internet a commodity for the public and businesses in Bangladesh. Internet is the most important component of this highly interconnected world. It is like blessings from the Almighty to countries like us, which can catalyze our developments and export growth in this

global knowledge economy. As the BASIS President aptly put "High Internet Pricing is seriously holding back our ICT exports growth in Bangladesh."

We simply cannot remain competitive in the international market with 15 to 20 times higher in Bandwidth pricing than the neighbouring countries. We must make that lower than at least India to attract foreign businesses.

We have built up a reputation in global market for IT and ITES business. We only need govt. patronisation in the infrastructure now like cheap and affordable quality Internet, IT park etc to grab the ready business and boost up our economy like the RMG sector did before.

Ahmed Ashrafuzzaman
Executive Director, Graphic Associates International Limited

A good example

This is the first time that we found someone in power in Bangladesh taking responsibility for something they were directly or indirectly

accountable for.

Mr. Qadri's resignation shows the dignity, honour, integrity and accountability that a nation has the right to expect from the leaders. Compare this to the examples set by the ministers in the administrations of the past thirty-six years!

I guess there is still hope for Bangladesh.

R. Majumder, USA

Job quota

At the moment 55% of the government jobs are reserved on quota which is very inconvenient for the general students. After working so hard, they finish their education to get a job. As the government jobs are more reliable, every student tries his best to get one. But a lot of them fail to get it because of the 55% quota system. On the other hand, the government is also losing the service of the best students. Moreover, some quarters are resorting to corruption by manipulating the quota system.

I am not against the quota system but 55% quota is in no way reasonable. It should not be more than 10%.

I urge the government to look into the matter.

Sagar Ahmed

Dhaka University

US moving towards "selective isolationism"?

I am writing with reference Post Breakfast article: "Will the EU ever have a common foreign policy?" by Muhammad Zamir (Dec. 20).

Ambassador Zamir may be right about European Union's striving for an independent foreign policy to counter US unilateralism. But the United States may be on the way to abandoning its unilateral foreign policy towards what some analysts call "selective isolationism." As the Bush administration is winding down, most presidential contenders, both Democratic and Republican, are calling for end of US interventionism in the world. They do not want to withdraw from the international scene in the same way the United States did after the First World War, but they want to leave many issues for other countries to resolve themselves.

Most polls show foreign policy is no longer the pressing issue for most voters. Economy, health care, environment and education are the top issues. Even war against terror is way down the list. About Iraq, most Americans think that it was wrong to go to war and America should not sacrifice the lives of its soldiers in a war that is increasingly becoming a civil war among Shi'as and Sunnis. Both Democratic front-runners, Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama want phased withdrawal of US troops from Iraq while third-placed former Senator Edwards want to pull them out at once. About Iran, despite sabre-rattling by George W. Bush, most candidates don't want any war and they want Europe, Russia and China to press Iran to end its uranium enrichment programme. In short, the United States is asking the European Union to fill the vacuum to be created by America's "selective" withdrawal from the world affairs.

The biggest international concern of the United States and the EU is the growing economic clout of China. China has replaced Japan as America's second greatest trading partner and China has replaced the United States as EU's biggest trading partner. Both the U.S. and EU are running staggering trade deficits with China. The European Union has recently imposed trade restriction on China and although the United States has not done so, the pressure within America to restrict China's trade surplus is growing. Here both the U.S. and the EU have a common ground. But they have failed to act in concert.

The EU is no longer concerned

about the U.S. unilateralism, but the European concerns about China's growing economic clout and its dependence on an increasingly assertive Russia next-door may be making the EU to ask for more U.S. role in European affairs. The global situation may have changed dramatically. It may not be long before the EU will be asking America to get involved in European affairs.

Mahmood Elahi
Iris Street, Ottawa, Canada

Bali conference and related issues

I have read an article on Bali conference. It says that the southern part of Bangladesh will be submerged under water by 2040. That's no more a fiction. Apocalypses happened before in planet earth.

If we really think of "one planet theory and new world order", then this question should have been raised in Bali conference. Surprisingly, nobody has raised the issue so far. Bangladesh will suffer not because of our fault. So the countries responsible for the impending disaster should share the burden of relocating people from the affected areas.

Dr. Azizul Karim
General Practitioner, Victoria Australia

Taking care of forests

"Hello! My name is Dipterocarpus" reads a sign attached to a sapling, one of many such signs installed by the Institute of Forestry at Chittagong University (IFCU) as part of local tree familiarisation initiative under a United Nations FAO project during 1986-1990.

Sure enough, crowds gathered around the trees and saplings adorned with newly installed rectangular name tags, beaming with curiosity, or at times bursting into unrelenting giggles and laughter. The project was a success opined Dr. Zaballa, a visiting FAO professor that targeted non-forestry community to familiarize tree species on campus.

Unlike other city-centric universities of the country, Chittagong University (CU) campus sits on a sprawling 1600-acre landscape, dotted with low-elevation hills interspersed with a few valleys that locals used for rice cultivation. Barring about a third of the area in roads and buildings, most hills were barren and filled with sage grass and weeds lacking any aesthetic or economic value up until mid 1980's. The picture was about to change as IFCU undertook a massive plantation drive on those denuded hills and along roadways. Within a few short years, once barren and pale faced campus was smiling under a lush green veil. Residents became happy with the new look of campus; the roadside trees provided the much needed shade from sultry summer heat and occasional escapades for many. People noticed deer in the evening, flocks of birds flying in and out the newly established plantations. Aside from initial cheers and kudos, these juvenile plantations provided field laboratory for IFCU faculty and its students.

Last year, I visited my alma mater IFCU and decided to take a stroll along a few plantations I treaded many times some 20 years ago. This time, however, I felt some sort of sadness inside me. The lush green appeared over bearing; most plantations still carry the same densities as they did at the time of their planting, and are yet to receive the much needed thinning required for proper growth. Many are filled with competing vegetations that perhaps can be accommodated on a few experimental ones for biodiversity studies; certainly not all plantations should have been in such a pitiful state of growth.

I had asked IFCU faculties as to why the campus plantations have not had any intervention of some sort all these years. To my surprise, I learned that many non-forestry residents fear of losing biodiversity

due to management activities, a belief with very little scientific basis, if not outright outrageous. The denser the better goes the belief on campus--one student told me. I was flabbergasted and sad at the same time because an apparently dense looking plantation with a lot of undergrowth does not necessarily indicate higher level of biodiversity, scientifically speaking, than one receiving periodic thinning with dispersed openings to promote healthy undergrowth as well as wildlife habitat. One must realise that forest management is not about preservation; rather it is the art and science of calculated manipulation of forests towards a desired end.

The CU authorities can take a few concrete steps:

1. Declare Chittagong University forest as the national research forest to help attract researchers from both home and abroad.
2. Allow IFCU the custodianship of forest management decisions.
3. Build one or two forest canopy walkways to serve as wildlife observatory, study pollution effects as well as to serve as eco-tourism.
4. Initiate research and development partnership with private sector.

My passion for forestry took me to Canada to pursue higher studies and later to employments with a Fortune 500 company and a state forestry agency in the United States. As I occasionally venture into the woods of the US Pacific North West, I can still hear the giggle and loud comment of my fellow students - "Hello! My name is Dipterocarpus".

There is money to be made, nonetheless, from these plantations through carefully designed management techniques. Suggestions mentioned above are intended to evoke discussions among academics and researchers as well as concerned citizens. I am sure there are ample qualified souls in our country to help design the necessary steps.

Abu M. Nurullah, Ph.D.

Forest Management Specialist

Washington State Department of Natural Resources

Commuters in trouble

Our main transports are vehicles like bus, rickshaw, cab etc. Though some metropolitan areas have recently been cleared of rickshaw to avoid traffic jam, but still there

are a large number of rickshaws in the streets.

We cannot pass a single day without traffic jam. Rickshaw-pullers demand an extra rent of Tk 5-10 due to the unending price spiral. Sometimes it leads to a quarrel between travellers and pullers. A few days ago I read the shocking news of the killing of a rickshaw-puller in Dhaka for demanding an extra Tk 1.

My question is, are the common people responsible for the price hike? We need to have a system to bring back order to the transport sector.

Mishu Kutubi
Dept. of English, IUC

Mobile phone and driving

It has become a common sight in our roads--people driving with one hand in the steering of the car and the other one holding a mobile phone which is without any doubt a dangerous thing to do while you are driving, especially in the busy roads of Dhaka. It has become a trend these days to drive your car while using mobile phones.

Mobile phone use while driving is common but controversial. Using a cellular telephone while operating a motor vehicle increases the risk of accident. Because of this, many governments have made use of cell phone while driving illegal and I think our government should also take this matter very seriously or else many people will lose their precious lives. Many countries have been very strict in this matter and are looking forward to becoming even stricter. In the UK a new law to increase the penalty for using a hand-held phone while driving has come into force on 27 February 2007. The current fine of £30 has been increased to £60 along with three penalty points on one's licence.

I think Bangladesh cannot be United Kingdom but at least we can take some measures, so that we can reduce the use of mobile phone while driving by fining them a hefty amount.

By being strict, we can reduce the use of mobile phone and thus save many lives.

Munna Hasib
Language Teacher
Dhanmondi, Dhaka

Knowledge-based transport planning

The truism "history repeats itself" applies to those who ignore the lessons of the past and insist on forging ahead, committing the same mistakes, and experiencing the same results. It is hoped that city authorities will learn from the mistakes of the Mirpur Road demonstration project and try to assign due importance to fuel-free transport. Given the small modal share of automobiles and the many problems they cause, there should be no provision for creating more auto-only roads within urban areas, and all existing auto-only roads should be converted into mixed-use roads by properly integrating public transit, FFT and fuel-dependent transport (FDT). If the Mirpur Road project is indeed a demonstration in a sense an experiment then clearly the lessons should be carefully learned before proceeding with transport planning. In this case, the lessons are startlingly clear, and point in a very different direction from that of current transport planning in Dhaka.

Again, while developing a mass transit system for a mega city like Dhaka, efforts should be made to develop an affordable system for the majority under a well-integrated multi-modal system. It would be rather unfortunate to develop a mass transit system mainly as a profit making enterprise.

Given the complexity of the transport planning process and the fact that transport and urban planning have significant effects on the economic and overall well-being of a city's residents, it is important to adopt a knowledge-based and participatory approach involving all segments of the stakeholders. Such a participatory planning process should take into account not only technical issues about feasibility and efficiency, but also the likely effects of policies on mobility, accessibility, and quality of life for all those affected, with a particular focus on vulnerable groups, those most likely to be left out of, and highly affected by, the existing planning process.

It is important to have an open discussion to explore the scientific validity of the further extensions of fuel-free transport bans and the justification of the building of mass transit mainly as a profit-making enterprise under the perspectives of sustainable transport development in Dhaka city.

We, the proponents of sustainable transport development, would be very keen to discuss the issues at lengths at any place in Dhaka between December 29, 2007 to January 21, 2008. Active participation of DTCC, DCC, police, high officials from the Ministry of Communications, academics from universities, representatives from the development partners and members of the STP advisory committee would be highly appreciated.

Mahabubul Bari
Transport Specialist
UK

Benazir's assassination



PHOTO: APP

Benazir Bhutto is dead. I cannot believe it. I shivered when I found the breaking news of her death in The Daily Star's website early in the evening of Thursday. Like hundreds more in her country, she too fell victim to an unkind bomber. This is the sad reality confronting Pakistan these days. Terrorism has engulfed Pakistan like a cancer and in the end Bhutto had to pay with her life for keeping Pakistani democracy.

This is not the first time that Bhutto, Pakistan's first woman prime minister, was targeted, but the attackers succeeded on that Thursday. Soon after her return from exile in October, terrorists tried to assassinate her. Nearly 140 people were killed in that explosion.

Pakistan has been facing a turbulent year, with changes in the political landscape as well as an increase in terrorist activities. More than 770 people have been killed in 40 suicide bombings this year alone.

The new year will be an even more challenging one for Pakistan, as it prepares for full civilian rule following a general election this month. Bhutto and former prime minister Nawaz Sharif both returned from exile to spearhead political campaigns. The militants are opposed to the election and have vowed to disrupt it.

It will not be easy to change this situation overnight, but Pakistanis should stand up to the challenge. A general election and a return to democracy is nevertheless Pakistan's best chance to turn the tide. Bhutto will be sorely missed as Pakistan seeks to overcome the

challenge of terrorism and lawlessness.

Benazir once said that she would not take a break until democracy returned to Pakistan. She could not fulfil this dream. But it will not be impossible for the Pakistani people to achieve. The election offers a glimmer of hope for Pakistan and terrorists should not be allowed to take that chance away.

Bhutto caused a revolution in Pakistani politics. Educated at Oxford and Harvard, she became the first woman prime minister of a Muslim country when she took the helm in Pakistan in 1988. She firmly believed in democracy.

Her unexpected death is a great shock to us.

Mohammad Shahidul Islam

Faculty

National Hotel and Tourism Training Institute

BPC

It was a gathering of democracy-loving people, assembly for the anti-terrorism activists.

Pakistan has a long tradition of political assassinations since its emergence as a state. The most important fact is that Pakistan has been under military rule which destroyed democratic pluralism in the country.

It is indeed an attack on democracy, attack on individual freedom. She sought additional security measures from President Pervez Musharraf as she felt threatened, but none was given.

MAH Nazim
Dept. of Political Science
University of Dhaka

SUNDARBANS

Having come back from Sundarbans, the largest mangrove forest in the world, I have been able to understand that we, unscrupulous and unwise guys, need not worry about this world heritage, rather it would come back to normal stage if we do not do

any serious damage. While visiting Sundarbans on December 22, 2007 by a trawler I watched some guys cutting trees mercilessly. Forestry experts have commented that it would take the Sundarbans at least twenty years to recover from the devasta-

tion if we do not cause any more damage to it.

In the name of protecting Sundarbans, the forest officials have been wreaking havoc on this mangrove forest.

Bazlur Rahman
Executive, Dhaka Stock Exchange Limited



PHOTO: APP