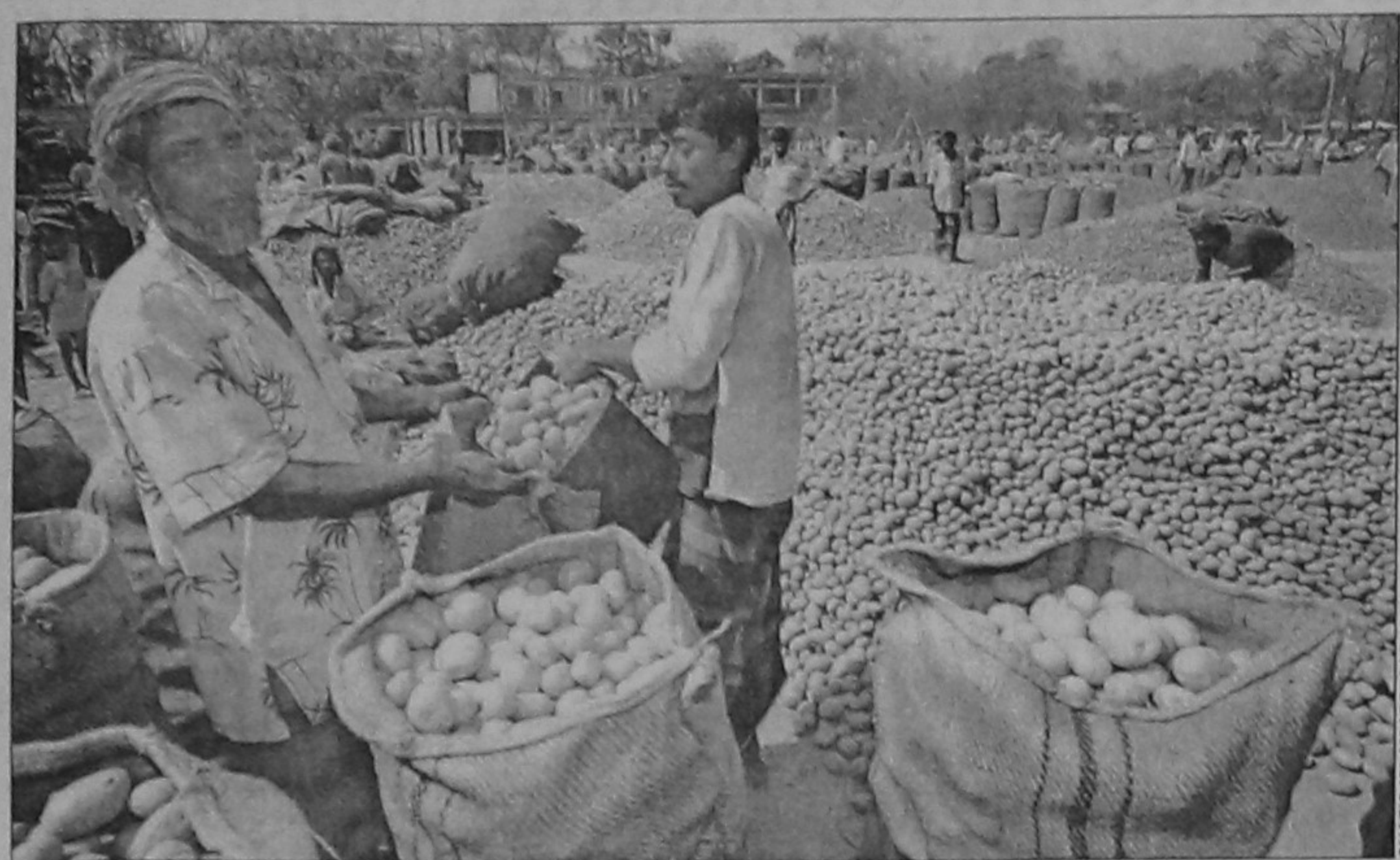


Letters will only be considered if they carry the writer's full name, address and telephone number (if any). The identity of the writers will be protected. Letters must be limited to 300 words. All letters will be subject to editing.



## Good potato harvest

When the country is facing a shortage of staple food items, the bumper production of potatoes is a blessing from the Almighty.

The Department of Agricultural Extension (DAE) must assist the farmers with labour and transport costs so that all the cold storages, wholesale markets, retail shops could be filled

with potatoes for normal consumption and storing.

The flood and the cyclonic season is not far away when potatoes can be consumed for survival.

Gulam Ashraf  
Gulshan, Dhaka

### NSC

Since the present caretaker government took office, a big segment of civil society and some factions of political parties hailed them. With the massive support from national media under the state of emergency, this unusual form of government, leaped for over-ambitious policies with great confidence. Just within two months of stay in power, this government put National Security Council (NSC) on their agenda. Unlike other issues, drive against corruption, voter ID, national ID, Human Rights Commission, Election Commission reform, the idea of NSC did not get overwhelming support, rather it was viewed with suspicion, though some politicians supported it. Whatever the ends and objectives of the planners, NSC cannot have a strong basis without constitutional arrangement and constitutional arrangement is not plausible without a democratically elected government.

Today people fear that NSC might have a direct role to influence politics and might have the power to topple the executive council of a government. However, as the discussion goes on, it is an opportunity for us to define national security. Now we have to consider external threat and ultimately that will refer to India, despite their invaluable contribution during our great liberation war.

Only strong democratic institutions will have the courage to face such security threat. Professor Talukder Maniruzzaman defines security in the context of least developed countries as the protection and preservation of the minimum core values of a nation: political independence and territorial integrity. But since the 1970s national security has begun to be redefined. Robert McNamara, the former World Bank president, defined security as "Security is not military hardware, though it may include it,

security is not military force, though it may involve it, security is not traditional military activity, though it may encompass it. Security is development and without development there can be no security." For a country like Bangladesh, security perception should be development oriented where security and development are intertwined.

Now coming back to NSC, NSC is not quite a new topic for Bangladesh.

In 1982, a nine member National Security Council was formed with the president as its chairman. The primary objective of NSC was to prescribe and assist the government regarding security matters. But now the situation is different as the country is being run by an interim government.

Farrukh Islam, Md. Firoz  
Department of International Relations  
Dhaka University

### No overbridge

As citizens we have to get five basic things from the government: food, cloth, education, health, and shelter. But if we can't defend ourselves from the hazards like road accident we will fail to achieve any one of the basic needs. I am a resident of West Hazipara and also a student of Leading University. This road (Malibagh rail-gate to Gulshan) is one of the busiest in Dhaka city. It is the most densely populated area too. It is a matter of regret that we don't have any overbridge or subway in these localities (Rampura, Badda, Chowdhury Para) to cross the road. There is even no speed-breaker in these areas. We have only one overbridge at the Notun Bazar which is so far away from the Malibagh rail-gate. Can you imagine how people are crossing the road in these areas? How much risk we have to take to cross the road? There are many schools, colleges, garment factories, banks, markets, shopping

malls etc situated on both sides of the road. I would appeal to the authorities concerned to build at least two overbridges and three or four speed-breakers in these areas to prevent road accidents.

Mohammad Rafiqul Islam  
Leading University  
Siddheswari Road, Dhaka

### Mugabe story

Just read a report that Mugabe is willing to quit as long as he doesn't face prosecution. Well, the best thing to do would be to promise him the immunity that he is so desperately asking for. But once the power is transferred, when his plane is on its way to his safe heaven (possibly a Mid-East country), bring his plane down, arrest him, and then put him on trial. He shouldn't get death penalty; give him hard-labour for the rest of his life so that he can understand the real value of a slice of bread.

He destroyed an entire country, millions died because of his corrupt, arrogant and selfish rule. This guy has no skills to run a country, he doesn't understand all the complications of modern economics and he should never have become president. He knows he is incompetent and that's why he used brute force to maintain his rule. Mugabe shouldn't get away with his crime; he must pay for all those people he killed.

Azad Miah  
Oldham  
UK

### Gas import

The recent initiative of Bangladesh to import gas from Myanmar has not been materialized due to the latter's negative attitude. Actually, China and India contacted Myanmar for importing gas long before Bangladesh's initiative. At present Bangladesh is thinking about importing gas but during the past BNP and AL regimes our politi-

cians spoke of the benefits of exporting gas, obviously as per foreign prescription. Had we exported gas at that time, we would have faced acute shortage of it by this time.

Gas is a natural resource and a gift to us from Allah. We should not waste it any way. Due to the fault of a foreign company, a huge amount of gas burnt out some months ago in Sylhet region—we only watched it on television. This kind of negligence is highly regrettable.

Harun-or-Rashid  
Sobhanbag, Dhaka

### Anti-drug drive

The drive against drugs, especially 'Yaba', lacking in persistence and follow-up, only stays as a symbolic action of the law enforcers. What we should assume is that there is no 'Yaba' on the streets of the city or the drugs dealers and peddlers both managed to go into hiding and are still running their trade. We want to know whether any system has been developed to trace the effect of that massive drive. For example, are the vulnerable groups safer than before or the 'drive' only boomeranged?

Quite a number of affluent users and the dealers are now in police custody. Who were the users and who were the dealers? There are so many questions that must be answered before we can place the issue in the right perspective.

Zaiaami Bodrudduza  
Uttara Model Town, Dhaka

### Gen. Moeen's suggestion

Army Chief General Moeen U Ahmed recently suggested that people develop a habit of eating potatoes with rice to reduce pressure on our staple food. He made this suggestion after visiting a farmers' market set up under the supervision of Bangladesh Army in Bogra town.

I appreciate and fully support Gen. Moeen's advice. In fact, nowadays the potato is very popular in our country. Everyday people are consuming a wide variety of potato preparations as supporting food and fast food both in rural and urban areas. Fortunately, this year we have had a bumper production of potatoes. Now some pragmatic post-harvest measures are to be taken so that potatoes can be stored and utilized. At the same time, opportunities should be created for the potato growers so that they can get fair price of their produce plus profit. In this regard, more farmers' markets should be set up in the potato growing areas under the supervision of Bangladesh Army and army trucks may be provided for the transportation of potatoes and other vegetables from one district to another and to the capital. Cold storage facilities should also be increased for the preservation of potatoes.

Professor M Zahidul Haque  
Chairman  
Department of Agricultural Extension & Information System  
Sher-e-Bangla Agricultural University

### Famine and hunger

Our Hon. Food Adviser has advised us (published on 5th April) not to call the nationwide hunger in Bangladesh a famine. He defines it as "hidden hunger", his newly coined phrase! The adviser has great command over language! Would he kindly (of course if he has the time to spare for the citizens) illustrate to us with reference to the context in Bangladesh what is actually the food shortage leading to? Is it "silent hunger" or "unknown hunger" or just an expanded temporary aberration; harped upon by newsmen and women! Also what is the difference between "hidden" and "visible" hunger? A newspaper article on the subject from his capable pen would be most welcome.

However, call it hidden or visible hunger or silent or loud (?) famine, whatever it is, it is after all only play of words. The reality is that the majority of the people are getting less food to eat, with scarcity of rice and lentils—popular Bengali staple foods! Mr. Adviser, we should not waste our time on anything else other than getting food—the crying need of the hour. Undoubtedly, the poor are hungry, the middle class angry (though till now silent), while the rich couldn't care less! Patience and forbearance are said to be rewarded in heaven; but we earthlings are an intolerable bunch and need food daily to live!

Unnecessarily curious  
On e-mail

### Liberation War history

I would like to request you to write an article or arrange a roundtable meeting in Dhaka or all over Bangladesh with the help of all freedom fighters, teachers, intellectuals and those who were in the real battlefield during the time of liberation. Nowadays when we see the history of our liberation being distorted, we feel sad.

Deb Das  
West Midlands  
United Kingdom

### Patient confidentiality

One of the pillars of medical practice in the West is patient confidentiality. A medical practitioner does not disclose his patient's medical history or problems to anyone other than the next of kin, and that also with the consent of the patient. I am therefore astonished at the callous manner in which the medical problems of the high profile prisoners are being disclosed to the public. Prisoners also have the right to privacy.

While the public has a right to know about many things, this right may not impinge upon the rights of others. Just general comments about the health conditions would be quite sufficient. I don't see why the public should be apprised about which patients are suffering with piles, much less the poor unfortunates who are struggling with fistulas and similar diseases.

I am very surprised that a newspaper of your standing and reputation would print such information just because the D.I.G. (Prisons) made such disclosures.

Syed Hamde Ali  
The Nawab Palace  
Bogra

### Women's rights

March 8 was 'International Women's Day' & the theme was 'Investing in Women & Girls'. From the primitive days, women are oppressed in society. But now they are fighting back to get their rights established. Society should show due sensitivity to all such rights.

Neluefa Yasmin Nodi  
Dept. of Applied Nutrition and Food Technology  
Islamic University, Kushtia

### Dream shattered

A government becomes successful when it establishes the fundamental, civil and political rights of the people of the land. After the liberation war, we had a dream, a dream to make society free from exploitation. The constitution we framed after independence fully reflects our political will and dreams. But in the years to follow successive governments failed to live up to the spirit of our constitution.

Arpi Howlader  
Faculty of Agricultural Economics and Rural Sociology  
BAU, Mymensingh

### Role of DCs

This is obviously a good attempt to hold an annual conference with the DCs. The Head of the Government and other Cabinet Ministers /Advisers get the opportunity to interact with the field level top functionaries and can realize the situation obtaining in the country. The DCs are responsible for coordinating all activities in the districts, from law and order to agricultural growth, communication, education, health service delivery etc.

I am afraid in future it might not be so easy for them to coordinate, with the empowerment and independence of the police, judiciary and all other departments.

The government will have to issue instructions on the coordinating role of the DCs in the districts and TNOs at the thana level until elected representatives take office.

Moreover, the DCs must have their e-mail facilities to interact with the centre and other departments and they should organise press conference in their areas to inform the public about economic development and other issues.

Kumar Prithwiraj Nath  
Canada

## City in distress

If my recollection is not wrong, recently one of the government officials remarked that Dhaka might have to be abandoned if necessary steps could not be taken in time to arrest decay and deterioration of civic amenities. The fact is that Dhaka could no longer be termed a modern city. It is already in its death throes. The monsoon will set in soon. While the city floods will cause havoc, the city fathers will be making tall promises without finding and/or doing what is actually necessary to come out of this situation.

The authorities may take short-term measures easily, pending the long-term plans. But it will not be an easy task to provide all the modern facilities to all the citizens of a megacity like Dhaka.

I would like to say that instead of trying to keep a large number of people within the city walls the authorities may reduce the burden by making necessary arrangements for quick and safe exit and entry to and from Dhaka, so that people are not compelled to live near their workplaces. If the above measure is taken, then the people will enter the city during daytime and leave it in the evening after finishing their work.

It would be easier for the authorities to construct roads which will need less effort and costs than keeping and feeding all the people within the city area.

Md. Shah Jahan  
Dhaka



### CNG price hike?

This is a request to all those people who can make some difference in society or at least give it a try. Though our country suffered a lot of setbacks in the past but there are a few silent positive developments we can rejoice about. Availability of hand tube-wells for clean water, clean sanitary latrines in the remote areas, telephone/mobile network are among these achievements. One of the silent revolutions which took place in the recent years is Compressed Natural Gas (CNG).

Thousands of transport vehicles are presently running on this pollution-free national resource. Only a few days ago some dailies reported the government decision to raise CNG price by almost 100%. The reason showed by the official concerned is that the present price level was fixed when the octane/petrol price was about Tk.33 per litre. While that price has doubled, it is time to double the CNG price to make our Petrobangla profitable. I am surprised to see no one is taking notice of this development.

The point is, this is our own national resource. We are not importing it, or are we? Then why compare this with the petroleum price-hike? This has saved the middle class people from economic disaster in the present context to a great extent. We have to keep the fact in mind, a mechanical vehicle is no more a monopoly of the rich, nor is it a facility, rather it is a necessity and the poorer section of society

will be affected by the CNG price-hike! Won't this decision increase the prices of the essentials even further? The present caretaker government claims to be a body ensuring people's rights. Is it not its duty to ensure the maximum benefits of the natural resources to its people?

Please reconsider your administrative decision---this is a humble request.

Imran  
Dhanmondi, Dhaka

### Political dialogue

A broken dialogue has just begun with the AL. The party is not necessarily united, one can feel from the media reports that the attitude of the government is not serious enough to achieve any positive results from the dialogue. The broken BNP(s) will eventually come to their rescue as its basic policy does not differ from the politics of the present government. The Jammāt is their safety net.

People are totally engaged in a battle for survival. Politics has become a secondary issue--a plus point for this government to manipulate the situation in their favour. That is what they are doing in the name of dialogue which is destined to fail. The dialogue might offer an opportunity to postpone the election, rather than facilitating the process. It might produce a model for guided democracy. The mission will then be fulfilled.

A simple "carrot and stick" policy has been adopted by the

government taking full advantage of disunity among the political parties. The news of the release of two leaders in jail is nothing but a "carrot" to ensure participation of the two major political parties. There is no way they are going to be released.

Are we going to be a liberal democratic state? The NWDP is perhaps facing its natural death. A big question will always remain unanswered: why the government initiated the drama with the NWDP, despite knowing the implications of it?

There is every reason to be concerned about the premature death of the NWDP. One can apprehend that the progress made for empowerment of women since the early 1980's is going to be challenged by the Islamic fundamentalists.

A reader  
On e-mail

### Obama and DS

Given the alacrity and enthusiasm with which The Daily Star prints every piece of positive article on Obama and highlights every negative article on Hillary Clinton, one can obviously see the lack of journalistic objectivity. Question is, why is The Daily Star so enamoured of Barack Obama? But then again if you are an Obama fan you believe in words and do not care for deeds.

I wish The Daily Star luck in your campaign for Obama!  
S.Abedin  
Foster City, CA, USA

## Barack Obama and Martin Luther King



Obama's recent speech on racial equality, though superficially powerful and rousing, was hypocritical and dishonest for it failed to recognise and fully appreciate the bedrock principle of human rights which guarantees racial equality. I refer to the principle enshrined in the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights which states "Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person." That same principle is found in The US Declaration of Independence which clearly states "... all men are created

equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness."

Unlike Martin Luther King Jr. who believed in real equality for all and whose image Obama was obviously invoking, Obama made no mention whatsoever of that great "promissory note" of freedom that guaranteed the right to life. This is because Obama himself vigorously opposes the right to life. In 2002, as an Illinois legislator, Obama voted against the Induced Infant Liability Act, which would have protected babies who were "accidentally" born alive during attempts to abort them. "The first thing I'd do as president is sign the Freedom of Choice Act," he told Planned Parenthood last July. This would make the United States the most pro-abortion nation in the world.

Obama is a false prophet who preaches "change" while pursuing a culture of death. The 20th century has witnessed many such initially charismatic leaders in Germany, the Soviet Union, and elsewhere, who promised change but who delivered nothing but unimaginable horror. Let us make sure this does not happen in America. Though the slogan "change" is usually invoked to signify something good, in this case it hides a different agenda—one which is very dangerous for America and the world.

Paul Kokoski  
Hamilton, Ontario, Canada

## Hidden hunger or silent famine?

Dr. Akbar Ali Khan calls it Silent Famine; the Food Adviser calls it Hidden Hunger. Statistics coming out of Bangladesh says that over 50% of pregnant women are suffering from anaemia, and a similar percentage (50%) of under 5 years old children are under weight (every one can understand the long term effect). WHO reports on these health fundamentals. Bangladesh was one of the model states among the developing countries. We do not know, when and how our nation will come out of this terrible situation, but this time we must not fail to identify the culprits that created this situation. This calamity is no less serious than what the Pakis and their dalals brought on us in 1971, because

this torture, this atrocity is SILENT. It has touched millions and millions of our homes across the country.

The CTG played in the hands of World Bank, IMF making us totally dependent for our two squares of meals. Foreign banks and foreign business houses are draining off our hard earned foreign currency and our people are going hungry in increasing numbers.

Subjecting the Nation to Hidden Hunger or to Silent Famine and compromising our democracy and sovereignty is a cardinal crime, which has to be dealt with firmly in future.

M. Hussain  
On e-mail

