

## Protecting crops

The government as well as the pesticide producers, marketers and distributors have now got a huge collective responsibility to educate the pesticide users about integrated pest management, proper doses and pesticide application safety measures, and also to get rid of fake, adulterated, unregistered and smuggled pesticides.

REAZ AHMAD

**P**ESTS are small insects that can cause colossal losses to crops, but many of them are not necessarily harmful to agricultural produce. The friendly ones are not only useful to the overall crop production process but also occasionally act as deterrents to the ill-effects of the harmful ones.

It has always been a big challenge for growers to protect crops from pest attacks. For centuries, farmers have been practicing natural, biological and also chemical ways of protecting their produce from pest attacks.

Farmers in a particular farming neighbourhood create an environment so that friendly insects outnumber the harmful ones and protect the crops in a very natural way. Integrated pest management and bio-pest management are also in vogue now.

Yet, we can't just ignore the application of chemical pesticides as another recog-

nised way of fighting the little predators. In our part of the world, chemical pesticides have been used to protect crops from pest attacks since 1956. For over two decades or so, the government, though on a limited scale, used to import pesticides and distribute them among the farmers.

Then came the era of commercial marketing of pesticides with both public and private companies entering the burgeoning pesticide market with a wide range of products -- which are not limited to pesticides but also include different brands of fungicides and weed killers too.

The sales of pesticides saw almost 300% rise from the mid '90s till now in Bangladesh. This emphasises the fact that farmers are more desperate now than ever before to protect their crops from pest damage and gain more output. More actors are in play now in the pesticide business, but the menace of pests of various genres and types is growing.

The pro-environment activists and defenders of nature's biological equilib-

rium apart, others may not mind judicious application of chemical pesticides in crop fields as long as that puts more grains in our bowls and better fortune to crop growers. But, here the main catch is best practices.

Despite having different pesticide regulatory set-ups in place, our poor farmers are still highly vulnerable to marketing of low-quality, unregistered and smuggled date-expired pesticides. Often, the companies do not care to educate their product users about the optimum level of pesticide usage, application process, timing and frequency, and safety aspects.

Thanks to the probe undertaken by the Institute of Epidemiology, Disease Control and Research (IEDCR), we have come to know how the excessive use of pesticides has been taking toll of human and animal lives in our villages.

This newspaper reported in its May 5 issue that excessive use of pesticides on farmlands in two villages of Dhamrai upazila caused the death of at least three children in April this year. It also killed a number of calves, dogs and fowls. Besides, the report says, 13 more children were hospitalised.

We can't afford to protect our crops at the cost of our children's lives. While we welcome the IEDCR's move of launching an awareness campaign about pesticides in those two villages and sending biological and environmental samples -- includ-

ing blood, urine, stool, cough and breast milk from villagers -- abroad for further tests, the issue here definitely demands more regulatory, legal and advocacy actions from the concerned government agencies.

There is a pesticide technical advisory committee in place, there is an association of pesticide marketers and producers in Bangladesh, there are thousands of agriculture extension staff across the country, and they all should play their respective parts now so that best practice can be ensured in applying the proper and timely doses of pesticides.

Often, we see farmers applying pesticides without using proper protective equipment, thereby exposing themselves to poisonous pesticides and their residues. Sometimes farmers, totally unaware of serious consequences, apply pesticides even on the very day they would be plucking the produce from the trees. Such last-moment spraying of pesticides is a serious health threat for the consumers.

The government as well as the pesticide producers, marketers and distributors have now got a huge collective responsibility to educate the pesticide users about integrated pest management, proper doses and pesticide application safety measures, and also to get rid of fake, adulterated, unregistered and smuggled pesticides.

The government must ensure that no



Is the cure worse than the disease?

unsafe pesticides are on sale or in use, and also update its list of legally authorised pesticides upon a renewed test of hazardous elements in each of those.

Besides, there should be a concerted move to promote other alternative best practices in pest control. For instance, promotion of pheromone can be a better way out from the curse of chemical pesticides damaging our agro-ecological landscape. Pheromone is a small chemical capsule in a plastic bottle half-filled with water. It works wonders -- insects

flock to the bottle to drown. Pheromone is the female sex hormone of insects that attracts the male.

So, the time is ripe now to look for alternatives and further diversify the tactics of fighting against pests, and also to make sure that chemical pesticides are applied in proper doses and at proper times.

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## Toward a changing society

The objectives of our liberation war were not confined to only setting up of an independent state; they included establishing off a new society in which there will be no social discrimination. People were united to build a democratic society with the ultimate aim of creating a democratic culture.

A.B.M.S ZAHUR

**C**HANGING a society is not possible only through reforming it. Better human relations can only be developed through social change. Even a political revolution cannot bring social change.

People need emancipation. For emancipation, an independent state is necessary. Independence of the state, however, cannot ensure emancipation of the people. Take the case of Bangladesh. Have the

people of Bangladesh achieved this emancipation though it became independent twice, once 1947 and the other in 1971. Independence does not mean change of rulers. Emancipation is only possible through social change.

The obstacle to social change comes from within the society. Vested interests will always try to oppose social change because they enjoy facilities and privileges not available to the common people. They will certainly not like to lose these advantages through agreeing to

social change.

Even the majority of underdogs do not like change in society because, firstly, they have become habituated to the system. They do not believe that change will be better than the existing situation. In fact, they apprehend a worse situation. Secondly, they accept the present situation as their fate and, as such, it cannot be changed. Thus, it is better to accept it.

It is true that we have been able to develop a lot during the last 38 years. Some people have improved their lot extremely fast and most visibly. They are enjoying all the comforts and privileges from the state. The number of such people is, however, too small. They are developing at the cost of the rest of the population. This is causing discrimination and division in the society.

In a capitalist system this means development. Socialisation is also

destroyed by it. People become introverted gradually, to the extent of considering their dear and near ones as not only their competitors but also, at times, their enemies.

A vast majority of the people is unhappy with the existing situation. They do not see any hope of change for the better. Neither can they dream of a situation where they can enjoy emancipation collectively. Gradually, they are separated and unemployment increases.

The government is committed to offer employment to at least one person from each family. Now it is reported that it may retrench 10% of the government servants. We do not blame the government for this. The fault lies with the system of capitalism, which will force the government to break its commitment.

We do not envisage increase in investment. Some analysts do not see a bright prospect for it in the near future. Some say

that as the local capitalists believe more in plundering and not in production there cannot be any appreciable increase in investment. It may be pointed out in this regard that small savers are neglected in the system. This may gradually result in social agitation, which may turn into social revolution.

The objectives of our liberation war were not confined to only setting up of an independent state; they included establishing off a new society in which there will be no social discrimination. People were united to build a democratic society with the ultimate aim of creating a democratic culture.

Education is generally regarded as the backbone of a nation; but truly speaking, culture is the real backbone. This anomaly is due to the influence of capitalism. If nationalism is to be democratic it has to be turned into cultural nationalism.

Are we to continue with the present

system? Will there be no change? Surely there will be change. That change will be brought by the democratic people who understand that the present system has to be replaced by a democratic society and culture.

Society is bigger than the state. The hurdles against social change are put up by people who are not interested in the welfare of the common men. The imperialists are ready to assist them. During the war of liberation they did not come openly. Now, they are ready to expose themselves openly.

Our only hope is our people, who are unhappy and angry. If there be any call for change they will respond as they did in 1971. This call will be given by the people who believe in true democracy, think properly and act rightly.

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## India's coming-out party

This victory is a mandate not just for the Congress party but within it for the remarkable troika of Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, party leader Sonia Gandhi, and her son, Rahul Gandhi.

FAREED ZAKARIA

**O**NE can date precisely China's debut as a great power. It was the evening of August 8, 2008 -- the opening ceremonies of the Beijing Olympics. The event perfectly symbolised China's rise, a spectacular and expensive feat of mass organisation, directed by the country's highly competent government.

We might look back a few years from now and date India's coming-out party to May 18, 2009, the day its most recent election results were announced. They are also a fitting symbol -- in this case of India's unique strengths, which are defined not by state power but people power, with all the messiness and chaos that implies. With 420 million people voting, the recent polls were the biggest exercise of democracy in history.

But the global significance of the election -- and the reason it might usher in a new age for India on the world stage -- was not the fact of it, but the results. Over the past two decades, India has been consumed by its internal divisions: of

caste, ethnicity and religion.

This has made it difficult for the government in New Delhi to mobilise national power to any purposeful end in global affairs. A decentralized and divided polity has punched well below its weight internationally. That's bad for India and bad for the world. This could all change now. For the first time in three decades, a single party -- the Indian National Congress -- was given a clear and broad mandate.

The Indian electorate is one of the world's poorest and least educated, and yet it voted with remarkable intelligence. The ruling Congress party was rewarded for economic growth. Contrary to the hopes of India's many left-wing pundits, people support the move toward a more open (and thus productive) economy.

One can see this in the fact that Congress didn't win everywhere. Regional governments that had also pursued development (in Orissa and Bihar) were rewarded as well. The parties that stumbled badly were those that based their appeal on fear, hatred and

identity politics -- the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party, and smaller caste-based groups.

In recent years democracy around the world seemed to have fallen prey to two ills. First, populism seemed to trump economic reform. Second, in the age of terrorism, fear became an easy way to mobilize political support. (These problems have affected democracies in rich countries like America just as much as poor ones.)

The Indian results contradict both notions. The Congress party has been reasonably reform-minded economically and highly responsible on issues of terrorism and tolerance. It chose to show restraint after the recent Mumbai terror attacks and was vilified by the opposition as weak. The voters didn't buy it.

This victory is a mandate not just for the Congress party but within it for the remarkable troika of Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, party leader Sonia Gandhi, and her son, Rahul Gandhi, 38. The latter has spent the last few years doing the seemingly impossible -- reviving the grassroots of the Congress party, which over the years had become less a political organization and more a fawning and corrupt court. He made a series of big strategic bets during the campaign -- to field young candidates and not to ally with caste-based parties. Everyone paid off.



Another triumph for them.

The media, particularly in India, have tended to be skeptical of Sonia and Rahul Gandhi's political skills. Yet they have presided over two electoral wins in a span of six years, are rejuvenating a sclerotic party and have done all this while maintaining a principled commitment to secularism, economic reform and good government. (Singh is the most scrupulously honest man in Indian politics in at least three decades.)

Neither mother nor son has yet taken a government post, and while this can be described as clever calculation or biding their time, how many people, when offered the prime ministership of the world's second-largest country, would show such discipline and restraint?

The great challenge for the 21st-century world is to find a way to bring India, China and Brazil into the international system. This task is often seen as a

Western one. But equally important, the emerging powers must assume their international roles and act responsibly on the world stage. That means taking a global -- and not narrowly national -- perspective on issues like terrorism, energy, the environment, trade, disease and nonproliferation.

This election has empowered an Indian government that -- compared with all the alternatives -- is the most likely to adopt a responsible approach to its world role. Even under tight political constraints, Prime Minister Singh reoriented the country's foreign policy. With a national mandate, he can act more broadly and boldly on all fronts.

"India is a geographical term. It is no more a united nation than the equator," said Winston Churchill. Churchill had a sorry track record on India. As prime minister, he ruled out freedom for the colony, saying, "I have not become the king's first minister in order to preside over the liquidation of the British Empire." In five years, India would be independent. Now, more than 60 years later, India has once again outwitted Sir Winston Churchill.

Fareed Zakaria is Editor of Newsweek International.

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## Bad words in odd places



A text message appeared on my phone:

"Bleep. I got a bleeping new job talking on the bleeping radio. I need help bleeping quickly."

That's the censored version. You see the problem? This friend, whom I shall call Jenny Bleep, cannot limit her vocabu-

lary to un-spicy language. Legend has it that she did not cry at birth, but shot out with a bump and a curse. I could not see her surviving five minutes on live radio.

Cursing is in the news at the moment. Families in the US are complaining about a music CD handed out to children by McDonald's. They didn't moan for the obvious reason, that it was mindless pop drivel, but because it had a bad word in it.

McDonald's replied that the song merely contained the term "looking around," which is not illegal anywhere, except possibly in Myanmar, where visitors who look around too energetically will cause an extra five years to be

added to Aung San Suu Kyi's sentence.

But I've listened to the Kidz Bop track called I Don't Want to Be, and the singer definitely isn't singing "looking around." Unless the correct pronunciation of that phrase begins with an "F" sound. Perhaps it's a regional variant?

But McDonald's needn't worry. The CD, which was of no interest before this incident, is now in massive demand from youngsters. It's still rubbish, but now it's rubbish adults don't want them to listen to.

If Jenny lived in America, I would send her to the Cuss Control Academy. This organisation, which really exists, turns foul-mouthed people into sweet-talkers

you can introduce to children (who can then teach them the latest curse words from the playground).

Psychologists say the first step in cleaning your tongue is to replace swear words with innocent ones. Top science fiction writer Larry Niven makes his characters exclaim "Tanji!" (derived from "there ain't no justice") when bad things happen. This would be a brilliant idea except for the fact that it makes everyone sound really silly.

In the US TV show Firefly, actors use real swear words, but only in Mandarin and Cantonese. This is a dumb idea. You do not want to get 1.3 billion people

writing angry letters to your boss.

An article going around the Internet proposes new swear words such as zighumple or jizzlewax. I couldn't recommend that Jenny use these. They are naff-sounding and unsatisfying. No, good swear words need to be sharp, hard-edged sounds which erupt from your mouth the second someone treads on your foot.

In the end, we sat down and worked out a huge list of possible words that sounded like curse words but were safe for broadcasting use. Jenny took the list away to try them out for a few days. She came back with some fascinating discov-

eries. The top three most satisfying broadcast-friendly non-curse words, in reverse order, were:

3. Pool,
2. Cow, and
1. Follicle.

I tried them myself. You know what? They really work. The next time something bad happens, shout "cow" or "pool" at the top of your voice. You actually do feel better. And when something really, really bad happens, slam your fist into your desk and shout "follicle." It feels great.

And it's meaningless enough even for the next McDonald's "Kidz Bop" music CD.

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