

Rice revolution

Congrats to BRRI

ON the heels of the good news regarding advancement in jute cultivation, that will see the moribund sector revitalised, we have another very good tiding, this time in the rice sector. The National Seed Board will approve today a new variety of rice that will have a high content of zinc. In fact two new varieties of high-zinc content rice for two different seasons are ready for release.

The development is phenomenal, and the Bangladesh Rice Research Institute deserves our compliments for presenting the nation with yet another variety of rice that will not only be high in yield but will also contain between 20 and 22 parts per million of zinc. That is 30 percent more of zinc than in other varieties of rice. And even more heartening is that these varieties will mature early. We can rightly take pride in the fact that Bangladeshi breeders have left their Indian counterparts behind in this regard.

The outcome of this development will have a salutary impact on the growth of children in Bangladesh. Given that nearly 44 percent children under the age of five in the country are at risk of zinc deficiency, this variety of rice will help prevent stunted growth of children.

This is yet another example where dedicated research has brought unimaginable dividends to the country. We would implore the government to continue promoting research and development with increase investment, particularly in the field of food grains development that will be able to meet the country's requirement of not only food but nutrition also.

Beware of salinity invasions

A doable strategy is round the corner

WITHOUT being panicky, we must treat the news of deepening salinity intrusions from the sea as yet another wakeup call for an effective response mechanism to tackle a growing geological challenge. To the extent it's related to global warming it should be dealt with as part of climatic change mitigation and adaptation processes. On the other hand, we have to also address the man-made factors contributing to salinity ingress.

This write-up is confined to addressing man-made factors behind heightening levels of salinity intrusion from the south reaching up to Magura, not too far from the midriff of Bangladesh.

One-sided groundwater extraction to the exclusion of any substantial utilisation of surface water has created a double jeopardy: Declining rate of Dhaka's groundwater every year at three to six meters due to pumping for piped water threatens land subsidence and causes salinity inroads. The twin-problem is no longer confined to Dhaka, rather it is present in varying degrees all over the country.

Indiscriminate extraction of groundwater will have to be done away with as recharging the aquifer with fresh water could improve the situation up to an extent. More to the point, we have to switch on to a greater utilisation of surface water by implementing plants that largely remain on the drawing boards. Simultaneously, we need to harvest rain waters during the monsoon and conserve it for use during dry season.

India-Bangladesh land dispute

AJEEF AHMED

THE Indira-Mujib Treaty of Friendship is supposed to address three kinds of land border disputes between Bangladesh and India, who share a 4,098 km long border. These are, un-demarcated border, enclaves and adversely possessed land (APL). Specifically, the two countries have yet 6.5 km of border to demarcate, 162 enclaves measuring a total 24,268 acres as per the agreed list signed in April 1997 at the level of Director General Land Record & Survey (DGLR & S), Bangladesh and DLRS, India and 6500 acres of adversely possessed land. Article 1(12) and Article 3 of the Land Boundary Agreement (LBA) of 1974 envisage that Bangladeshi enclaves in India and Indian enclaves in Bangladesh should be exchanged expeditiously and the people in the enclaves offered a choice of citizenship. In accordance with the agreement, Bangladesh handed over the Berubari enclave to India while India pledged to lease in perpetuity to Bangladesh an area measuring 178x85 meters near 'Tin Bigha' to reach the Dahagram-Angorata enclave of Bangladesh. However, it has taken India 27 years to open the corridor for 12 hours daily to Bangladesh on the pretext of legal complications.

Though the Nehru-Noon Agreement of 1958 -- and the 9th amendment of the Indian Constitution ratified the said agreement and does not need further amendment to ratify the Land Boundary Agreement (LBA) of 1974-- the Indian policymakers say the exchange of enclaves requires further amendment. After a quarter of a century the agreement is awaiting ratification. Major Indo-Bangladesh tension points from the Indian perspective are insurgents from Northeast India using Bangladesh territory as a sanctuary to launch terrorist campaigns against India and cross border movements from Bangladesh to the bordering states of India, which have been raised by India on several occasions at different official meetings. While Bangladesh's major sources of concern are human and drug trafficking, smuggling of small arms and ammunitions, increased smuggling in goods, frequent clashes with the Indian Border Security Force (BSF) and unprovoked firing leading to death of innocent citizens.

Though Government of India recognises the need to ratify LBA to resolve the dispute one wonders whether the killing of more than 1000 innocent Bangladeshi's in the past 10 years by BSF, or more than 1000 Bangladeshi tortured by BSF since 2001, 974 abduction, 107 missing from the border, 14 rapes, 71 snatched/looting and 313 illegal pushing into Bangladesh in the Bangladesh-India border area, are not enough of a wakeup call. (Statistics credited to Odhikar). If this is not enough then maybe the Baraibari border clash of April 18, 2000, which left 3 BDR and 16 BSF men dead in the worst border clash in the 42 years of Bangladesh's independence due to the unresolved adversely possessed land issue, would be. But surely the plight of 51000 people living today in the 162 enclaves in the two countries (as per statistics of The Times of India), who neither hold refugee status nor have access to any internationally recognised civil rights in the prison like enclaves, would definitely be. The inhabitant of these enclaves could argue that even prisons have rights and prisoners are sentenced for definite term times.

Even the economics of this unresolved dispute should

have been an important factor if the human aspect was not, that Taka 832.2 million worth of smuggled food grain, sugar, textile, machinery and many other commodities enter Bangladesh on a monthly basis from India (as per a survey conducted by the Bangladesh Unnayan Parishad on the annual seizure statement from Border Guard Bangladesh BGB). While there are no reliable data available on women and child trafficking from Bangladesh, it has been estimated in surveys done by NGOs that 200-400 young women and children are trafficked every month to India and beyond. Researchers have shown that traffickers use the border enclaves as collection points. Although Bangladesh and India, along with other SAARC countries, have signed an agreement on child and women trafficking in 1997, BGB and BSF do not have any joint action programme to prevent trafficking yet.

Recent efforts of the Indian government to place a constitution amendment bill in the Rajya Sabha to ratify the LBA with Bangladesh failed. The Trinamool Congress, Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) and India's main opposition lawmakers scuttled the move to ratify the Indian Constitution (119th Amendment) Bill, which intended to give effect to an exchange of enclaves adversely held by India and Bangladesh. Birendra Prasad Baishya of AGP sat on the floor carrying two placards and saying the bill was

"an injustice to Assam." The BJP and AGP oppose the agreement insisting that India is ceding too much territory to the neighbouring country. When contacted by the media, Trinamool leader Derek O'Brien said, "It is not a vanilla ice-cream; it is the country's precious land that is at stake," while justifying Trinamool's opposition to the bill.

Derek O'Brien or Birendra Prasad Baishya, who, in all likelihood, have not visited and do not share the difficulties such as faced by the residence of Balapara Khagrabari an Indian enclave of district of Cooch Bihar, situated inside Nilphamari district of

Bangladesh, should visit and tell the same to the Indian citizen who have been waiting for their lawmakers for the last 66 years to take a decision on their fate. In the words of Abu Bakr Siddiqui, one of the oldest Indian resident of the enclave, "After the partition by the British, we woke up the next morning to realise we were neither part of India nor erstwhile Pakistan but of an enclave inside East Pakistan. Only for couple of years we were given Non Visa Required Identity Card to travel to Bangladesh and India in the 1970's but eventually stopped it. From outset we are very peaceful where everyone has a smile to greet. The hospitality is warm enough to confuse a common bystander but reality differs from the norm, when looking deep into our lives. We are desperate people with no sign of hope with a brewing anger, desperation and lack of trust. The Indian Government has never looked into the livelihood of our people. They have now even constructed fences closing any kind of communication between us. We are like livestock, we are living a life like animals and no one cares if we die."

On Bangladesh-India borders, Mr. R.N. Bhattacharya, ex ICG, BSF has made the following comment: "It's the most artificial border in the world." These are realities and the Indian policy makers should finally wake up to realise and act upon if they are to make positive and effective steps to improve Bangladesh-India relationship.

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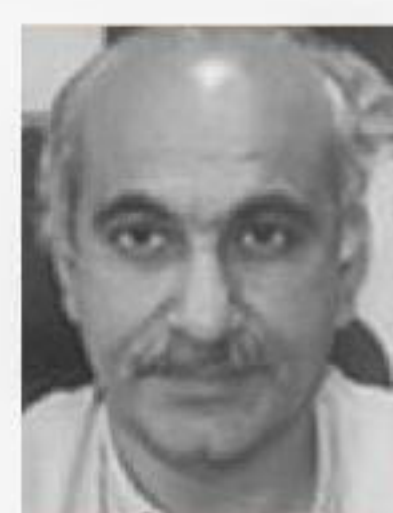


"Indian Government has never looked into the livelihood of our people... We are like livestock, we are living a life like animals and no one cares if we die."

STAR

Welcome to the Indian animal farm

BYLINE



M.J. AKBAR

WHO says no one listens to Dr. Manmohan Singh? The animals do. Ever since the Prime Minister of India ordered Indians to release their animal instincts, the bears have started a carnival on Dalal Street.

Maybe the instructions of our first economist-PM got mislaid in translation. He surely wanted bulls to march across Mumbai, conquering every stock exchange in an exhilarating stampede. Instead, horrible little bears arose from long hibernation, and turned into a wrecking crew that has left the economy gasping and government choked. In the meantime, picking up on another variation of the animal theme, the Indian

The worst damage is done by incompetence, not evil intent. All careers, they say, end in futility -- but only if you do not know when to quit. Dr Singh will understand this analogy, since he likes America and American businessmen.

rupee has turned into a truant chimpanzee, sliding down with pathetic glee and jumping up with an occasional wheeze, but quite certain that its destination is downhill.

If the great Indian animal farm of 2013 seems out of control, it is because the keepers have lost the map as well as the plot. The economy is only one casualty of self-generated mayhem. The political stability of India is equally a shambles.

The recent behaviour of the UPA government has been utterly bizarre. Congress might lose the plot, as it has done before, but it has enough experience in its DNA to manage a Parliament session. The current session is an object lesson in suicide. As seasoned a politician as Parliamentary Affairs Minister Kamal Nath gives the impression of being either a fool or a zombie; and since his track record proves that he is not silly, then he is under clear instructions to act like a robot.

Preparations for any session of Parliament rest on a basic principle: get your priorities right. The UPA's declared priority was the Food Security Bill. They had even set a date for full rollout: August 20, the late Rajiv Gandhi's birthday. The rest was actually quite simple. All that government had to ensure was that atmospheric were under control when the session opened, so that the bill could go through in the first week. The Opposition was trapped. It could not say no, but was unwilling to say yes, for both fiscal and political reasons. It was the perfect environment for government to sail through, putting some ballast in its wings as it did so.

Instead, UPA, led by Mrs Sonia Gandhi and her faithful lieutenant Digvijaya Singh, for reasons that elude the com-

prehension of common sense, decided to kick up a massive storm over Telangana. Inevitably, dust from this storm blinded the monsoon session. Telangana has been on the anvil for four years; would another four weeks have mattered? In fact, the Prime Minister could have made the announcement on the floor of the House after the passage of food security; and if the rest of the session was washed out at the least this bill would have been home, high and dry.

Here is a little more to perplex you. Why did government suddenly abandon its opaque tactics of evasion and fudge over the missing coal scam files in the middle of the session? These "missing" files first came to public attention when last May CBI director Ranjit Sinha said publicly that he could not pursue investigations because he had not received them. We all know why. Government is in deep trouble over this colossal corruption. Its star industrialists in Parliament, like Naveen Jindal and Vijay Darda, are involved. There is nothing mysterious about the fact that files pertaining to these two are among those missing. It seems to be a case of theft compounded by abetment. A few more chunks of evasion would not have made absolute solution easier in the eyes of God, if God has time for Indian corruption anymore.

Moreover, in terms of purely Parliamentary tactics, if the Prime Minister was going to make a statement on the files, which was the Opposition's demand, and which he was obliged to do as

minister in charge of coal mines at the relevant time, why did he not make this statement on the very first day? Why did he have to wait a week to promise to do so, and thereby erase one-fourth of the session from the agenda? This makes no sense. It is not the Opposition that has delayed the Food Security Bill, however much it may have wanted to, but the government. The reason? Inexplicable. The worst damage is done by incompetence, not evil intent.

All careers, they say, end in futility -- but only if you do not know when to quit. Dr. Singh will understand this analogy, since he likes America and American businessmen. The share price of Microsoft just went up 7% after its chief executive officer, Steve Ballmer, announced he was leaving. Ballmer was once a hero of Microsoft, and an astonishing videotape shows him bouncing across the stage at a company gathering, making cowboy noises, in the days when he took the job as an untarnished superstar.

How much will the share price of India rise when the government of Dr. Manmohan Singh, quits?

The writer is Editor of The Sunday Guardian, published from Delhi, India on Sunday, published from London and Editorial Director, India Today and Headlines Today.

LETTERS

TO THE EDITOR

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PM must reinstate CTG system

ON August 18, 2013 at a press conference at the Gono Bhaban, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina said that she would not budge by a hair from the constitution. How could she outright reject the demand of 90% people of the country who want CTG system for holding the next general election? It is not only the demand of the opposition; it is the demand of the people. She just cannot ignore it.

Constitution is for the welfare of the people. It had been changed many times in the past and it must be changed again to reinstate the CTG provision.

If Sheikh Hasina does not change her stance, the country will head towards a turbulent situation and sixteen crore people will suffer. We hope and trust that she will accept people's demand.

Nur Jahan
Chittagong

Where's Bangladesh headed?

The country is sunk deep into many negatives that have become an accepted part of our daily national life: Endless violence on any excuse, hartals, needless and unending political standoffs, price hike, etc. When will all this end?

Now the weather has also added to our miseries; with vast areas in the country flooded, and the unceasing rains with unbearable heat soon to follow. Is this all a prelude to a special judgment day for Bangladesh?

Engr. S. A. Mansoor
Dhaka

Ambulances should be given precedence

Emergency vehicles with stickers denoting 'Ambulance', 'Emergency Garbage Removal Van' etc., are frequently seen on different streets of Dhaka. But these emergency service providing vehicles seldom get priority passage to reach their destination quickly. Neither the traffic personnel nor the public give much importance or attention to these emergency vehicles. Of course some vehicles are abusing the emergency stickers.

If not other emergency service vehicles, ambulances carrying seriously ill patients should be given priority by the traffic personnel and others on the streets.

Professor M Zahidul Haque
Dean, Faculty of Agriculture
SAU, Dhaka

Public discussions on creative math questions

Teaching of math needs expertise and care. It is a great pleasure for us that creative questions on math are going to be introduced in the ISC and SSC exams from 2014 and 2015 respectively. But we can not see proper ground work. We expect that creative questions will be published in the daily newspapers, discussions and talk shows on creative questions will be aired on various TV channels, and a lot of sample creative questions will be uploaded onto the relevant websites. Regular workshops and training programmes on creative questions should be held across the country to help the teachers.

Mawduda Hasnin
Raninagar, Rajshahi

Comments on post editorial, "Stubbornness is not leadership," published on August 23, 2013

deepjelejai

Very clear message to the PM and the opposition leader indeed! Hope they have the foresight to realise the people's desire and work together for a common goal -- the development of Bangladesh.

Torikul Islam

To avoid any kind of turmoil, non-partisan and neutral polls-time government is needed. PM should not neglect the people's demand.

Mohi

Nicely said. However, as the PM remains unflinching in her stance that she will continue as the PM during election time, the nation may soon plunge into the labyrinth of vicious violence and destruction.

Doronto

When in power, our two leaders are always stubborn leaders. During BNP regime the then election commissioner Mr Aziz and BNP did not listen to what AL had to say. Now AL does not seem to bother about what BNP is saying.

Nds

The author is absolutely correct in his observation that we the people must share the responsibility for the state of affairs that we are speaking against. He also appears to be honest in admitting that what Hasina says is not always a travesty of truth.

"Priority high, progress slow" (August 22, 2013)

Iftekhar Hassan

Delay in appointment of contractor is because they want to select a contractor who wants to be a willing partner in joint looting venture.

Snr Citizen

If no importance and priority is given to the most important highway of BD, then we can imagine easily the insincerity of our government. All the governments do the same dillydallying.

Throwing stones at running trains is no fun

ABDUL MATIN

PREETI Das, a 24-year student of architecture, was hit by a stone thrown from outside while she was travelling with her husband by train from Chittagong to Dhaka on August 20. She succumbed to her injury hours later. An investigation report by Bangladesh Railway blamed an unidentified miscreant who might have hurled the stone for fun.

Eleven days later, Md. Abdullalil Baki, a driver of a Dhaka bound train, sustained severe injuries on his head near Brahmanbaria after being hit by another stone, again thrown by an unidentified miscreant. Credit goes to the driver who managed to pull the train safely to Brahmanbaria Railway Station. He is now under treatment at Railway Hospital in Dhaka. Imagine the fate of the passengers if he became unconscious after being hit by the stone.

It is reported that throwing of stones at running trains is common in many areas in Bangladesh. Nine such incidents occurred during the current year alone. Although the Railway Act provides for life imprisonment for hurling stones at trains with the intention of harming passengers, nobody has been punished in recent memory for such crimes.

How could throwing of stones at running trains be fun to anyone? Who are the boys who throw such stones? Should the moral values of our children erode to such low levels? How it is that none of the miscreants could be brought to justice though as many as nine such incidents had occurred during the current year? Is it not a reflection on our system of education, family upbringing, erosion of moral values and inefficiency of the law-enforcing authorities?

The throwing of stones at running trains, removal of fish plates of railway tracks, torching of trains and vehicles, vandalising public and private properties, cold blooded murders in public places etc are only few examples of our failures in properly grooming our young generation. Is there no way of correcting our failures?

I wish I knew the answer. I am sure there is one. I leave it to our psychoanalysts, social scientists and members of the civil society to find an answer to the question. We need it urgently and we must convince our youngsters that throwing stones at running trains is no fun but a serious crime like the ones I mentioned above.

The writer is a former chief engineer of Bangladesh Atomic Energy Commission.