

Anti-formalin drive

Adhocism won't do

EXPERTS, especially agricultural scientists, have raised some pertinent questions about the methods used as well as the efficacy of the drive launched by police and mobile courts against toxic preservative or ripening agent-added fruits in the city.

While the Department of Fisheries (DoF) has already had an understanding with the BSCIR to buy some 16, 000 appropriate formalin detection kits from the latter, they questioned the wisdom of using the imported device, which is meant for use in laboratories.

Seeing that toxic chemical-treated fruits and various kitchen market commodities including vegetables and fish are posing a serious threat to public health, it was very natural that people in general welcomed the drive against it. Clearly, however, the ongoing drive against toxic preservative or ripening agent-treated fruits or other perishables has started in an adhocist manner without proper planning or result-oriented approach. Neither is the drive backed by an expert committee to oversee it, nor guide it. Obviously, the drive, in its present form, runs the risk of not only being wasteful or losing purpose, it may also become counterproductive.

Now that the 'ongoing anti-formalin' campaign has come under scrutiny by agriculturists, people concerned in the relevant ministry and business leaders, we hope the government will form an expert committee to oversee the drive in a well-planned, coordinated and result-oriented manner. At the same, it should recommend well-thought-out measures to contain the menace effectively.

Budget sidelines renewables

How do we achieve the target?

SURPRISINGLY, this year's budget has not allocated sufficient funds to produce the planned 800megawatts (MW) of electricity by 2015 from renewable sources. Industry experts generally concur that the Tk400 crore allocation in the budget is not adequate to attain the set target. As pointed out in the Bangladesh Economic Review 2014, current power generation from various renewable technologies including solar, stands at a little less than 400MW. What is interesting to note here is that the government will have to spend an estimated Tk9,000 crore to generate the additional 436MW over the next 18 months if it wishes to stick to its plan.

The 363.8MW that has so far been installed involved the private sector, which invested anywhere between 50 and 60 percent of project cost, with the remainder coming from the government. Hence, the question arises, precisely why such a measly portion of the estimated cost has been allocated in the current fiscal? Are we then to assume that renewables are no longer a priority area, or that the project completion timetable has been revised?

Whatever may be the thinking behind this move, it is obvious that reaching 800MW from renewables is not achievable by 2015 with this fund. And that is a pity, since many renewable technologies have become viable sources of generating electricity, particularly in off-grid areas. In rural and remote areas, application of solar rooftops and biogas must not be ruled out as viable sources of alternative energy generation. Clearly, a rethink at policy level is called for.

A daughter's tribute

RITI IBRAHIM AHSAN
 DR. Neelima Ibrahim (1921- 2002) was a noble and indomitable soul and a true renaissance woman. She left us on June 18 2002. She received her PhD from Dhaka University in 1959 while she was a mother of five children. She started her teaching career in 1944 in Calcutta Victoria Institution and continued teaching in the Bangla Department of Dhaka University. She worked as the Chairman of the department, Director General of Bangla Academy, and Provost of Rokeya Hall. She also led the Bangladesh Mahila Samity, FPAB and CWFD.



DR. Neelima Ibrahim

She was actively involved with the pre-liberation student movement and had given shelter to many student leaders when they were in distress. She remained in Bangladesh during the Liberation War and actively helped freedom fighters by providing them with money, shelter and medication. After being informed about the kidnapping of her colleagues, she went to the Mirpur Badhavumi and Dhaka Medical College Morgue to identify them. Finally, after liberation, she was actively involved in the initiative to construct a memorial for the Shaheed Intellectuals.

In the pre-liberation years, she spent most of her time educating students. However, like any other Bangladeshi, the Liberation War had a tremendous effect on her professional life. In January 1972, Bangabandhu asked her to create a centre to shelter all Biranganas. Because of these efforts, the "Nari Punorbashon Board" was constituted. Later, she wrote "Ami Binangana Bolchi."

Finally, to me she was also an excellent mother. I worked as her driver during the Liberation War and after the War as well. She always taught us to be independent but at the same time to care about our family. In this regard, she was lucky to have a supportive husband. She was a very hard working woman and was dedicated to furthering female empowerment and promoting education. I believe it is important for us to do something constructive so that the younger generation can know about her work. We miss you *maa*.

The writer is a former Secretary to the Government.
 E-mail: riti@hsan@hotmail.com

GROUND REALITIES



Syed Badrul Ahsan

France's capitulation to the Nazis in 1940, told her: "Cameroon has lost a battle. She has not lost the war."

Now, you may not agree with me. Maybe Cameroon will once again turn out to have been a mere blip on the global football screen. That is not the point. The point is that some people should be out there to speak up for the underdogs of the world, a thought you may not agree with. Well, dissent is a democratic right. It is also a huge spur to informed argument. But let me not digress. I will come straight to the point. Over these past many days, I have been travelling, with something of intensity if not intrepidity, through Argentina and Brazil and France and Germany and what not, here in the rainy, rather humid soil and sizzling weather of Bangladesh.

Of course I refer to the World Cup. Now, I have nothing against football, having played the game to my heart's content for quite a significant number of years of my life. I stopped playing it when I was ten. And that, I keep telling myself, was not very long ago. You will, I presume, not agree with me. Believe you me, I once scored ten goals on an empty field. All the other players were then reclining against the pine trees around the field. They were too tired to play. And that included the goalkeeper.

But let that be. Let us get back to this World Cup affair. As things stand in this city today, perhaps in other regions of the country too, there is a ubiquity of foreign flags hanging from nearly every window and rising on every rooftop, so much so that you might be lulled into thinking that this country has suddenly been peopled by men and women come from South American and Europe. That got a bureaucrat, a deputy commissioner to be precise, annoyed here. A true patriot, he decreed a ban on a flying of foreign flags. He was soon followed by a minister. Jaws dropped, smiles vanished. Those two men appeared to be telling us that those foreign flags in Bangladesh were slicing away at the country's sovereignty. But then the prime minister intervened. Good that she did. She came down firmly on the side of the flag

Cameroon, football and Nixon

HERE'S the unabashed truth: I am a non-sports person. Yet I have been going around telling people why I am a Cameroon partisan at this year's World Cup football. And I have been getting strange looks, followed within seconds by loud guffaws. The other night I waited for Cameroon to win. It did not. My combative friend Sadya was soon texting me: "Your Cameroon lost." I went back to Charles de Gaulle, and paraphrasing his eloquent view of

flyers. Good to know she is still head of government. And Bangladesh is yet a free country. Our sovereignty remains undefiled.

That said, people will have every reason to make their soccer preferences known. The problem, though, is in all that chaos of the flags. Let me not crib here. It is perfectly all right to back a country in a game, maybe even in international politics. But whether it is all right as well for you to drench your streets and your cities in foreign colours just because you love foreign football teams is something else. It is a matter not to be made light of, mind you.

Have you noticed that a lot of Bengalis have also taken to displaying the Argentine and Brazilian flags on their vehicles, which happens to be quite a bother? And it is because once you spot such a vehicle near you or approaching you, you are quite liable to think that the ambassador of either of these countries is passing by... until you realise it is one of your own kinsmen happily engaged in sports propaganda for the country of his choice. Come to think of it, you can't really do anything about it. Ah, but can't you, really? Think of any other country where you will come across such a ubiquity of foreign flags. You will likely spot none.



No, do not get me wrong. Far be it for me to question anyone's patriotism here. And sports go beyond frontiers. Anyone who tries to inject politics here deserves to be put into the doghouse, unless of course you have alternatives in hand. But what really puts you on edge here is the thought of these football fans' inability to demonstrate their World Cup preferences in a more subtle way.

They could do it through conversations, through high-pitched arguments if you like. But plastering an entire locality or city with non-Bangladeshi flags is really going overboard in a demonstration of excitement.

Ah, well! Don't forget that in all these years some idiosyncracies have crept into the way we think. In our general deportment there is something which speaks to us of the beauty of things foreign or alien. Think of all the people who regularly speak in public, on television or somewhere else. Think of yourself, if you don't really take offence at my effrontery, if it is effrontery. In our quotidian conversations, the chances are that we will bring in English terms and phrases when we really shouldn't. Don't you find it a tad disturbing when a Bengali, despite being acquainted fully with his own language, deliberately or carelessly injects English words into his conversation? Language, you see, is a matter of delight... as long as you do not make a mess of it.

But enough of polemics! Let us go see how many more Argentine and Brazilian flags have come up in the neighbourhood. And if you spot a Cameroon flag in all that crowd, do let me know. I love people who fall and get up again. It is one reason why I loved Richard Nixon. I still do.

The writer is Executive Editor, The Daily Star.
 E-mail: ahsan.syedbadrul@gmail.com

Nehru's last stand?

AWAKENING INDIA



SHASHI THAROOR

THE victory of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and its leader, Narendra Modi, in India's general election last month has raised a crucial question about the country's future. With the BJP sweeping to power on a platform of aggressive nationalism and business-friendly corporatism, has the socioeconomic consensus dating to India's first prime minister, the democratic socialist Jawaharlal Nehru, come to

an end? cated its values and objectives to voters; but the BJP's historic victory mainly reflected widespread anti-incumbent sentiment after ten years of Congress rule, aided by Modi's ability to convince Indians that he is the messiah of change.

Those who claim that the Nehruvian consensus has unravelled allege that Congress failed to read the country's mood—that Indians want economic growth, not social legislation. But, leaving aside the last two years, India witnessed record-high growth rates while Congress was in power. Our objective -- supported by eminent economists, lawyers, and social activists with tremendous first-hand experience -- was to distribute the fruits of this growth more equitably. And, though the election results might suggest otherwise, lives and living standards of most Indians have improved in the last ten years.

The "Nehruvian consensus" facilitated India's democratic maturation and accommodated the country's many diverse interests, without permitting any one group or section to dominate the nascent nation-state. It is fashionable today to decry Nehruvian socialism as a corrupt and inefficient system that condemned India to many years of slow economic growth. But at its core was the conviction that in a land of extreme poverty and inequality, the objective of government policy must be to improve the welfare of the poorest, most deprived, and most marginalised.

In Nehru's day, the best way to accomplish that was by building up structures of public ownership and state control of resources, as well as by boosting economic capacity through government intervention. Of course, Nehru's economic vision had its flaws, giving rise, for example, to the so-called "license-permit-quota Raj," under which government control stifled entrepreneurial activity, which in turn held growth rates below those of India's Southeast Asian neighbours. India slowly repealed many of these burdensome regulations in the 1980s, when Nehru's grandson, Rajiv Gandhi, was in power. Then, following reforms initiated by his successors atop the Indian National Congress, Narasimha Rao and Manmohan Singh, India entered a confident new era of flourishing growth and socioeconomic dynamism.

So what went wrong? Many attribute the astonishing scale of the BJP's victory to Modi's success in tapping into the restless (and rightful) aspirations of India's youth after two years of a slowing economy. This is where critics deem the Congress party to have failed, focusing as it did on the needs of India's poorest. Congress can justifiably argue that it helped build on the economic structures of Nehru's day while liberating them from excessive restrictions. But it remains committed to an inclusive idea of development, based on social justice and greater opportunity for India's deprived and marginalised -- an idea that is not always easily marketable to a youthful electorate that wants change here and now.

Admittedly, Congress could have better communi-

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

letters@thedailystar.net

They were butchered, not 'accidentally'

The arson and atrocities at Bihari camp in Mirpur is now being investigated by a committee formed by the government. The Mirpur carnage was not "merely an accident," as the state minister for home has said. It was an accident in which people were killed by arson and bullets fired by the police and



miscreants. The reasons behind this tragedy are illegal activities of land mafia and illegal electricity connection. It has been alleged that the local ruling party MP and the ruling party men were behind this incident.

It is said that if you want to judge democracy in a country, judge it by the state of life of the minority of that country. But in our country the life of the minorities are always vulnerable.

Ahmed Ilias
 Executive Director
 Al-Falah Bangladesh
 Mohammadpur, Dhaka

Pampered public servants

"The world has enough for everyone's need, but not enough for everyone's greed." "True happiness does not come from without, but only comes from within." - Mahatma Gandhi.

The public servants are the most privileged persons of the country. They often get government accommodation and those in higher levels get a full-time car. As a further gift, they can get a residential flat. There is no other calling or profession where a person is respected as much and has the opportunity to serve his fellow men.

In the years from 1947 to 1970, the civil servants were pampered and made to believe in a "consumer-oriented" society. We are following that old model and our greed has led us to the abyss of consumerism.

Why do we need a Pajero, a Lexus or a BMW, instead of a simple 1300 CC car (better, a reconditioned car)? These expensive cars clog our roads and deplete government resources. Unless we live a simpler life and abhor the reckless and senseless consumerism, corruption and nepotism shall prevail.

Shahabuddin Mahtab
 Gulshan 2, Dhaka

Comments on news report, "10 killed; nine of a family," published on June 15, 2014

Ismail
 Inhuman. What is more shameful is, every day we read such stories but always remain silent. People discuss this over a cup of tea and then go on with their normal life. Such indifference by the citizens of Bangladesh makes these leaders think that they are invincible.

Vikram Khan
 There are pictures of the criminals murdering these people! Why have they not been arrested yet?

Akhtar Shah
 Exactly. What more evidence do the police need? Unless of course they are from the ruling party! Then no law applies. Leave them alone! Humanity has gone on a one way ticket out of the country!

Spiderman
 Burning people alive is now a common practice by the criminals and politically protected goons and terrorists in Bangladesh. In recent times, barbarism has crossed all limits and it seems the government is ineffective and in some cases completely supportive of these crimes.

Bakhtiar Hussein
 This may be a bid to grab land by the local Awami leaders. Unfortunate that innocent women and children died because of their greed.

M Khan
 I walk on the streets of a foreign country. I am a minority here, but this country gives me equality and freedom. Today I am embarrassed and it hurts that minorities in my own country do not get the same privileges. I dream of a tolerant and just Bangladesh.

"Education flaws" (June 13, 2014)

Molla A. Latif
 The education system itself needs a total time-befitting overhauling. The question papers should be prepared at upazila level in the previous night and supplied in the morning to the examination centres under bona fide guarding system.

Anonymous
 A better plan would be to keep the current system and ensure severe punishment for those who broke the law.