

Sending or not sending children to school Poverty does not explain it all

NURUDDIN MAHMUD KAMAL

CHOING a subtle expression from the young Indian activist Arundhati Roy's maiden literary work 'The God of Small Things' published in 1997, the two-egg twins in Bangladesh's education parquet are facing serious road blocks. The twins known as primary education (PE) and adult education (AE) are said to be passing through blind alleys and are taking wrong turns. They are missing the targets and are also providing wrong signals to the people. The policy planners sitting on the easy cushions are foreseeing that one day soon enough they will wake up giggling at the education's funny dream: "Yes, we have done it". Indeed, it is unbearable at times to even think that the bureaucratic tangle is endeavouring day in and day out to convince the political government that much before the end of the first decade of the 21st century, one hundred per cent 'literacy' would be achieved in Bangladesh. The government, even if it is not convinced about the drama that the bureaucracy is playing, apparently heaves a sigh of relief and says, "Let's not argue -- let's accept that it's going to happen and it will happen soon". A conscientious and realistic citizen however finds it difficult to rationalise the thought process in the face of the fact that a substantial number of children between grade-I and grade-III still drop out, completion rate is low and the most important aspect is that the achievement in terms of learning skills are not within an acceptable limit and above all at least around fifteen per cent children are still out of school.

The adult literacy rate, according to government announcement in 2001, was touching sixty per cent which must be an outrageous statement. The international practice is to consider age group 15 and above for adult literacy rate, but in Bangladesh, reportedly, the age group is taken at 7 and above (the formal Primary education age group is 6 to 10). The difficult contextual position is that born from separate but perhaps simultaneously fertilized eggs, the elementary or primary education for children under

the Compulsory Primary Education (CPE) Act 1990, and the adult literacy programme initiated long before for grown ups never looked much like each other. But, under the non-formal mode of delivery the chemistry of PE and AL are being confused by some NGOs. The worse part is that some NGOs are still making abortive attempts to offer them simultaneously, perhaps under one umbrella. Consequently, both PE and AL remained rather thin armed, unyouthful, worn out and sick. Although operationally they remained separate -- one is held during night with a flexi-time and the other during the day as full-time schooling, the achievement of primary school output certainly affect the overall literacy rate of Bangladesh. Until the beginning of

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"The largest single reason for non-attendance has neither been poverty, nor children earning income or serving as helping hand. They simply do not attend school." That was not only true for richer households but also for a sizeable proportion of poor households. The second most given reason was poverty, especially for girls. Two factors stand out as crucial for sending children to school: parents' educational level and the attractiveness of the school..."

1970, they were both run by the societies and communities, which changed overnight in 1973. The government took onto itself the onerous responsibility of nurturing the sick twins, however through an uncharted course. The nation's children, especially the poor girls, are the major losers in the present iniquitous situation.

More than ever before, Bangladesh is confronted with confusion regarding the nature of man, conflicting value systems, ambiguous ethical, moral and spiritual beliefs and questions about its own rule in society. There is a major struggle over the issue of whether men is for government or government is for man. The question is not whether there should be some form of government, but what should be its role, functions, and structure, and what are its controls. Young people are now becoming involved earlier in politics and national life. A democracy can survive only by the partici-

strong protest against the so called "education policy" declared in the early 1980s. The criticism was almost singularly directed against the fear of imposing Arabic script on primary school children in the name of including religious instruction in the primary school syllabus. The critics considered this as an unnecessary additional burden on children, particularly of poor illiterate parents who constitute the vast majority of the population. However, the pressure from the combined forces of opposition political parties forced the government to leave matters relating to education policy to the forthcoming elected government. At the age end of Ershad's regime some unbelievable things happened. Happily, I recall three major decisions: the first was the enactment of CPE Act, 1990; the second was the recruitment of sixty per cent female teachers; and the third was the introduction of stipend programme for secondary level girl

dynamic primary education activist (currently working for UNICEF, Nairobi) in particular.

Although the lives of the twins have attained a size and shape now, the government's effort to improve the situation appears to focus mainly on propaganda. The twins now look like a team of trolls on their separate horizons : short creatures with long shadows, patrolling the paved roads of the Bangladesh Secretariat (Dhaka) perhaps because they are now discouraged to stroll on the lanes and walkways of Bangladesh, Mirpur or Labagh where a common citizen can also help them cross the street through the faded zebra or unmarked crossings. The broad vision of the early 1990s and a common platform to forge a common alliance between the societies and the government appears to have lost its strength and goals. Millions of dollars have already been pumped into the development of primary education

LEST WE FORGET

Justice Murshed

Recalling spirit of liberty on his 92nd anniversary of birth

KABIR CHOWDHURY



I first met Justice Murshed most probably sometime in the mid-fifties at a national seminar where issues like the inter-relationship between nationalism and culture were discussed and debated. He spoke brilliantly. His talk displayed his firm grasp of the many dimensions of the subject, intellectual breadth and range, ability to develop his point of view through lucid logical arguments bolstered by quotations from great writers of several languages, many erudite references and wonderfully felicitous phrases. It was a treat to listen to him. One could immediately see that he was interested in the subject, that he spoke sincerely and with conviction and that here was true learning and not its pretence, which unfortunately we came across, not infrequently, in quite a few of our academics. I was also a participant at the seminar and he later complimented me on my paper. It was most gracious of him and a source of encouragement to me.

Grace, urbanity, good-natured, wit and humour, kindness and sympathy and a capacity to appreciate the other man's point of view were characteristic of Justice Murshed's personality. In many ways he was a true aristocrat, in the best sense of term. He was also firmly committed to the ideals of democracy, to upholding the cause of justice against extreme odds and to keeping the flag of liberty flying in defiance of all kinds of pressures from the highest quarters. Everyone knows about his role during the mass upsurge of 1969. During the liberation war of Bangladesh in 1971, a lot of pressure was brought to bear upon him to collaborate with Pakistani occupation junta which he consistently resisted with success. One also recalls in this context his valuable, conscientious and earnest efforts in organising the defence of the Agartala Conspiracy Case in which task he threw himself selflessly after resigning from the post of Chief Justice in late 1967. He was very sensitive to the question of cultural freedom. The support he gave to those who wanted to pre-

incorporate in one of his stirring judgements the well-known lines of Shakespeare from Measure for Measure:

O! it excellent
To have a giant's strength, but it is
tyrannous
To use it like a giant."

Justice Murshed's dedication to his vocation, total fearlessness and fierce independence of spirit have carved for him in our hearts an abiding niche of love, affection and respect. The judgements he delivered in the famous cases popularly known as the "Minister's Case", "Colonel Bhattacharya's Case" and "Pan Case" are still regarded as historic for his brilliant exposition of constitutional law, among other things.

Justice Murshed is no longer with us. But his example rests with us as a source of noble inspiration. Today, we are in dire need of men like him, men who can act in accordance with the ideals that Justice Murshed upheld and fostered. I am reminded at this point of the closing words of Presidential address that Justice Murshed delivered in 1967 at a seminar on the Rule and Law. Let me quote:

"The spirit of liberty is the spirit which seeks to understand the minds of other men and women; the spirit of liberty is the spirit which weighs their interests alongside its own without bias; the spirit of liberty remembers that not even a sparrow falls to earth unheeded; the spirit of liberty is the spirit which emanates from the faith that there may be a kingdom where the least shall be heard and considered side by side with the greatest. In that spirit lies hidden, in some form, the aspirations of us all. In that spirit, I ask you to pledge our faith."

Moving words! And very pertinent at the present moment when the spirit of liberty seems to be threatened in so many parts of the world including our own little corner by the forces of tyranny and oppression.

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The threat of 'slumisation'

ABUL BARKAT and SHAHIDA AKHTER

WITH around 130 million people, Bangladesh is the ninth most populous country in the world. The population took more than 60 years to double from 28.9 million in 1901 to 57.5 million in 1965, and only 30 years (1936-74) to double again from 38.2 to 76.4 million. It seems set to stand at 190 million by the year 2025. About 77 per cent of the population live in rural areas. However, the urban population is bent on catching up.

The nature of this "urbanisation" can best be described as "slumization" or "ruralisation of urban life" caused by rural-to-urban migrations due to push factors. Push factors increase the share of the city-dwelling population while non-push factors increase the scope of the city itself.

The urban population includes everybody living within a municipality, a town committee or a cantonment board. From 1970 to 1995, its average annual growth rate was more than 6 per cent while that of the rural areas was some 2 per cent. As a result, the urban population, 7.6 per cent of the total in 1940, increased to 16.4 per cent by 1990. It may reach 30.3 per cent in 2010 and 38.2 per cent in the year 2020, with an estimated growth rate of 5.37 per cent between 2000 and 2005.

The two major causes of the growth are (1) natural increase, and (2) internal migration and reclassification. In 1960, internal migration and reclassification were responsible for 58.6 per cent of the growth. In ten years, the percentage stood at 66 per cent. After 1970, the share of natural increase began to take on a larger role. However, internal migration will continue to be the major push behind urbanisation.

Urbanisation is not, however, an outcome of industrialisation. Unemployment, poverty, environmental hazards, and problems with housing, sanitation, and water usage plague urban areas. With the absolute numbers of urban poor and hard-core poor on the rise, the unequal distribution of wealth in urban areas is highly pronounced. Forty per cent of the urban population receive 20 per cent of the total income while 10 per cent receive 10 times that of the most impoverished 10 per cent. The indicators are, moreover, notorious for underestimating the incomes of the wealthy.

Internal migration is often the main cause of changes in the size and composition of communities and regional populations; it is a key factor in explaining urbanisation and other population changes as well as in identifying their consequences. Internal migration includes every immigration make-up, from urban-to-rural, rural-to-urban, rural-to-rural and urban-to-urban. But it is remarkable that the main internal



migration stream occurs solely by the rural-to-urban track. Indeed, internal migration rates show rural-to-urban migration composing somewhere around 51.8 per cent of the total population flow, whereas urban-to-rural migration rates measure in at only 1.1 per cent. Rural-to-rural and urban-to-urban migration rates are insignificant. In general, migration occurs mainly due to two reasons -- the pull factor and the push factor. Pull factor migration is determined by employment opportunities while the push factor is dependent upon natural disasters, employment contraction of the poor, and the non-availability of land. Other factors like education and health are also relevant.

During the period between 1961 and 1990, 24 per cent of all migrants had moved in search of better jobs; 23 per cent fled "no work" in their home villages; 15 per cent came in search of 'transferable jobs'; 10.6 per cent 'accompanied relatives'; 2.8 per cent wanted to help out the family; and 1.7 per cent fled river erosion. The main causes of rural-to-urban migration were lack of work at the point of origin, inducing a perceived quest for better jobs at the point of destination. A more recent study conducted among slum dwellers found that 76 per cent migrated from their rural origins to seek employment in the urban lands, with most ending up with jobs in the informal sectors. Evidently, "poverty of opportunity" was the main driving force behind population inflation in urban agglomerates.

In terms of population size, the dwellers are a burgeoning lot. The projection is that by 2020, the urban population will account for 38 per cent of the total -- amazingly, a number almost equivalent to the 1981 population of the country. The vast majority of the migrants pouring into these urban hot-spots are extremely poor. Because of the interaction of rural push and urban pull factors, cities are being flooded

with people looking for jobs, most of whom have no recourse but to reside in slums and squatter settlements. Not surprisingly, these centers of destitution are multiplying at an alarming rate. The estimated total number of slums and squatter settlements in the four metropolitan cities is 3,431, with about 88 per cent clustered in Dhaka alone. Of these settlements, 2661 (78 per cent) are slums, and the rest are squatter settlements located on public land. Almost all were developed over the last 25 years, with particularly rigorous growth during the post 1980s. Considering the fact that the slum and squatter population is 20 per cent under-counted, the total size can be some two million. This number will indubitably increase in the future.

The migration of the rural poor to the urban areas has resulted in a direct inflow of rural poverty and backwardness to the cities and subsequent "ruralisation" of urban centres. The new migrants are mired in the destitution of sub-standard "squatter" living; unable to go back to their rural roots and traditions, they remain strangely out of place in the harshness of deprivation. And yet they seem to prefer slums to villages where nothing awaited them but the poverty of opportunity. According to some projections, about 50 per cent of the total urban population will soon be struggling for survival in slums and shantytowns. The preponderate size of this population and the alarming growth rate of these centres herald important economic, social, and public health concerns which must be dealt with via direct and immediate policy interventions.

In order to delve into the problem, one must analyse the economy in all three of its sectors: the urban modern, the urban informal, and the rural. The growing urban informal sector is the most backward one. A "non-urbanised" sector, the informal arena, is filled with adults forced to

work unusually long hours in low-wage, low-end jobs in order to meet basic levels of subsistence. A vast majority of them (about 70 per cent) are employed in the informal sector. Thirty-two per cent of their work as hawkers and/or petty traders; about 18 per cent are rickshaw-pullers; around 12 per cent work as jhee (maid servants); about 20 per cent work in various types of industries; 10 per cent is construction labourers, four per cent porters, and two per cent either hotel workers or beggars.

The government's development efforts in slum areas are highly inadequate; in most cases the urban poor are 'served' less even than the rural poor. They do not have sufficient access to the education, employment and health facilities of the formal sector. Consequently they are physically shabbier than their rural counterparts. Fewer than 20 per cent of school-age children in Dhaka slums attend school. Infant and maternal mortality rates are also egregiously high. About 300 thousand children under five years die of diarrhea every year, one-third of them in city slums and squatter settlements. The high extent of human deprivation is clearly evident in all dimensions of life in slums. The circumstances of urban slums as compared to the national situation is deplorable, particularly so in terms of life expectancy, the prevalence of child labour, literacy rates, access to health facilities and sanitation, and other health issues including knowledge of sexually transmitted diseases.

The lack of reliable national data on slums exemplifies the government's negligence of this hefty segment of the population. A special Rapid Survey involving 480 slum households in Dhaka, Chittagong, Khulna and Rajshahi areas revealed life in the slums to be full of misery and deprivation and thoroughly inhuman by any standards. Thus, the urbanisation, which

essentially takes the form of slumisation, is clear evidence of growing urban impoverishment.

Since increasing urbanisation is a direct result of downturns in the rural economy, appropriate national policies should be adopted to minimise the problem at its source. Such policies, in order to be effective, should aim to increase the chances of success for the often marginalised small farmers. This includes upping agricultural productivity, enhancing access to ownership and/or use of land and other productive resources, improving rural infrastructure and social services, fostering off-farm employment opportunities, ensuring equitable diffusion of modern technology, and overcoming credit constraints to borrowing and lending. At the same time, the government should also provide incentives to the redistribution and relocation of industries and businesses from urban to semi-urban or even rural areas.

In Bangladesh, urbanisation is taking place without concomitant economic development and industrialisation. Moreover, it is overwhelmingly mono-city based, which often means a widespread sense of apathy toward the 'slumisation' problem on the parts of other unaffected urban centres. Thus, in order to achieve a balanced spatial distribution of production, employment and population, the government should adopt a sustainable regional development strategy to ensure the growth of small or medium-sized urban centres. This will, among other things, diffuse the pressure of sustaining large migratory inflows.

The process of urbanisation is an ugly reality that must be dealt with. To tackle the problem on a long-term basis, extra attention should be given to the absorption of the urban poor as well as their adjustment to their new city homes. The government should undertake policies to develop and improve the earning capabilities of the urban poor by facilitating their access to employment, credit, production, marketing opportunities, basic education, health services, and vocational training. To combat the poverty of urban centres, the attack must be two-pronged: those living in squatter tenements should be given better resources and a permanent solution should be hammered out to deflect the rapid inflow of rural-to-urban migrants.

Abul Barkat is a Professor at the Department of Economics, University of Dhaka, and the General Secretary of Bangladesh Economic Association and Shahida Akhter is an Assistant Professor of Pediatrics at BIRDEM. The Harvard Asia Pacific Review has carried a larger version of the article under the headline 'A Mushrooming Population...'

AKM MAZHARUL ISLAM

IT was in the year of 1993 that I met Dr K M Ashrafur Aziz. I was a student of honours first year in the department of anthropology at Dhaka University. I went to ICDDR, B at Mohakhali to see him after I had read his wonderful book an anthropology, *The Kinship in Bangladesh*. He was a Senior Scientist of the center at that time, I became a very close associate of him when we worked together in different professional bodies like 'Bangladesh Environmental Society', 'Asiatic Society of Bangladesh' and 'Bangladesh Health Education Society'.

He was the Secretary General of 'Bangladesh Environmental Society', Senior Vice President of 'Bangladesh Health Education Society' and an editor of 'Encyclopedia of Bangladesh', a project initiated by 'The Asiatic Society of Bangladesh'. After that when he joined as a Research Specialist in the Research and Evaluation Division of BRAC, I was working there as a Research Anthropologist. We worked in the same project and I have the opportunity to see him from an close distance. Even during the last years of his life, when he was working as a Consultant (he was in this position at the time of his death) at ICDDR, B, I had a very close association with his work. Mixing with him, getting closer to him and his family is a memorable part of my life. A researcher, a scientist and a person full of life like him is very rare. He was simply extraordinary.

One of the pioneers of anthropological research in Bangladesh, Dr KMA Aziz started his career at ICDDR, B 35 years from now. Since then, he devoted his life towards the development of anthropological research and became one of the key scientists and the most celebrated anthropologist in ICDDR, B. He has hundreds of highly recognised scientific articles and about 15 books to his credit, which are the best spokesmen of his work. His monographs in the field of kinship, life stages, beliefs, fertility and diarrhea management at the community level earned global recognition for the center and for himself.

Today, anthropology is a recognised discipline in Bangladesh. Hundreds of anthropologists are involved in the study and research in almost all the public universities and in the development and research organisations outside university. However, anthropological research was not an easy task in 60s and 70s. Outside the universities, it was even more difficult. Dr KMA Aziz was the torchbearer of the anthropological fieldwork and research in Bangladesh. He started this difficult journey facing enormous struggle and obstacles and continued to do that during his three decades of research at ICDDR, B. He made anthropology reader-friendly and popularises the discipline in Bangladesh. His scholarly articles received high appreciation and recognition at



home and abroad. As a person, he was even more wonderful. He was a source of inspiration and admiration to everyone he met. His amicable nature, the ease in his personality and a charismatic power to attract people made him special to his colleagues and fellows. Mixings and spending time with his colleagues as students (he was a part time visiting professor for



All health information to keep you up to date

About Hepatitis B

What is hepatitis B?
Hepatitis B virus is a virus that can infect the liver.
Is hepatitis B serious?
Each year hepatitis B virus infects hundreds of Bangladeshis and causes deaths from short-term and long-term complications. Some people infected with hepatitis B may carry the virus all their lives. Around one quarter of these carriers may die from liver disease and cancer.
Is hepatitis B preventable?
Yes. Hepatitis B infection can be prevented by vaccination.
How hepatitis B virus spreads?
Hepatitis B is spread by:
sexual contact
= exposure to blood or other body fluids
= from mother to child
Who should be vaccinated against hepatitis B?
All infants and children, young people at risk and workers whose occupation puts them at risk of hepatitis B.
Are all young people at risk of hepatitis B?
Becoming a teenager brings lifestyle changes that may place young people at risk of hepatitis B. Predicting exactly which adolescents are at risk of hepatitis B is difficult.
Which occupations are more likely to be at risk of hepatitis B?
All occupations that involve:
= exposure to blood
= sharp objects that may carry contaminated body fluids
= workplace accidents resulting in skin puncture
How many injections are needed to become immune to hepatitis B?
Three injections are required. After the first injection, two further injections are needed. Booster dose is required following the completion of the routine primary schedule in persons with an abnormally functioning immune system.
Did you know?
Greek scientists used to define 'diabetes' as a chronic kidney disease in 1000 BC.
Next: Asthma: Fighting for breath