

Determining priorities in educational planning

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EDUCATION is a precondition for economic and social development. We have professed the importance of minimum education for the masses but have done very little in translating those pronouncements into action. We want democracy to function in the country, but how can democracy work in a nation where 40 per cent of the people are illiterate? We also want to implement such vital national programmes as family planning, increased food production, improved health and sanitary conditions, etc. But can any of these programmes make any headway unless the people are able and willingly ready to participate in the programmes? The answer is obvious.

Although education as a vital sector deserves special attention due to the fact that progress in the other sectors depends on it, ironically it was given the least priority during the Pakistan era. As a result the inevitable has happened. In spite of heavy investments in money and effort, we have failed to make any substantial progress in the field of family planning and health sector. Although food production has slightly improved over the past years, there has not been any breakthrough in terms of utilisation of modern agricultural practices mainly due to lack of education among the people which prevented assimilation and utilisation of modern agricultural technology by the people.

The tradition of assigning low

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priority to education still persists and this is reflected in the financial allocation for the education sector. It can be said without any doubt that until and unless our people are developed through education and awareness, we will be a nation of hand-to-mouth living perpetuated through a spoon-feeding development process.

In order to make the development process self-sustaining and self-propelling, it is essential that the people participate in the nation-building activities voluntarily with a strong urge to improve one's own condition as well as the condition of the nation. Needless to say that in the present condition with 60 per cent illiteracy, this will not happen unless steps are taken to educate the people within the shortest possible time. In this connection, one may remember the statement made by Dr Julius Nyerere, President of Tanzania, when he assumed power in his country almost thirty years ago. He said, "we have chosen to remain poor for the next 20 years because we are going to invest 50 per cent of our national income for education. We want to develop our people first and then they will develop the country."

It does not need any further emphasising to prove that unless

education sector is not taken seriously, we are not going to go anywhere and the country will be languishing as ever under the heavy burden of population explosion and the resulting mass poverty which has become endemic in the Third World countries.

Centralised planning which is the legacy of the colonial rule cannot satisfy the needs of a free people. Since the centralised planning does not involve the general people whom it intends to serve, it becomes an exercise of the technocrats and is bound to fail. As in the Pakistan days, so at present very little has been achieved through centralised planning manifested in the form of five-year plans.

There has been a lot of talk about bottom-up planning or local level planning as against top-down or centralised planning but nothing has been done so far to put this idea into practice. It is time to start doing things in the proper way so that wastage could be substantially minimised while optimising the benefits.

Local level planning does not call for high level economists and sophisticated technocrats. Rather, it can be done on a smaller and simpler scale involving local resources and personnel.

The strategies for the local planning is simple. The following strategic may be appropriate for effective local level planning.

1. The Union may be accepted as the planning unit. As the first step, surveys of resources in the villages under a particular union should be undertaken to have an idea of the existing resources. Such a survey should also identify the areas which need additional inputs for further improvement and also new areas of development which hold potentials for improving the infrastructure of the locality.

2. After the survey is completed, attempt is to be made for identifying new projects which need to be undertaken as well as previous projects which need further improvement. After completing this step, estimates of cost should be calculated and a realistic budget should be prepared for each of these projects.

3. The union plans should be collected and compiled together at the thana level and may be sent to the district authority for compilation at the district level. Again they should be compiled at the divisional level and then forwarded to the Planning Ministry for final scrutiny and approval.

4. The central planning commis-

sion at Dhaka should scrutinise each of these plans and modify them depending on their viability. The planning commission personnel should undertake tours in the planning areas to gather first-hand knowledge so that modification are not based on purely arbitrary decisions.

5. The plans should be ultimately compiled on the basis of divisions. This way there will be six plans for the six divisions compiled into one.

These plans may be printed at Dhaka and sent to the divisions for distribution to the local planning authorities.

Needless to say that it is very likely that by this process of planning, local involvement will be ensured. Since local representatives will be involved in preparing the plan, they will try to sincerely implement it as they have a stake in its success. If this process works and it is bound to work, a self-sustaining development process may be the outcome which is the long cherished dream of both the government and the people.

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UN at stake?

AMM SHAHABUDDIN

ONCE again it has been proved, beyond any doubt, that "birds of the same feather flock together" and "honey catches more flies than vinegar". So they are now flocking together and buzzing around the new-found Iraqi 'honey-comb'. Yesterday's 'heroes' who had earlier opposed at the UN Security Council the US resolution that wanted the UN approval for pre-emptive armed attack on another UN member, Iraq, who had not been dabbled by UN as an 'evil state' or 'dancer to peace', now stand in the same row with the invaders in the name of peace. What an irony!

At least, the two occupying

powers, US and Britain, of Iraq, had come out with flying colours after getting their new resolution (1483) supported in the Security Council by all the former 'rebels' France, Germany, Russia and China, and with an overwhelming majority of 14-0 vote (only Syria boycotted), lifting the more than a decade old UN sanctions against Iraq, and giving them free-hand to run Iraq and control its oil industry.

Many would consider it as a sad day for "the peoples of the United Nations". The Security Council members, including the three permanent members, who had put up a brave show in March last when they didn't approve the Anglo-US forces to wage war in Iraq, unfortunately had now indirectly put a "venerer of legitimacy", through this new Reso-

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lution, on the Anglo-US action.

Dangerous precedent

What a dangerous precedent has been set by this act of 'approval' of the war not authorised by UN! It would now embolden any adventurous leader of a country to attack a neighbouring country which it considers to be weaker, on some plea or other, and then come to the UN to get its 'blessings' to carry on reconstruction programme and help establish a new government. A new vicious circle!

It is a pity that the leading countries that stood solidly to oppose the US move in the Security Council, could forget so abruptly their earlier stance against an illegal war. France was so vociferous in the Council against US stand that it received a warning from Washington, threatening it of "consequences". Even Russia, which had earlier reminded the Council Members, that the "post-conflict involvement in Iraq by the UN must not legitimise the war", very quietly changed its track.

UN is what its members make of it

The sudden U-turn on the part of the anti-Iraq war group of member countries had not only belittled their own political status before the world public opinion, but it had also disgraced and degraded the world body. It is said that "UN is what its members make of it." How could they forget about their earlier stand that the sanctions imposed by the UN against Iraq in 1990, cannot be lifted until the UN weapons inspectors were allowed to return to Iraq to complete their job and submit their report to the Security Council? How could they bury such a most strategic demand and vote for lifting the sanctions, without such a report? Perhaps they were guided by some mundane considerations. They

knew it well that America was hell-bent not to allow the UN weapons inspectors to return to Iraq as it had already fielded some one thousand US weapons experts in Iraq to hunt out the hidden (?) WMD. The US insistence on the presence of WMD in Iraq for which US led the preemptive war, looks all the more hollow when Dr. Blix, the Chief UN inspector, had again reiterated recently that he believed there was no WMD in Iraq and as such the US-led war on Iraq was "not justified."

Then comes the 'vital' question of 'central' role of UN in the post-war reconstruction and administration of war-ravaged Iraq. This was the consistent demand of the four powerful members of the Security Council. But what happened to that? That has also been given a peaceful burial during the tete a tete between the US officials and anti-Iraq war members of the Council. The UN has been brought in, no doubt, more as a face-saving device than as a powerful and substantial presence in the whole operation. Kofi Annan had nominated an official from the UNHCR his special Representative. Had he taken a senior most official, ranking next to SG from his UN Secretariat, as was reported earlier, it would have given some political weight to the representative. What 'vital role' the Representative plays, only time will show, particularly when the resolution 1483 has virtually given the two occupying powers absolute authority to run Iraq and control its oil wealth.

Device to use oil revenue

The new resolution has also devised a new way of utilising the oil revenue. Henceforth, the oil revenues will be put in a New Development Fund to be held by the Central Bank and the money will be spent on reconstruction and humanitarian needs at the direction of the two

occupying powers, America and Britain. It can easily be guessed how the money will be spent. And the UN representative will "also" be on the Board to work "intensively" (as the resolution emphasises the UN role) with the two occupying powers. Every body is aware how the 'use of money' from UN-controlled 'Food-for-oil' programme to minimise the miseries of the poor hungry Iraqi people, particularly sick children, was criticised. The less said about it the better.

Efforts to bridge US-EU rift

The bottomline, however, focuses on a single point, that is, efforts are on now to bridge the rift between US and EU caused due to the US-led war in Iraq. The indications are already visible. It was first observed when French President Jacques Chirac and German Chancellor Schroeder were reported to have "distanced" themselves from the proposals made at four power meeting of EU countries held in the last week of April, to create a multinational forces headquarters for European operations where NATO was not involved, when both Washington and London, reacting angrily, warned against any such "duplication" with the western military alliance of NATO.

Then came the meeting of the EU Foreign Ministers held at Greek island of Rhodes in the first week of May, where they held "constructive" talks on "bridging" the rift between EU and US over Iraq. And the new UN resolution offered a golden opportunity to the EU to mending their fences by voting in favour of it, perhaps in the greater interest of all concerned!

America, which had earlier shown France the proverbial stick, with a warning of consequences, now came forward offering a bunch of carrots. And lastly, the icing of the cake was done by Colin Powell, when he was all praise for the French Foreign Minister for voting in favour of the US resolution, saying France's "change of heart" was "a good move towards mending US-France relations."

An anchor sheet for

US and Britain

In this context, I would like to quote from the interview of Mr Morton Halperin, who, while commenting on the new UN resolution on Iraq, said: "The purpose of this resolution is to relieve the United States of its obligations and the limits of what it can do as an occupying power under international law by having the Security Council supersede the requirements of the Geneva Convention." Thus the new resolution will serve as an anchor-sheet for the two occupying powers, America and Britain, to achieve two ends. First, it would provide them full authority as long as necessary (the time-factor being in their control) in running the country's civil administration, reshuffling the Baath-influenced armed forces, reconstructing as well as enjoying full control of Iraq's oil wealth. Secondly, it would save the international law experts from "re-writing" the 1949 Geneva convention redefining the duties and responsibilities of the two occupying powers. Because, under the 1949 Geneva convention, the occupying powers are not supposed to create a new permanent government, or commit Iraq to long-term oil contracts, such as, oil exploration. But, under the new UN resolution, the two occupying powers of Iraq will have a freehand, in making a by-pass of the Geneva convention.

But what had been achieved by the two occupying forces and their newly acquired associates, would be a heavy price for the UN to bear. It is true that this is not for the first time that the UN has been so 'used' by some self-styled 'world-policemen', or 'global peace-keepers'. But the peace-loving peoples of the world in whose name the world body was created, cannot allow it to go the League of Nations way. "The peoples of the United Nations" are determined to save the world body. Let the very UN Charter guide them to rescue it from the clutches of the 'hawks'.

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UK, US and the Security of ME

Post WW-II

BILLY I AHMED

GREAT Britain was the undisputed victor in the Middle East during World War II. Faced with financial impoverishment and veritable exhaustion as a result of the war, however, Great Britain's hegemony in the region was destined to be short-lived. The influence of the United States, conversely, was increasing, and it would only be a matter of time until the United States supplanted Great Britain as the dominant Western power in the Middle East. During the post-World War II era, the evolving and dynamic Anglo-American relationship was characterised by cooperation as well as confrontation.

There are a number of examples of Anglo-American cooperation and confrontation in the Middle East in the decade following World War II. From 1945 to 1948, Anglo-American views diverged over Palestine. Britain never succeeded in reconciling the conflicting Arab and Jewish demands, while the US generally supported Zionist views. The result was three years of diplomatic friction. The recovery of Western Europe, as manifested by the Marshall Plan and NATO, was of mutual British-US interest. Other examples abound.

The alliance of convenience of the Second World War evolved afterwards into an intense rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union, with a concomitant formation of a somewhat rigid, bipolar alliance system. Primarily Britain and the United States, from 1950 to 1953, pursued negotiations for a defence organisation to be the equivalent of NATO in the Middle East. The Middle East Command (MEC) was the first proposal, but after Egyptian rejection in 1951, MEC was rearranged and became the Middle East Defence Organisation (MEDO). Subsequent MEDO discussions included Turkey, Iraq, and Pakistan, with Turkey actively seeking Arab participation in a regional defence system and arguing for such a defence organisation to counter a Soviet threat.

After Egypt repudiated the MEDO, and after the Eisenhower administration came into office early in 1953, US Secretary of State Dulles travelled widely in the region and developed a new concept that focused on the states immediately south of the Soviet Union -- the Northern Tier. The Northern Tier approach was devised to shield the Persian Gulf oil fields and British military installations from a threatened Soviet expansion southwards. This new US policy was to support and promote mutual defence arrangements among these countries, but in doing so infringing on traditional British interests in the Middle East. This strained Anglo-American relations, and forced the British to realise their nation's decreased influence regionally and globally.

In late 1954, after an Anglo-Egyptian agreement on the Suez Canal base, British and American officials pursued in secret Operation Alpha, a joint effort to resolve the Israel-Palestinian conflict through a comprehensive settlement. Alpha, an example of Anglo-American political collaboration, was explicitly related to the Northern Tier strategy, and had repercussions on policy relating to the Baghdad Pact. The Baghdad Pact, in which the importance of Soviet containment overrode parochial national interests, was the resulting outcome.

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My father in my eyes

MD AMDAD HOSSAIN

SUNDAY, June 15 was World Father's Day. Like many a son, I also recalled time of my life with my father -- events, moments of love and affection, care and concern and so on. My father is now in bed, counting time on the way to his last journey towards another station beyond this world. He can neither move so much nor can do anything by himself. Depending on others for care and love, he calls everyone in the house he can remember the names of, just to spend few moments with, although he often doesn't know the guy who he is calling. His memory is now almost beyond order. What he says is hardly understandable, can't eat anything himself until someone feeds him kindly. The man, who could touch everyone of his family once, now waits all the time to be touched by others, both physically and emotionally. This is the recent time picture of my father, a nearly dead man!

But this is not about it. In his 80 years of life, he witnessed so many things, passed some hard times including world war second, and has observed political ups and downs in the country and the war of 1971 for Bangladesh. During this time he gathered all his experience through all the difficulties he faced in his life, and we, all of his sons and daughters were bestowed those all.

This guy, my father was not that sort of man who liked to be focused on. He liked to pass his days with honesty and dignity. He did everything he could do within his limitations and even sometimes he over-crossed those and tried heart and soul to make us happy and smiling.

One day I was crying for a football. In the afternoon my father came back from office and heard all about this. He instantly took me to the market and bought a football for me. This proves that he had love for me and did care about children. He really tried to fulfil all our desires, although it was beyond bearable for him in those days to buy something unnecessary.

He has never scolded me, has never beat me for any fault. Yes, he went on passing his days somehow, but could not enjoy any of those. As he was a government employee, and his salary was very poor, he could not take us anywhere to enjoy. He earned, he taught us various things relevant to our life, he enjoyed witnessing football matches or some other games. These were the areas he was involved with. But the rest, he left all for my mother. With his salary she could hardly cover the whole month. Every last few days of a month we all had to suffer too much for this, and all those sufferings were for his honesty. This is why I saw him going office on foot rather than by bus. I have never seen him to utter bad words to anybody or quarrelling with others for any reason. He liked to live a peaceful life and he maintained it all the time in his life.

What he was always afraid of is, storm called Kal Boishakhi in Bangladesh, the weather with gusty wind during monsoon. It is because he experi-

enced two huge storms in his early days and in both the cases he survived by the mercy of Almighty Allah.

One day in the Kal Boishakhi season, the sky was heavily clouded, black and gloomy. Daylight had disappeared. The wind for a few minutes stopped blowing. The whole earth seemed to be waiting for a huge disaster. My father was really frightened. He took me over his shoulder and rushed to a safer place. We took the shelter in an under-constructing building near our residence. The storm broke down the silence and hit all things on earth with its mighty power. I heard the sound of lashing of the gusty wind. My father was continuously calling Allah standing beside a brick wall holding me on his chest very tightly with his two hands. After twenty minutes the storm cooled down and then started heavy rain. The storm left signs of destruction here and there. I don't know what were the casualties on the day. But I am sure that fear touched many people like my father. However, we got relief from that tension at last, thanks to Allah. What I remember it for is his affection and love for me. He could leave me with the other members of my family. He left them because they were strong and brave enough to face this situation, while my father and I were not. What I feel is that he wanted to save me, his youngest little son.

Then we passed many years. I have grown up, started doing job after completion of education, then got married. Now we have two sons. But still he is anxious about us. One year ago I went to my sister's home in her village taking my wife and sons with me. It was almost midnight when we started the journey by launch. Like other times he was very much opposed to taking my wife and children with me on a midnight journey. In spite of his interdiction I started and arrived at the station next morning, and on the way there was no problem at all. But who knew the problem would come from other side. After being in rest for few minutes in sister's house I phoned my mother in Dhaka. I came to know that my father had broken his right thigh joint bone. But none in the family could care much for this. When I came back home in Dhaka after two days, I took him to hospital to check with a doctor. The doctor advised to go for an operation very soon. We went for this operation and he by the grace of Allah soon got the recovery. He started to walk. I caused this problem and sufferings to him and his love and affection for me had driven him towards a bad ending in life. For after some days he became disabled again and since then he is in bed, laid down like a dead horse that will never be able to run again.

This man, perhaps he may not be listed with the greats, but no doubt he has been a good father to us, a good husband to my mother, and a good man to others. That's his success that he earned throughout his life, in a very simple and ordinary way, and this is good and inspirational for us, and all his followers. Father, I love you.

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