

PM at Dhaka University Right speech, but will it be followed by right action?

WE have been anything but the best in our speeches. But we have never been anywhere near best in our action. That sums up our history of most things. In the same vein the prime minister on Monday gave a wonderful speech at Dhaka University. Will she have the foresight to follow it up with action?

The PM lamented the demise of quality education in the highest seat of learning in the country. In the process, she identified a number of causes all of which are correct. But the principal cause of the malaise she only mentioned peripherally. What she referred to as teachers' grouping, which in reality means politicisation and partisanship of the teachers, is the fundamental cause of the deterioration of the academic atmosphere in all our universities, including the premier of them all, the DU. From the appointment of the vice chancellor to those of deans, heads of departments, provosts of residential halls and of course appointments of teachers and staff have all come under political influence. Even relatively minor things like being nominated for scholarships or for attending professional seminars are decided on 'for us and against us' basis.

The largess that the PM handed out to the university in terms of women's dormitory, land, buildings and plots for teachers are all very welcome. But the real issue, that of acute politicisation of the campus both at the students and teachers levels, has not really been addressed by the PM. Let us not forget that it is the ruling party and the government of the day -- with their capacity to handout favours, appointments, promotions and postings -- that is the real culprit in the politicisation process. Needless to say, the present ruling party or the coalition government is not the inventor of the present malaise but can definitely be termed as an ardent follower of this disastrous practice.

Even though she touched this subject only marginally, it reveals that she is aware of it. So the question is will she do something about it? We think, if the PM really wants to achieve what she proclaimed in her speech on Monday, she should make a firm declaration that all future decisions about the DU will be taken purely on merit, where partisanship will have no role. She should make a solemn commitment to discourage "groupings" among teachers and gradually depoliticise teachers' association activities. Only then, will she be seen to put her WILL behind her WORDS. As of now they remain EMPTY WORDS.

Under-trial prisoners

Who will be accountable for their lost years?

IT is a reflection on our justice dispensation system that no fewer than 155 inmates of Dhaka Central Jail have remained in captivity without trial for five to 11 years. It is not an instance of justice delayed, it is justice denied altogether.

The presence of such prisoners who neither faced trial nor got released, despite spending many years in jail, is something that drew the attention of the press in the past also. The law minister himself addressed the issue and assured us of speedy disposal of such cases. That is indeed necessary to avoid punishing people without trial for such a long time. But the law minister's words do not seem to have changed things appreciably when it comes to a great number of under-trial prisoners languishing in jail.

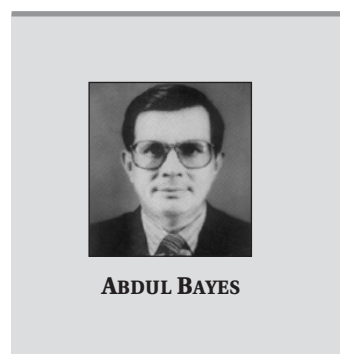
The Star report on the issue gives a picture of Dhaka Jail only. But if example is anything to go by, matters are unlikely to be different in other prisons. The saddest part of the story is that many minors, abandoned by their parents and having no way to seek legal aid, are facing the ordeal with other prisoners of the failed system of justice.

The trial of such cases failed to proceed because the prosecution could not produce witnesses for deposition. And in one case the failure was repeated as many as 78 times! The figure is unusually high, and it is not at all clear why the law could do nothing to accelerate the pace of the trial. The only thing it did was to make sure that the case remained alive.

Now, what compensation the detained fellows will get for losing so many years in jail without facing trial? There are few advocates of people facing criminal charges, but we still cannot forget that an accused does not shed his/her basic rights at the jail-gate. Any violation of their rights is tantamount to violation of the rights of other citizens.

The government should immediately address the issue and make sure that the prisoners who have been detained without trial for years are at least granted bail. The High Court can also take up the cases suo moto in order to put an end to a gross violation of the rights of prisoners.

Roads, electrification and poverty reduction



ABDUL BAYES

IN the context of India, an earlier research conducted by the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) argued that additional expenditure on roads is found to have the largest impact on poverty reduction as well as a significant effect on productivity growth. Roads, arguably, lead to larger benefits for the rural poor. It is another dominant "win-win" strategy. The authors of the research report further suggested that Indian government should give priority to roads and agricultural research and extension. When the choice has to be made between irrigation and roads or between education and roads, the authors seem to support roads. Under the research umbrella of IFPRI, Raisuddin Ahmed and Mahabub Hossain also discussed at length the economics of infrastructural development in the context of Bangladesh and delved deep into the dynamics pertaining to infrastructure-poverty nexus.

Most recently, "Rural livelihoods systems in Bangladesh: Changes and challenges" a forthcoming book (by Mahabub Hossain and co-authors) contains an academic as well as empirical analysis on the role of roads and electricity in the reduction of rural poverty in Bangladesh. Based on a data set generated by IRR/BIDS and IRR/PETRA projects covering 62 villages, the authors tend to show how roads and electricity could become gateways to poverty reduction. Two points of time have been compared, 1987 and 2000.

In the cited book, villages have been categorised as: (a) 'developed villages' -- having access to both paved roads and electricity; (b) 'semi-developed villages' with an access to either paved roads or electricity and (c) 'under-developed villages' -- having been deprived of both.

Access to roads and electricity

During the 1987 survey, out of 62 villages surveyed, nearly one-tenth was found to have access to both electricity and paved roads (developed villages). By 2000, the share of developed villages stood at little over one-fourth. It seems that

the share of developed villages in rural Bangladesh increased in tandem with the development in communication and rural electrification over the years. The change over time might sound reasonable, if not remarkable, in the light of developmental objectives. However, the proportion of sample villages with access either to electricity or paved roads (semi-developed villages) seems to have marginally declined implying that some of the semi-developed villages of 1987 have graduated as developed villages in 2000. On the other hand, the share of the villages without access to either electricity or paved roads (under developed villages)

irrigation in 2000 compared to 40 percent in 1987. However, irrigation coverage in semi- and under-developed villages also increased over time but that was far away from a respectable limit achieved by developed villages.

And finally, rice yield. All the sample villages witnessed a reasonable rise in rice yield between 1987 and 2000. However, in the case of developed villages, the increase was to the tune of 69 percent over the period compared to semi-developed villages (38 percent) and under developed villages (36 percent). This seemingly implies that rice productivity growth is positively associated with the development of rural

developed households had 1.5 times more mixed assets than under developed households in 1987 while they held 4.5 times more in 2000. Thus, not only developed households endowed themselves with the accumulation of non-agricultural fixed assets at particular point of time, but also maintained a higher growth rate compared to others over the periods. In fact, roads and electricity tend to contribute more to non-farm activities and hence it is not unlikely that households with better access to these facilities would gain most in terms of accumulation of non-agricultural assets.

Interestingly, only three per cent of

total income per capita, and possibly, more in the case of non-agricultural income per non-agricultural worker.

On occupational mobility

With increasing access to paved roads and electricity, occupational mobility is evident from cultivation and agricultural wage labour to trade and business and to non-agricultural labour. The findings seem to be in consort with that observed in other countries, especially in India and China. When multiple occupations are taken into consideration, we observe that the degree of multiple occupations is relatively low in developed villages. In fact, it

villages (0.496) compared to semi (0.443) and under-developed villages (0.398). In 1987, the same pattern prevailed. Seemingly it sounds that inequality in income is an increasing function of infrastructural development. This could be true since sources of household income tend to change with access to paved roads and electricity -- say from crop production to business and trade that require more capital and education. Just take the case of rural trade and business. In 2000, in developed villages, this source accounted for 40 percent of the total gini ratio compared to only 13 per cent in 1987. This means that 40 per cent of the inequality originated from trade and business activities. In semi-developed villages, trade and business also accounted for a higher contribution to inequality but not so much as developed villages. Quite in contrast, however, under-developed villages witnessed a fall in the role of trade and business. By and large, most of the incremental inequality in developed villages seems to be linked to non-agricultural pursuits.

Policy palliatives

We were, perhaps, late in realising that rural roads and electrification could reduce rural poverty. At the time of writing this piece, I suppose, more than three-fourths of our rural households remain deprived of paved roads and real under darkness. The research findings from Mahabub Hossain and co-authors -- based on a representative household level data -- should ring a bell for our planners and policy makers about the urgency of developing rural infrastructure like roads and electricity. As I mentioned in some of the earlier writings, one of the means to combat rural-urban migration and rural poverty is to take the urban environment to rural areas. Policies should not be populist such as "pro-poor" but pro-rural in spirit and action. Development of rural infrastructure is gateway to poverty reduction.

Inequality? That's likely to remain for a while. To contain inequality, access to education, credit and social services should be raised for lower income deciles. There should be human and financial capital available to the lower segment. If we fail to do that, we fail to contain inequality of income. Mind that inequality also increased over time in under-developed villages. But barring rural roads and electricity, possibly, we shall have to live with twin evils: poverty as well as inequality.

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BENEATH THE SURFACE

We were, perhaps, late in realising that rural roads and electrification could reduce rural poverty. The research findings from Mahabub Hossain and co-authors -- based on a representative household level data -- should ring a bell for our planners and policy makers about the urgency of developing rural infrastructure like roads and electricity... One of the means to combat rural-urban migration and rural poverty is to take the urban environment to rural areas.

substantially declined over the same period indicating that a large part of the underdeveloped villages of 1987 graduated as developed villages in 2000. The trends are not unlikely events given the fact that between 1987 and 2000, Bangladesh witnessed appreciable growth in rural roads and electrification.

The differential access to roads and electricity resulted in differential economic performances and allow me to submit few of them in the following paragraphs.

On crop production

During 2000 survey, cropping intensity is estimated to be the highest in developed villages (179) compared to the same lower level (149) in both semi- and under-developed villages. Noticeably, just the reverse had happened in 1987: lowest at 159 in developed villages compared to semi developed (162) and under developed villages (173). Thus, it appears that, with increasing access to paved roads and electricity, developed villages stole the lead in cropping intensity while semi and under developed villages faced a fall in cropping intensity. Cropping intensity has relation with research and extension, marketing opportunities and processing activities. It is no surprise that with increasing access to paved roads and electricity, developed villages would perform better.

Developed villages retained the lead in terms of irrigation intensity -- the share of irrigated area to total cultivated area -- both in 1987 and 2000. For example, about four-fifths of the cultivated area in developed villages was covered by

infrastructure, especially roads and electricity. And one of the causal factors in this case could be the increased irrigation intensity and more areas under modern varieties of rice induced by paved roads and electricity.

By and large, the cause of apparent positive correlation between infrastructure and crop production is not, perhaps, difficult to detect. The development of infrastructure helps lower the marginal costs of production by shifting the marginal cost curve to the right. The supply curve shifts to the right when farmers face a fall in input prices and a rise in output prices. Both paved roads and electricity tend to contribute towards the fulfilment of the twin objectives.

On capital accumulation

Households in developed villages seem to own more agricultural fixed assets than semi- or under-developed villages. Noticeably, accumulation of agricultural fixed asset was negative for developed villages while semi and under-developed villages marginally gained over the periods. Besides infrastructure, some other factors might have contributed to narrowing down the gap over time.

The striking difference appears when one considers accumulation of non-agricultural fixed assets. Accumulation of non-agricultural fixed assets appears to be an increasing function of the development of infrastructure. Developed households possessed 1.3 times more fixed assets than semi developed villages in 1987 while the same households held 2.8 times more in 2000. Likewise,

developed households had access to financial institutions in 1987 compared to 15 percent and 18 percent, respectively, by semi- and under-developed households. But by 2000, the share jumped to 29 percent for developed villages but feebly for others. Similarly, in 1987, institutional credit per household in developed villages stood at US\$ 5 compared to US\$ 15 and US\$ 18 respectively for semi- and under-developed households. By 2000, all households witnessed an increase but faster improvements followed infrastructure. The phenomenon could be explained by the fact that it takes time for infrastructure to impinge positive effects and it is not surprising that given a longer time, they surpass all.

Productivity of assets

For 2000, per capita income estimated for developed households stood at US\$ 309 compared to US\$ 226 and US\$ 202, respectively, for semi- and under-developed households. The per capita income of developed households is 1.4 times that of semi-developed households and 1.5 times that of under-developed households. In 1987, developed households had not had this edge over others. In fact, the per capita income of households in developed households was lower than semi-developed households and very close to under-developed households. It seems that, over time, developed households witnessed a growth rate of 7 percent per annum compared to that by semi-developed (about 3 percent) and under-developed (about 4 percent) households. The difference also widened in terms of

increases with under-development of infrastructure. The reasons are, perhaps, not far to seek. Paved roads and electricity drive households more towards specialisation and risk minimisation. Further, both mobility and malleability are likely to rise with the development of infrastructure like paved roads and electricity.

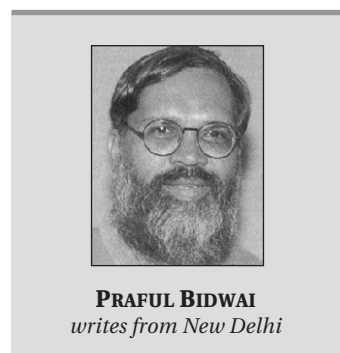
On poverty

It could be found that access to paved roads as well as to electricity contributed to a larger reduction in poverty in sample villages. In 1987, 33 percent of the households from infrastructurally developed villages were extreme poor compared to 31 percent and 27 percent, respectively, in semi and under-developed villages. By 2000, all villages witnessed a decline in extreme poverty but the pace of decline was much faster in developed than semi-developed and under-developed villages. For example, between 1987 and 2000, extreme poverty in developed villages fell by nearly two percentage points per year as compared to one percentage point in semi-developed villages and by half a percentage point in under developed villages. The similar kind of situation prevailed in the case of moderate poor. The poverty-gap index and squared poverty-gap index also seem to tell the same story.

On inequality

While poverty, reportedly, reduced in developed villages, inequality of income increased. In fact, inequality of income rose in all villages in 2000 but the gini ratio was much higher in developed

A tyrant is captured: Judge Saddam fairly



PRAFUL BIDWAI
writes from New Delhi

he had \$750,000. Two unidentified men were detained with him.

All this suggests that he wasn't so much in hiding as a prisoner, probably taken by his own guards. An Arab newspaper has identified his betrayer as General Mohammedi Ibrahim Omar al-Muslit, a relative.

Mr Hussein was so isolated that he could not have directed the resistance to Iraq's occupation. This should warn us against the

between 12 and 30. They include both political-nationalist organisations like the Unification Front for the Liberation of Iraq, and religious guerrillas like the Shia-Islamists and Wahhabi Sunnis. The Baathists play only a minor role compared to theirs.

What might change temporarily now is the balance between the secular and Islamist elements in the resistance. But more important is the growing alienation of moderate Shias from the US-

Relations Committee's Joseph Biden says this is like "stick[ing] a finger in the eye of those whose help we have been seeking." Disclosures about Halliburton's petrol-deal rip-off will further alienate US allies.

Mr Hussein's arrest won't silence President Bush's domestic critics. It might temporarily boost his approval ratings. But that might not help him in next November's Presidential elections. Eleven months is a long, long time in

system, badly corrupted under Mr Hussein, cannot immediately deliver justice.

Under international law, Mr Hussein is *prima facie* guilty of invading Iran in 1980 and Kuwait in 1990. But he was arrested by the *occupation powers*, which themselves invaded Iraq in violation of international law. A trial ordered by them will lack *legitimacy*, even legality.

A tribunal nominated by the

use of chemical weapons against Iraqis and the Kurds.

This will legally establish what has long been known: Washington's encouragement of Mr Hussein throughout the Iran war. It has him vital intelligence about Iranian forces' location, heavy weaponry, and above all, biological agents.

These included the anthrax bacillus, a source of the potentially fatal botulinum toxin, and three strains of the Clostridium bacteria--which cause systemic illness, and diseases attacking lungs, brain, spinal cord and heart.

Mr Hussein was a US protégé from the mid-1970s. He received generous support, especially after the 1979 Iranian Revolution, after which Washington blindly adopted its notorious "my enemy's enemy" posture.

The international tribunal should go into the cruel economic sanctions imposed upon Iraq, and prolonged by the Western powers. These caused *one million deaths*, half of them of children.

Justice in the Saddam Hussein trial cannot be separated from responsibility for equipping and encouraging him to do harm. Nor can it be divorced from fixing culpability for the death of nearly 8,000 civilians since the war began.

Praful Bidwai is an eminent Indian columnist.

The only way to do justice is to publicly try Mr Hussein in a United Nations-sponsored international tribunal with a multilateral bench of credible, impartial judges. During the trial, Mr Hussein must be treated in conformity with the Geneva Conventions. He must not be humiliated, as he was during his television appearance.

euphoria that's being drummed up.

Not many will mourn the arrest of the deposed dictator. But the US and its allies didn't go to war to capture Mr Hussein. Rather, they wanted to disarm Iraq of its weapons of mass destruction. But *none* has been found.

The capture doesn't alter the character of the war/occupation. It raises three issues: What lies ahead for Iraq? For the larger world? What should happen to Mr Hussein?

The capture won't greatly affect the insurgency. Since the event, the violence remains unabated. Baathist loyalists are only one group in the resistance. Other groups reportedly number

controlled Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA). Shias form 60 percent of Iraq's population.

Their highest leader, Grand Ayatollah al-Sistani, is bitter that the Americans want to create the proposed constituent assembly by nomination, instead of elections.

Will the capture help Mr George Bush mend damaged relations with his Western allies? Leaders like Mr Jacques Chirac and Mr Gerhard Schroeder should have questioned the US's claim to being Iraq's gendarme. Instead, they welcomed it.

But they are deeply embittered at Pentagon cronies grabbing Iraq's \$18.6 billion reconstruction contracts. The Senate Foreign

politics. Besides, there's rising popular disappointment at US casualties in Iraq, now over 450 dead.

What about Mr Hussein? A number of leaders, including Mr Bush, have pledged to put him on trial. Some Iraqi leaders favour virtual "mob justice" -- even torture or summary trial leading to execution. Some insist he be tried in Iraq. Others want an international tribunal.

The US seems inclined to a trial within Iraq. It certainly does *not* want the trial to go into issues other than Mr Hussein's culpability for killing and brutalising Iraqis.

The limited-trial idea is seriously wrong. Occupied Iraq is *not* a sovereign state. Its legal

CPA or the Iraqi Governing Council will be a kangaroo court. The IGC lacks even a semblance of representative status. A kangaroo court, in which the US is the judge, jury and executioner, will only compound injustice.

The only way to do justice is to publicly try Mr Hussein in a United Nations-sponsored international tribunal with a multilateral bench of credible, impartial judges. During the trial, Mr Hussein must be treated in conformity with the Geneva Conventions. He must not be humiliated, as he was during his television appearance.

Most important, the trial must not be allowed to obscure the circumstances pertaining to Iraq's invasion of Iran, and Mr Hussein's

Will Saddam Hussein's capture rescue US from Iraq morass?

BILLY I AHMED

SADDAM Hussein was not some virtuoso organising attacks that had risen across the entire territory of Iraq. He was a stalking individual, apparently moving from place to place for his own survival. The tactical success in short-term Hussein may be a nabbing buttress for the curvature prestige of the occupation.

The US television networks repeatedly broadcasted footage of two demonstrations in Baghdad. The first was that of supporters of the Iraqi Communist Party, while the second was organised by a Shiite Muslim faction. While both these predilection have cooperated to one degree or another with the US occupations, neither seems a likely pedestal for some new and stable US-backed regime.

US officials have also declined to clarify how they will deal with Saddam now that he is in custody.

General Ricardo Sanchez, commander of US occupation troops in Iraq, deviated questions about whether he would be turned over to Iraq's Governing Council or brought before a special tribunal.

Whatever is done with Hussein will be in favour of US. The Iraqi Governing Council and the new tribunal are both creations of Washington and have no legitimacy. The US occupation has no authority under international law to carry out any trial of former Iraqi officials.

If war crime charges are to be brought in relation to Iraq, the most serious one of all would be leveled against the Bush administration itself for plotting and carrying on an unprovoked war of aggression.

There are good reasons for US to want to avoid any public prosecution of Hussein. Occupation officials described him as "cooperative" upon his capture. This adjective could equally be

used to describe his relations with US administrations over years.

The regime's greatest crimes against people -- the Iran-Iraq war, the suppression of the Shites and Kurds, etc. -- were carried out with Washington's active support. This involved the direct participation of some of those who now play leading roles in US policy, such as Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld and Bush's new special envoy, former secretary of state James Baker.

The path that led Saddam to power in Iraq began in 1957 when at the age of 20 he joined the Arab Baath Socialist Party. The Baathists

have frequently been described in the media as "national socialists," but this definition is useful only within strict limits. To equate Baathism with Nazism and Saddam with Adolf Hitler, as both Washington and the Zionist regime in Israel have frequently done, is a volitive distortion.

Iraq is a backward and historically oppressed country, not an imperialist power bent on global conquest. Saddam led a ruthless dictatorship that systematically repressed the Iraqi working class. There was a definite distinction, however, between the kind of nationalist movement he led and the semi-feudal regimes

that were installed by British imperialism, like that of Nuri al Said, who was regarded as a traitor by his own people and the entire Arab world.

In a televised address, Bush read out a "message to the Iraqi people" declaring that the capture of Hussein ended "dark and painful era" and signalled the arrival of "hopeful day." The US president claimed that the event would further a US policy aimed at bringing "sovereignty for your country, dignity for your great culture and, for every Iraqi citizen, the opportunity for a better life."

It will be a dream come true if

Iraqis are granted sovereignty. But, the Bush administration has embarked on a programme to re-colonise Iraq and seize its oil wealth and strategic geopolitical position in order to further a programme of global US hegemony. The occupation has stripped the Iraqi people of their dignity, creating growing support for attacks on US forces. Iraqis face mass unemployment and poverty, opportunity being granted in unlimited amounts to corrupt or politically connected corporations like Halliburton to pillage both Iraq's resources and US taxpayers funds.

The apprehension of the former

maintain a permanent occupation to assure itself unrestricted control of the vital energy resources of the region.

While the ties between Hussein and Washington have been largely camouflaged from the US public, they are widely known among the politically literate population of Iraq. The real question is whether the likes of Rumsfeld and Baker are to be regarded as accomplices of Saddam Hussein's crimes, or whether Hussein himself was merely the accomplice in the greater crimes of US imperialism.

Bush's desolated pledge that Saddam Hussein will face "justice" needs to be addressed for immediate withdrawal of all US officials responsible for the present war that claimed thousands of Iraqi lives and be held accountable for these crimes.

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