

MDGs: Thoughts on ways to achieve them

DR. BADIUL ALAM MAJUMDAR

At the Millennium Summit in 2000, world leaders adopted the U.N Millennium Declaration, committing their nations to a global partnership to end hunger, poverty and related deprivations that still grip a vast segment of the human-kind. They collectively committed to eight millennium development goals (MDGs) and 18 quantitative, time-bound targets under them of which seven goals and 11 related targets are to be implemented by developing countries to improve the conditions of their poor and the hungry. The remaining other goal and, the seven targets under it, are to be implemented by developed countries to give a fair shake to their developing counterparts in the areas of trade and aid. Taking 1990 as the base year, all the targets, except one, are to be achieved by 2015.

Status of Bangladesh's achievement

Bangladesh is a signatory to the Millennium compact and hence committed to implement the MDGs. The table below shows the status of Bangladesh's implementation of MDGs. The table is compiled based on a simple regression analysis using data contained in the Millennium Project's database.

The data in the table show that on the whole Bangladesh is not in real good shape with respect to implementation of the MDGs. The first two targets relating to poverty and hunger are most critically important and Bangladesh is not doing well in achieving them. With the present rate of poverty reduction, the proportion of people below the dollar-a-day poverty threshold, an indicator about which many have serious reservations, will hardly change in 2015. In fact, given the present rate, it will be in 2648 after nearly 650 years when the target will be fulfilled. Similarly, at the present rate, Bangladesh will seriously miss the target of eliminating hunger. Bangladesh is also expected to fail to achieve the targets relating to environmental sustainability except for improved sanitation.

Bangladesh appears to be doing well with respect to the goals on universal primary education, gender equality in education, under-five mortality, maternal mortality and death from tuberculosis. However, the progress in education is to some extent misleading in that the expansion of educational opportunities for both boys and girls has been accompanied by sharp deterioration in their quality. Human development obviously requires enrollment, but more importantly the quality of instructions. Same argument is applicable to health services.

Need to empower people's initiatives

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It is clear that if Bangladesh is to fully achieve the MDGs and become truly hunger-free and poverty-free, then the common people, including the women, will have to be empowered. Empowerment encompasses mental empowerment, social empowerment, information empowerment, organizational empowerment, economic empowerment and political empowerment. Such empowerment must be intended to help people take responsibility for their own future and ensure that they succeed.

poverty-free, then the common people, including the women, will have to be empowered. Empowerment encompasses mental empowerment to unleash their human spirit, social empowerment to ensure their freedom of movement, information empowerment to get them the necessary information, organizational empowerment to ensure their freedom to form own organisations, economic empowerment to ensure that they receive the necessary skills and financial support for creating self-employment, and political empowerment to make sure that they receive their rightful entitlements. Such empowerment must be intended to help people take responsibility for their own future and ensure that they succeed.

In order to help people, especially the poor succeed in becoming authors of their own future, their capabilities need to be enhanced, local democracy established and a social movement fomented. Their capabilities may be enhanced by ensuring their human development and creating opportunities for them to form self-help groups. A social movement is necessary because many of the social problems can be solved by awakening and mobilising people and creating campaigns under the catalytic leadership of elected local leaders. When people are mobilized, a type of "social capital" is created, which can be used to solve many of the social problems without external financial support. With the social problems resolved by using social capital, opportunities are created for the solution of difficult economic problems as people can form self-help groups and catalyse savings for self-employment activities. For that to happen, a people's centred development approach need to be introduced, which will require among others to strengthen the UPs and transform their role to that of catalysts.

Need decentralisation and improved governance

Once people take responsibility for their own future and begin the journey to create a better future, they need an enabling environment to move forward. Such an environment requires transformation of policies leading to decentralisation and devolution. Decentralisation is the means to create local accountability for many of the basic services such as health, education, law and order, and devolve power and resources to local bodies. It is also the means to taking government to the door steps of the people and ensuring their effective participation in the affairs of the

state, causing the democracy to deepen.

Good governance is also an essential prerequisite for creating an enabling environment and is critically important for those who are disadvantaged in the society. Good governance requires rule of law, social justice, and effective participation of the people in the decisions that affect them. It also requires the practice of transparency and accountability to ensure a corruption-free environment, which is most important for the poor as they are hurt most by corruption. It is clear that whatever achievements that have been made in human development areas Bangladesh is owed to have made tremendous achievements so far relative to its neighbours cannot be sustained without accountability in the delivery of many of the services such as health and education by public authorities. There must also be corruption-free and accountable economic governance. That is, resources must be allocated based on considerations of merit and social justice rather than to provide patronage to powerful vested interest groups.

In order to bring about decentralization and good governance, truly people's rule need to be established. For that to happen, honest, competent and committed individuals committed to people's welfare rather than to self-interest need to be given the opportunity to go to state power. Many national level institutions need to be transformed through major reforms for creating such opportunities.

Independent judiciary, strong and independent Election Commission, neutral government during elections, effective Anti-corruption Commission, efficient civil administration, and honest and transparent internal governance of political parties are now urgently needed to help achieve people's rule. Honest intentions of the government are needed to make progress in these areas and in the area of decentralisation. However, despite making unequivocal commitment otherwise, the government does not appear to be at all serious about any major reform initiative. A case in point is the issue of decentralisation and strong local governance, which is an essential pillar of the recently formulated Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSP). Despite commitments on paper, government has not made any significant shift in its policy decisions and resource allocations. For example, Upazila and Zila Parishad elections are not yet held despite constitutional obligations and Supreme Court

Status of Bangladesh's implementation of MDGs										
Goal	Target	Indicator	1990 baseline	Most recent data	Projected 2015 value	2015 goal	Projected date of reaching goal			
1. Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger	1. Halve, between 1990 and 2015, the proportion of people whose income is less than one dollar a day	Proportion of population below \$1 (1993 PPP) per day	32.1, est.	36% (2000)	31.5	16.1 (or less)	Some time in the year 2648			
	2. Halve, between 1990 and 2015, the proportion of people who suffer from hunger	Proportion of population below minimum level of dietary energy consumption	38.5, est.	30% (2002)	26	19.3 (or less)	Some time during 2028			
2. Achieve universal primary education	3. Ensure that, by 2015, children everywhere, boys and girls alike, will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling	Net enrolment ratio in primary education	71.2	86.6% (2001)	112.84	100.00	Early 2007			
		Ratio of girls to boys in primary, secondary and tertiary education	Primary			0.86	1.02 (2001)	1.150	1.000 (or greater)	Some time during 1999
			Secondary			0.52	1.10 (2001)	1.878	1.000 (or greater)	Some time during 1998
			Tertiary			0.20	.50 (2001)	0.971	1.000 (or better)	Just before 2016
4. Reduce child mortality	5. Reduce by two-thirds, between 1990 and 2015, the under-five mortality rate	Under-five mortality rate	144	69 (2003)	3.6	48.1	Some time during 2006			
5. Improve maternal health	6. Reduce by three quarters, between 1990 and 2015, the maternal mortality ratio	Maternal mortality rate, per 100,000 live births	850	380 (2000)	0.0	211.3	Some time during 2003, est.			
6. Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases	8. Have halted by 2015, and begun to reverse, the incidence of malaria and other major diseases	Prevalence			741	490 (2003)	239.9	Less than 736.8	Early 1990, est.	
		Death			65	57 (2003)	50.6	Less than 65.2	Early 1990, est.	
7. Ensure environmental sustainability	9. Integrate the principles of sustainable development into country policies and programmes and reverse the loss of environmental resources	Ozone-depleting CFCs consumption in ODP metric tons	195	805 (2000)	2170.5	No goal explicitly specified in the Secretary-General's report. "Road Map towards the Implementation of the United Nations Millennium Declaration"				
		Proportion of population without sustainable access to improved water source	Proportion of population without sustainable access to improved water source	29%	25% (2002)	20.7	14.5	Some time during 2033		
10. Halve, by 2015, the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water and sanitation	Proportion of population without sustainable access to improved sanitation		77.0%	52% (2002)	25.0	38.5	Some time during 2008			
	11. By 2020, to have achieved a significant improvement in the lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers	Slum population as percentage of urban population (secure tenure index)	87.3%	84.7% (2001)	81.31	No goal explicitly specified in the Secretary-General's report. "Road Map towards the Implementation of the United Nations Millennium Declaration"				

order, and no increases are made for the allocations for three elected local bodies (i.e., are only about 2% of ADP, which no way reflect government's priority.

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An emissary's memoirs

MUHAMMAD ZAMIR

It is usual practice for retired diplomats in Europe and North America to write their memoirs. It is however unusual to do that in Bangladesh. In fact, very few have attempted this difficult task in the recent past either here or in India. We have had autobiographies from Ambassador JN Dixit and Ambassador CS Dasgupta from India and Ambassador SA Karim from Bangladesh. Now we have an informative publication from Ambassador KM Shehabuddin.

All the ambassadors I have referred to above played an important role in the evolving history of this region in the decades of the seventies, eighties and the nineties. In more ways than one, they were associated with our liberation struggle that eventually ended with the emergence of independent Bangladesh in 1971.

The significant thing about Shehabuddin however was his direct and inter-active involvement with our war of independence. A man of principles, not afraid to be honest, he was the first career diplomat of Bangladesh origin to renounce his allegiance to Pakistan and pledge loyalty to the unborn state of Bangladesh. He was posted at that time as a junior officer in the Pakistan High Commission in New Delhi. The book reveals his total commitment towards the cause for Bangladesh and the lack of hesitation on his part and that of his lady wife. Their participation as well as that of Amjadul Huq in the struggle, acquires special relevance given the fact that their decision was not based on any material considerations. Unlike our many other "freedom fighter" diplomats, who bargained with the Mujibnagar authorities over pay and allowances and many other privileges, Shehabuddin, AH Mahmood Ali, AMA Muhith and Mohiuddin Ahmed did not do so. They threw caution to the wind and joined the struggle out of spontaneous conviction, totally aware that the path ahead was full of difficulties.

The author has traced his journey through life with sensitivity. His description of the socio-economic background of rural Chittagong will open windows among expatriate Bangladeshis. His portrayal of his family members will also be a sociological testament of how a Muslim family has expanded its horizon from rural Bangladesh to a wider world setting. His narration of the joys of his childhood will similarly be interesting for many who have since seen it disappear because of urbanisation.

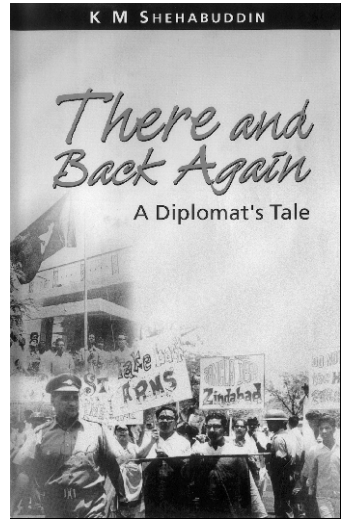
Ambassador Shehabuddin has also provided his readers with rare nuggets of background information. In page 75, he narrates his experience with former President Ziaur Rahman and Begum Zia in his Apartment in Paris (where he was then posted). I quote the relevant sentences -- "(He) Zia proudly said that he did what he did then in the name of Bangabandhu. Both he and Begum Zia clearly held Bangabandhu in the highest esteem." This is refreshing given the controversy that has been created in the recent past by over-

BOOK REVIEW

There and back again

by KM Shehabuddin

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zealous supporters of President Ziaur Rahman who are attempting to distort history.

The author has also placed on record the many nuances that accompanied the efforts of liberation struggle both in Calcutta and New Delhi. He has also recorded the role played by our important political leaders to bring relief and succor to the millions of Bangladeshi refugees who had sought sanctuary in India. He has also recalled how the cabinet functioned in the interim government of Mujibnagar and the difficulties that were encountered in trying to project the activities of the Bangladesh government in exile in the international media.

The later part of the book deals with the author's experiences in Europe, the Middle East and in North America.

The chapters dealing with the USA are particularly interesting. It allows the readers to be exposed to the many delicate protocol problems that ambassadors have to encounter and overcome. It also reveals the many sensitive aspects of logistics that are associated with VIP visits and their inordinately large entourages.

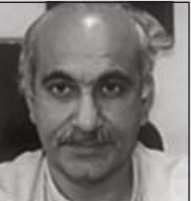
Shehabuddin has also recounted his association with the Bangladesh Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In this context, he quite correctly gives due credit to the former Foreign Minister Professor Shamsul Huq, not only for promoting understanding with India but also for the recognition bestowed on Bangladesh within the UN structure.

The publication will also be appreciated for the many historical photographs that have been included.

Students of international relations both within Bangladesh and abroad should study Shehabuddin's account of events and reference to documentation carefully. This book needs to be purchased and kept carefully in our personal libraries.

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In the name of the warlord



M.J. AKBAR

On December 2, 2005, His Excellency Eng. Hussein Mohammad Farah Aideed, deputy prime minister (politics and security), minister of interior, Transitional Federal Government of the Somali Republic, called, by appointment, on India's high commissioner in Nairobi, Mr Surendra Kumar. He was dressed in a dark blue suit, tie, and leather-strap sandals. The "Eng" before his name was similar to "Dr": Engineers now like to be known that they are thus qualified. In Somalia the preferred title of Hussein Aideed is "General," a claim by hereditary right.

His father, General Mohammed Farah Aideed, became the world's most famous warlord, immortal in local lore and deified by Hollywood, when, in 1993, he broke American will by downing two Black Hawk helicopters and killing 18 American Marines whose bodies were dragged through the streets of Mogadishu, capital of Somalia. A reward of a million dollars was placed on his head, and he was nicknamed, for some obscure reason, Yogi the Bear. The father did not die in an American prison, but in his own city. His son was living in America, and had trained to become a reserve Marine. When his father died, he returned to Somalia to inherit the title and the loyalty of his father's militia, though not the respect that

his father commanded. Neither father nor son believed that the term "warlord" was appropriate. Aideed means "one who rejects insults."

He seemed sincere, said Mr Kumar. Hussein Aideed promised peace would finally come to Somalia in about six months, thanks to the latest deal brokered by mostly well-meaning (or simply fed-up) neighbours. He asked for Indian assistance in de-mining southern Somalia, building roads, assisting in healthcare, and training the police.

Uniforms and guns for the police would not be welcome. Since there is nothing called a police force in Somalia at the moment, perhaps Hussein Aideed wanted arms and training for his own force. Mr Kumar was diplomatic in his response; the visitor's charm was not sufficient to reduce the host's scepticism. The news is that India is not in any hurry to arm and train anyone, or rebuild roads, which are controlled by AK-47-wielding bands who laugh as they collect their tax on any vehicle brave enough, or desperate enough, to travel. The government of Hussein Aideed used to be based in Nairobi until the Kenyans exhausted their patience and told them to go.

Somalia is not a country in search of a government. It is a government in search of a country. From the air, Mogadishu is entrancing, lean and stretched out against the Indian Ocean, a city of two million in a country of seven. It begins in the greenery of banana trees in the south, curves along the pristine beaches untouched by the large waves that break much before the shore. The city ends where the sand rises to cliff height in the north before spreading into the arid and endless desert.

We flew into an airport in the north on Saturday in a Red Cross plane. The Red Cross is now the

only international organisation with a national presence in Somalia, working to bring a touch of contemporary concern to a land that has been driven back into a pre-industrial past by criminal greed and mindless violence.

The breeze cools the midday sunshine and throws sand into our eyes as step off. The airport was built by Osman Hassan Ali Atto, warlord and politician, to ferry khat, a local nerve-soother. From the international airport closed down, its fortunes boomed. Wisely, Mr Atto decided to share such fortunes with a fellow warlord. The commerce is limited but it is a commercial hub of sorts.

Warlords print the Somali currency. There is an advertisement of a cell-phone company on the second hut, which is possibly an office. The third structure on an airstrip devoid of any human habitation for miles is a mosque, an Ottoman crescent atop its minaret.

A small craft of Aviation Sans Frontiers is waiting to take off when we land: the two NGO planes constitute the business of the day. A man near the tarmac with a cap, a piece of cloth wrapped around

into the drum, the other into the plane. The engine is pulled into a gurgle. Oil begins to flow up.

They travel about a hundred metres or more ahead, obscured by a windscreens of powdery desert dust: nine men on the back of a powerful Toyota, their legs dangling over the side, each with an AK-47 of varying power, and enough ammunition to start a small war. In the centre is a mounted heavy machine-gun, manned by a burly brother in a bandana, with don't-fool-with-me in his eyes and a pistol in his belt. In local parlance, they constitute a "technical." No self-respecting warlord travels with less than four

hugs scraggy, a crazy museum of twisted, shattered metal, carcasses of cars, machines, yesterday's homes, anything that could be pillaged. It is owned by Bashir Raghe, a warlord. A minute later we see a large ship sitting impassively offshore. This is the scrap metal trade, a lucrative byproduct of a destruction-economy, and yet another fortune for warlords to kill over. "Do you know where the scrap is headed?" asks a friend whom I shall leave unnamed. I don't. To India.

To the right, in another minute, is what seems to be a mirage: a pink villa from an Italian seashore. Who lives there? A businessman. What is

both ears, a football-referee whistle in one hand and a tasbeeh in the other is the air traffic clearance authority. Each item has a function.

The cap is for the sun. The cloth is for the sand. He keeps in touch with the pilot with the whistle. He keeps in touch with God with the prayer beads.

Our plane is refuelled while we wait. Three skinny, industrious men, two of them in the trademark lungi, kick-roll dented drums from a Dyna 350 semi towards the plane. A wheelbarrow, carrying a hose and a small engine, accompanies them. The drums contain the fuel. Each is opened, with some effort, by a metal strip that fits into a groove in the cap and twists the cap around. On end of the hose goes

"technical." Since this one has been hired to protect us, I suppose this "technical" is on the side of the angels, but loyalties are variable in a cash-and-carry business.

We drive over sand and rock towards the world's largest, or perhaps only, ghost city. An occasional man sleeps under a desert shrub. Lonely men squat on the edge of the track, waiting for nothing, their faces drained of all expectation. Women, in rare ones or twos, are defined by the bright colours of their dress, principally a dramatic red interspersed by a soothing yellow. The rest is silence in a vast emptiness, broken only by the periodic and minimal radio exchanges between our SUV and our "technical."

Suddenly, to our left, appears a


Amman's amphitheatre symbolise the achievements of 2,000 years ago. In Mogadishu, you see the ruins of a flourishing 20th century city in an environment that has regressed 2,000 years. Only a few of the shell-shocked homes seem inhabited; strangely there is utter silence even among the sparse patches of life.

I am given a guided tour of devastation: here what was once an enclave of diplomatic homes or an embassy row during the era of the Soviet-supported President Siad Barre, there nothing where once the Indian embassy existed. Every hundred paces is dull repetition of what used to be. The true sadness of Mogadishu is not what it has become, but what it once was, and what it could have been.

The radio crackles. We cannot go to the Italian cathedral built when they colonised this part of Somalia. The "technical" has reported that a gunbattle is going on in front of the cathedral. And so, without any fuss, we turn left a little before the gunbattle and drive into what was once the pride of the city: the main street, full of banks, businesses, government offices, cars, pedestrians, restaurants, bars and hotels. The street ends at the embarkment. A majestic hotel sweeps in a classic Italian curve to our left, architecture that once hummed to the music of hundreds of rooms. It has now been blasted apart, shattered by tank battles that destroyed this street and city.

We get off at the embarkment, which is broken at one place leaving a large gap. One tank, unable to brake, crashed through at this point. The tank lies on the rocks of the ocean shore, rusted, its turret tilted up, still searching for an enemy of the same colour and blood. It is as distressing a memory as the Fascist pillar nearby that has survived on the promenade from the time of Mussolini.

We are at the Hammaruin. We change guard. Literally. Our gun-



BYLINE

This is the dividing line between the north and south of Mogadishu. Militia from the north cannot enter the south, and naturally vice versa. In the ocean, a handful of children chatter and skip over the rocks, the shallow water being their only entertainment. On the street, from a corner, young men with nothing to do but clutch triggers at their nerve-ends watch as we switch vehicles and guards. A gun is part of the normal dress code of normal young men.



BYLINE

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