

Longer-term Planning is Needed for Economic Recovery

By A. M. A. Muhith

Special to The Daily Star

Eid Mubarak to All

After observing the Holy month of Ramzan, the Muslims of Bangladesh along with the Muslims of the world will celebrate the Eid-ul-Fitr, the festival of peace, brotherhood, equality, sacrifice and love for fellow human beings.

Do we really follow the teachings of the Holy Koran, which was revealed for the benefit of mankind? Do we really maintain the sense of sacrifice and austerity throughout the whole year which we observe during the month of Ramzan?

As we pray to Almighty Allah on the Eid Day, as we express our gratitude to our beloved Prophet for showing us the right path and as we embrace our fellow brethren after the Eid-Namaz, we should reflect for a moment and ask, to what extent our lives really reflect the path shown by the Holy Koran and our Prophet.

The first question that needs to be asked is that of "Zakat" and "Fitra". Have we conscientiously met our obligations? Technically perhaps, yes. But the meaning of "Zakat" is much more profound than doling out a mere percentage of what we possess.

This really is the crux of the message of the festival of Eid — be happy yourself and do your best to share that happiness with as many of our fellow human beings as possible.

The Holy month of Ramzan followed by Eid-ul-Fitr has some other very profound meanings for us as well. Discipline is a very important element of fasting. Through fasting, through refraining from all sorts of excesses we cultivate self-discipline.

Take the question of corruption. We are aware that it is eating away at the vitals of our civic and political life. Our moral and ethical values are threatened by an all-pervasive corruption.

Finally Eid represents to us an occasion when we tear down all our social and economic barriers and become a part of a bigger entity declaring our solidarity with the poor and the destitute.

Going into the inner meanings of the Holy month of Ramzan and the Eid-ul-Fitr is the duty of true devotees. It is our hope that on the occasion of the coming Eid, we will take its true meaning to heart.

A Happy New Year

We greet the whole of our people on the occasion of New Year's Day. We have two of this — but one of them one too many. The Gregoria calendar year and its first day and all its attendant sentiments help keep us in step with the rest of the world — particularly the developed North.

Our first wish, therefore, on this day of days would be for our citizens to feel in their hearts the true import of this which lies in its being the special day signifying culture and heritage, and travail and productivity.

Before wishing any other thing we should do better to appreciate, as Tagore did, the placing of this in the dreary and often apocalyptic season of Baishakh. This parched up nature is all a preparation for all life and earth to rejuvenate.

We are already too many people on our little boat — and any moment it can start sinking, if it hasn't already done so. As an insurance against developing leaks the whole of our people need to be brought under literacy and education.

A PROMINENT economist commented a couple of decades back that Bangladesh is an economic mistake. The difficult development problems of Bangladesh defy stereotyped solutions.

In the 1980's Bangladesh introduced a number of open economy measures. Privatisation, market determination of prices and liberal trade policies marked this effort. But a sustained effort has been impeding quite often because of the nature of the regime.

(1) Successive military rule and transfer of power from dictators through violence have never allowed political stability in the country. This does not inspire healthy economic activities and specially foreign direct investment.

(2) An autocratic and illegitimate regime derives its support by bribing special groups. Current expenditure has spiralled and large-scale expansion of the bureaucracy and the military has taken place thereby withdrawing resources from productive use or investment.

(3) Unaccountable regime engendered high level corruption and capital transfer. This hurt the economy in various ways. It left the honest economic actors in the lurch. Conclusion of stinking deals invariably cost time and quality.

(4) In programmes involving large masses of people as in universal primary education, family planning, health care, agricultural development and flood protection, social mobilisation and decentralised programme execution are sine qua non for success.

(5) Above all illegitimacy and corruption that characterised the regime destroyed the vitality of development administration. Development indeed is as much a result of investment as of commitment of economic actors.

NEW Zealand's trade unions are fighting for their survival as the recently-elected National Party government moves to introduce sweeping labour market reforms.

From May it will no longer be compulsory to join a union — as it is now — and individual or collective contracts will have to be negotiated between employers and employees.

The government's legislation has been angrily branded by some trade unionists as a "recipe for chaos and worker exploitation."

But Labour Minister Bill Birch, who introduced the legislation, retorts: "It is not a recipe for exploitation, but an agenda for cooperation between employers and employees."

Described as the most radical labour legislation to go before New Zealand's Parliament this century, the Employment Contracts Bill replaces trade unions with "employee organisations" with voluntary membership.

The legislation is still before Parliament but the government has a huge majority and its passage is assured. The new labour law is expected to take effect starting May 1.

Employees may belong to

inefficiency and ineffectiveness.

The economy is highly dependent on foreign aid because the level of current government expenditure is unsustainable and domestic saving has been moving between 0 and 5% of GDP.

In macro economic management freer play to market forces is the gospel and it governs

The strategies and programmes to be fruitful will have to be sustained over a period of time. A consensus is needed because everyone must support the programme heart and soul, and change of government should not change the course of programme.

policies relating to exchange rate, interest rate, import liberalisation, export orientation and investment promotion. What it means is that there is very little scope for new policy initiatives or independent action.

Economic development targets and strategy to be meaningful call for a longer time horizon in Bangladesh.

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Unions Berate 'Radical' Law

Derek Round writes from Wellington

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formed so badly," he said in a recent "State of the Nations" speech.

Years of feather-bedding, overmanning resistance to new technology, poor work practices and union demarcation disputes had inflicted huge additional costs on New Zealand producers.

"A more flexible labour relations system is crucial to our economic development," Mr. Birch says.

But union leaders see the new labour legislation as simply a move to smash the power of the unions.

"The hard truth is that we cannot go on borrowing the savings of other countries to fund one of the world's most generous welfare systems, and cover for the fallings of our

poorly performing economy," Mr. Bolger said.

Labour Minister Birch argues that the rigidity of the New Zealand labour market is a fundamental cause of the country's slow growth, low wage levels and high rate of unemployment, currently approaching 9 per cent.

But union leaders see the new labour legislation as simply a move to smash the power of the unions.

"What is really taking place is a full-blooded attempt to stack the odds in favour of the meaner employers," says Sue Piper, head of the big civil servants' union, the Public Service Association.

"The government is clearly on the side of our most back-

ward-looking employers who want to whittle away union strength so they can force down wages and conditions."

In support of this view union leaders point to a recent report of the Business Roundtable, an influential organisation representing some of the country's biggest employers, which says real wages must drop 3.9 per cent for unemployment to be eliminated.

The unemployed, currently numbering over 200,000 in a population of 3.4 million, should be able to "bid themselves into jobs by temporary wage reductions which make them attractive for employers to hire," the Business Roundtable says.

The only basis for pay increases was shortage of labour in specific categories and locations. Productivity increases did not justify wage increases if labour was in abundance.

Council of Trade Unions president Ken Douglas says: "This legislation spells the end of a New Zealand where you earn a fair wage no matter where you work, where those with more strength support those more vulnerable."

The legislation is not about individual choice or individual rights, he says, adding: "It gives total powers to employers to impose what they see as appropriate to their particular workplace."

Mr. Birch rejects claims the new laws could lead to the operation of sweatshops in New Zealand as "fearmongering" and argues they will lead to higher wages in the long term.

Most workers have no individual power to bargain about pay and conditions," he says. "Take it or leave it, and join the ranks of the unemployed."

With the increase of employers' power, workers would need more protection and assistance and this might increase union membership, Dr. Szakats says.

The new law does not prohibit unions and if they provided the required services they could increase membership.

— Depthnews Asia.

To the Editor...

Letters for publication in these columns should be addressed to the Editor and legibly written or typed with double space. For reasons of space, short letters are preferred, and all are subject to editing and cuts.

Pseudonyms are accepted. However, all communications must bear the writer's real name, signature and address.

Bureaucrats and professionals Sir, I fully endorse the views expressed in the letter by Mr. Noazesh Ali of Banani, Dhaka published in your esteemed Daily on 21-3-91 under the heading "Bureaucrats and professionals".

The bureaucrats are not only having a good time they are behaving as if they are the masters and others who are professional-ex-

occasions overdoing things or even acting more than bargaining agents?

It is time the Govt. should follow one policy for all on any single issue.

Reazuddin Ahmed Bailey Road Dhaka.

The space and humanity

Sir, "Humanity will not stay on Earth forever, but will instead, in search of light and space, at first timidly penetrate beyond the atmosphere and then conquer the whole of space around the sun."

We have been told time and again that the officers of the Govt. Departments, Semi-Govt. organisations or autonomous bodies cannot form any such "Association" as to act as their bargaining agent.

the 20th century. It should be noted that he said "humanity" rather than some particular nationality, such as the Russians, Americans, Germans or Japanese.

In these words he both expressed his confidence in the future and made a prediction for posterity. It is only by pooling our efforts that we can break the chains of gravity and pave the way to distant worlds.

Since then, space exploration has advanced tremendously. Humanity can now translate into life very daring ideas not only in near-Earth space but in deep space as well.

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The first steps towards this dream was made on April 12, 1961, when Yuri Gagarin of the USSR made the first manned space flight as a trailblazer cosmonaut, and then in July 1975, when the Soviet

Soyuz-19 and the US Apollo spaceships rendezvoused and docked, thus forming a single orbital complex.

Soviet cosmonauts and US astronauts Alexei Leonov, Valeri Kubasov, Thomas Stafford, Vance Brand and Donald Slayton moved from ship to ship to shake hands, symbolizing the co-operation of people of different countries in space and on Earth.

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First Manned Spaceflight) can become a reality at the turn of the 21st century.

The new political thinking that has in recent years become dominant in international relations has favourably affected space research.

After so many years of alienation, the two leading powers are once again pooling their efforts in studying the Earth. This certainly is a welcome news for the humanity, particularly at a time when ecological contamination is threatening the very existence of life on this beautiful planet.

Nadia Tabassum, Monipurpara, Tejgaon, Dhaka.