Dhaka, Thursday, September 12, 1991

# Hoping and Praying for the Waters to be Good

Waters have engulfed more areas in the country and pushed much more people to more suffering than can be imagined by citizens sitting snug in the insularity of a capital's life and lapping up with morning tea what little the newspapers can purvey of the situation. Even that little has been enough to make the unaffected ones get uneasy with the thought - is it going to be '88 again? What of the affected broad masses? Millions in 22 districts have already been literally marooned. The question for them is how far will the water further rise and how long can they cope with it. Reports of death are already coming in.

Meanwhile more and more areas keep on going under water. The Ganges and the Brahmaputra river systems command almost all of Bangladesh's area, leaving some modest thousands of square kilometers to the influence of the Meghna. With dangerously voluminous discharges continuing from across the Farakka and Brahmaputra showing no sign anywhere of stopping its rise, the Ganges-Brahmaputra valleys are in for further

worsening of the situation.

It is so far lucky that there hasn't been a comparable rise in the Meghna. And also that the Bay is low and calm although the approaching new moon should occasion a little swelling in two or three days' time. One keeps on hoping, putting the whole heart into it, that the rain-induced river swelling inland will by then take a turn towards ebbing with the cessation of downpour in the foothills of the Himalayan ranges. A repetition of '88 would call for conjunction of all the raininduced spate at a time in all three major river systems, and the swelling of the Bay made double by another conjunction of heavy rain in the seas and lunar full rising. One keeps on hoping and praying that we shall somehow be spared such doomsday coincidences. We have no power to do anything beside that. The poor people waiting interminably for days on the village rooftops jutting out of endless expanses of water have been condemned to count only on God and nothing beside making a lie of society and government, science and civilisation.

Eightyeight came and went. Hefty international relief followed. Some people got pats on the back for claimed good distribution. The story ended there except for leaving a bad taste in the mouth in the form of a predictable water trap called the capital protection embankment. What thoughts were given to the protection of the whole nation? The mindless inaction in the matter can be blamed on the autocratic nature of the then government. And the new representative government, yet to be made an accountable one, is hardly settled on its saddle. It's too early for it to decide on a response to the challenge. This is perfectly acceptable alibi for inaction. If we are good at anything at all - it is explaining things

As long as the waters are threateningly there let us remind ourselves of the two or three most urgent things dying for our active attention:

a. How to help the monsoon water discharges from across the borders to better reach the sea. This would call for massive engineering and ecological programmes may be the size of tens of billions of taka and unified national initiative that continues to elude us even in our dreams.

b. Forging a trilateral, or if need be quadrilateral, common approach in the matter aiming at containing the losses and channelizing the discharges.

c. Introduction of changes in the habitation and housing patterns in the villages which would involve adjustments of social, economic and tenancy equations in the villages that would have repercussions on urban equations as well.

There is no sign yet of addressing these tasks that can hardly take any delay. The all enveloping thing will go only to come back. Will it find us prepared the next time?

# **Primary Education**

The education sector was recently dubbed a "clinically alive patient" by a senior official of the government. The official, a joint secretary at the ministry of education, also acknowledged that 75 per cent of our primary school pupils drop out well before finishing their five-year stint. Rarely has a sorrier state of the country's education been portrayed by an official. And that during a speech given on the occasion of World Literacy Day too.

The irony was quite stark. But perhaps the saddest part is that government sigures whether ministers or officials - have become ( or have always been ) too adept at dishing out statistics to illustrate the problem, but hardly ever do they decorate their speeches with policy guidelines which would be implemented to solve the problem.

Against such a backdrop, what do we really expect from our primary schools and teachers? Or the five-year olds sent to those schools? We should expect a lot, because primary education is the foundation stone of not only the education

sector, but of the whole nation. One look at the phenomenal success of such Asian countries as Korea, Taiwan, Thailand, Indonesia and others would reveal a simple fact : these countries put in greater resources and effort behind primary education than they did for secondary or higher education. The result ? Illiteracy has been virtually wiped out, the overall level of education has improved and the ability of its people to acquire and use more advanced skills enhanced greatly. By putting greater em-

phasis on primary education, South-East and East Asian countries have raced ahead of South Asia in economic development, without sacrificing much in the way of human resource development. What we need now is less talk, speeches and

ribbon-cutting, and more concrete action. We are still waiting for an education policy which will set out our priorities for the next 10 to 20 years. Top most priority naturally should be given to efforts to enroll 100 per cent of the country's five-year olds at primary schools. The system of teaching should be made interesting and rewarding enough to reduce the number of drop outs. People at the lower end of the social scale have to be convinced that it would pay in the long run to keep their children at school than to send them out to work at an early age. But before any of that can come about, we need an imaginative and positive action plan from the ministry of education.

# China Sticks to Reforms that Pay Off

HE rapid collapse of anti-Gorbachev coup in Russia proclaims the strength of the political winds blowing thr-

ough the world. Eventually we can expect widespread economic change to follow in the wake of the political transformation - notably in Asia, where an upsurge of trade based on the region still known as the "Soviet Far East" can be confidently predicted. But this will not happen overnight; and in the meantime China continues to provide a most impressive example of economic reforms that, so far, seem to have paid off handsomely.

Unfortunately, the problems that afflict the economies of the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe are far from solved, and may even have been worsened by the events in Moscow.

The two Communist giants, China and the USSR, have now both launched massive reforms of their systems. But not in the same manner: Beijing is pushing through economic changes first, but resolutely keeps the party monolith in full charge politically. In Moscow, the party's grip has been wrested away, but no one seems capable of introducing effective economic reforms.

Even before rumblings of discontent against Gorbachev were heard last year, an economist of the International

Monetary Fund was writing: The Soviet Union's present economic difficulties reflect deep-seated problems with the system of central planning and ... neglect of technical and economic efficiency. The failure of perestroika is clear. Far from reviving the ailing Soviet economy, the partial relaxation of administrative controls has led only to increasing chaos."

So the prospects for Russia are poor, and the economy will probably shrink this year by as much as 10 per cent in real terms. Russia's foreign debt stands at US\$62 billion, and its reserves of gold and foreign currencies are worth about US\$10 billion. So the country has to export: its big earners are oil and gold. (World prices are likely to stay weak this year for those two commodities).

Eastern Europe has also had a bad year. Enormous amounts of capital are needed to modernise that region. But not all the countries there are badly

Eastern Germany is being nursed by the West, and the three northern countries - Alan Chalkley writes from Hong Kong

Against a background of successive waves of political change in the USSR and Eastern Europe, China's concentration on economic advance stands out in conspicuous contrast

Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia - are doing relatively well. But the southern countrics of Bulgaria, Romania, Yugoslavia and Albania are in terrible shape, both politically and economically.

Turning to the Soviet Union itself, we see the final breakup of an empire forged by the tears over the centuries, and then expanded after World War Il by Stalin. It now reaches from Bohemia in central Europe to some Japanese islands off the Pacific coast.

From this massive multi-racial complex, the first to break away was actually Mongolia on the northern border of China. The people there overthrew their hard-line government last year (in fact, Russian troops had started withdrawing from the country in 1988). A high-powered team from China recently visited Mongolia, proposing economic cooperation.

One after another, the Soviet states have declared independence from the rule of what used to be called "Muscovy," the central power of the tsars. Economically, there is bound to be further breakup as the economies of central Asia trade more with

Asia and the Middle East.

Asian trade with Russia has been limited. India has been a large trading partner, but much of that trade is under barter conditions, both nations being short of foreign exchange. For a few years, Victnam was a political partner of Russia, but trade was limited.

The most solid trade link has been between eastern Russia and Japan. The special modern port of Wrangel was built several years ago on the Siberian coast to handle massive exports of wood-pulp to feed Japan's burgeoning paper

closed naval port at Vladivostok is opening up, Siberian trade with East and Southeast Asia, and the Trans-Siberian railway link with Europe, are bount to get busy.

The three independent states on the Baltic Sea Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania may well revive their former flourishing trade with the West. Along with the ports of Poland and North Germany, we may see the revival of the old "Hanseatic league" of merchant republics, which were among the very first democratic nations in Europe.

In contrast, let us look at China. Its economy is now forecast to grow at an average 7 per cent a year. Real growth averaged a high 8.8 per cent during the 1980s, but then harsh anti-inflation measures cut this to 3.7 per cent in 1989. It revived to 5 per cent in 1990, and growth this year to expected to be back to 8 per cent.

National income per person is still at a low US\$380 a year but industrial output has been reviving strongly and is forecast to soar to 13 per cent, especially in the rural areas and small towns. Light industry industry. Now that the hitherto is roaring away in southern

China, notably in the Special Economic Zones, where investment from Hong Kong. Macau and Taiwan is heavy.

These zones are in Zhuhai next to Macau, Shenzhen and Shantou next to Hong Kong. and in an area in Xiamen city in Fujian. Last year a similar zoning was announced for a huge Shanghai harbourside area which is to be cleared and rebuilt as an industrial and

commercial city. Chnia's agricultural output has grown considerably since 1978 (grain output is up 25 per cent; cotton, tea and sugarcane have doubled and oilseeds have tripled). Rice yields rose by one-third over the last five years, and are now among the highest in Asia. The recent tragic floods in central and east China have halted this improvement. The north and south, however, are not seriously affected.

China enjoyed a foreign payments surplus of US\$6.27 billion last year, and its foreign reserves have been soaring recently, from US\$15.95 billion at end-1990 to US\$45.4 billion at mid-1991. Its foreign debt is about US\$43 billion and the debt-servicing ratio is a comfortable 18 per cent of export

- Depthnews Asia

# Infusing New Life into Literacy Efforts-II

by Mahmood Aminul Islam

bdun Noor of the World Bank in his paper "Proposing Another Dimension in International Adult Education: Availability of Education conceptualized basic eduction as learning three essential elements:

(1) Communication Skills and General Knowledge which at the basic level would include literacy; numeracy; general civic, scientific and cultural knowledge; values and atti-

(2) Living Skills and knowledge embracing health factors, sanitation, nutrition, family planning, the environment, management of the family economy and creating and maintaining home.

(3) Production Skills, em bracing all forms of activity directed towards making a living or the production of goods and service at whatever level.

According to Noor, the first objective of providing communication skills is fostered by two major instruments: primary education and literacy training. Of the two, primary education is considered the main instrument as it provides education to school age children thus cutting at the potential source of illiteracy. It is also considered basic for human development and improv-

ing the quality of life. The second instrument, literacy training, which mainly caters to the needs of adult illiterates has been found to be uneconomic with high-dropout rate and high incidence of relapses to illiteracy. Moreover, continuation of an adult literacy programme depends on sustained political

will over a long period. Noor therefore suggests that rather than waiting to make every adult literate, "desirable educational message can be packaged and delivered through the proper use of orally based communication patterns existing within a society - an ideal method of deliver living skills, the second objective of basic education."

The third objective of basic education is production skills. Knowledge about improving one's existing production skills (say of a farmer) or helping

mediate priority may be to pick up at least one adult member from each family represented in the cooperative, and ensure that he/she compictes the literacy course. This will be in addition to programmes which every co-operator must go through so that he/she becomes acquainted with living skills and knowledge without, in the first instance, learning how to read

ation. For co-ordination and control of literacy efforts a high powered autonomous authority may be created. The programme performance including demand for literacy will be periodically reviewed by this for issuing policy directives and allocation of resources. This will greatly reduce the overhead cost of the programme while maximising

the output.

seek a permanent solution to

the schools have only 3 rooms for five classes resulting in staggered shifts and short daily duration of classroom teaching) and dearth of other physical facilities, poorly motivated and ill trained teachers, inefficient management and academic supervision, lack of community participation, the policy of keeping large number of vacancies of teachers, su pervisors and field administra tors unfilled, and our inability to bring the non-govt primary schools into the main stream primary education

While intensifying the campaign for literacy we should

The above weaknesses in primary education have to be removed through policy reforms, adequate funding and improving the planning and management process. Sooner this is done, the better !

The educational needs of the youthful population (8-16) who have never been to schools or dropped out have to be catered for so that they do not join the rank of illiterates . These boys and girls should be able to complete education equivalent to primary education by following a shortened course of instruction. This is currently going on by the name of non-formal primary education in Bangladesh. This has to be expanded and strength-

Primary education, adult education and non-formal education for the youth have to go hand in hand for increasing the literacy rate in the country to an acceptable level. All the three should therefore enjoy top priority in development planning in the 90s.

Bangladesh is going without any mass education programme worth the name since after the death of President Ziaur Rahman in 1982, Valuable time has already been lost, and now is the time to act if we are to leap into the 21st century with a broad base of literate population who will take us on to the path of rapid

The writer is a former Additional Secretary of the Ministry of Education.

#### popularise literacy training and The official literacy programme suffers from the disadvantage that it does not provide the learners with any economic incentive in the immediate context.

him/her to learn newer skills can be given through oral instructions and demonstration. Literacy and numeracy certainly facilitates the learning process but is not indispensable for elementary skill training. For preparing the youth for productive work Noor suggests a systematic exposure of primary school children to informal work experience during their formative years.

The official literacy programme suffers from the disadvantage that it does not provide the learners with any economic incentive in the immediate context. The situation could be largely mitigated if the thousands of govt co-operatives of small and landless farmers and disadvantaged women are taken within the purview of the national literacy programme. With appropriate policy measures and allocation of adequate resources the cooperatives can play a crucial role in literacy drive. An imcreate an atmosphere in the community conductve to education of the children.

and write. Such an action will

The NGOs have done valuable work during the past 20 years and have developed very useful and innovative teaching materials for mass education.

The next national literacy programme could be a rolling plan, instead of a project extending up to the year 2000. The programme could be designed on the principle of active collaboration between the govt on the one hand and the NGOs, co-operatives and similar other institutions offering any form of economic pro-

The role of the government will be that of a facilitator assisting implementing agencies with subsidy, supply of primers and other teaching learning and post-literacy materials, teacher training, media support and monitoring and evalu-

the problem of illiteracy. As we all know, this is possible by universalising primary education in the true sense of the term. The statistics show that we have achieved a gross enrolment ratio of over 70%. But that gives us little comfort in the face of persisting high incidence of dropout and poor quality of education. We have also not so far been able to bring all primary age group children to school. And what about older children and youth (8-16 years) who have escaped schooling. It is heartening to note that the government has made primary education compulsory for 6-11 years age group children. But are we ready to enforce the compulsion and for full implementation of the programme?

As it is, primary education suffers from a number of problems like shortage of classroom accommodation (most of

tralised administration of primary education through upazilas, is not working creating a vacuum in management.

Moreover the policy of decen-

At the root of many of these problems that have plagued primary education is inadequate allocation of resources. The percentage of GNP spent on education is about 1.7% which is one of the lowest even among the South Asian countries. The per student recurring cost in government primary schools was only Tk 444/- in 1986-87 according to figures published by BANBEIS. And that small amount is almost entirely spent on teacher salary. The national workshop on Universal Primary Education held in Comilla, 1-3 April 1989 recommended that the allocation on education be raised at least to 2.5% of the

Concluded

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.

### Referendum — ballot symbols

Sir, The selection of a 'cross' sign in the ballot (for putting the rubber stamp by it) in favour of Presidential system does not appear to be a wise decision. What impression this cross would create in the minds of majority of voters who are not educated enough to understand the significance? It would mean something negative and undesirable to the unlettered as well as to somewhat-literate people. Does it not mean that the voters are being subtly discouraged to cast vote in favour of Presidential system even if somebody thinks it more suitable for our country?

The Election Commission would do well to clarify their choice, of such a symbol, to naive voters and general public.

A Hashem 62, Bijoynagar, Dhaka-1000

Sir, in the past all the elections in our country have been held on the basis of election symbols of different political parties. In a country like ours people are habituated to cast their votes easily, correctly and without much difficulty on

the basis of symbols. We strongly feel that for our imminent referendum our Election Commission may kindly select symbols for 'Yes'

and 'No' votes as clear as i) 'A group of persons' for 'Yes' vote (Parliamentary form of government) and ii) 'A man sitting on the chair' for 'No' vote (Presidential form of government) for the convenience of the voters.

There is still time for the Election Commission, political parties, Radio and Television to educate the voters to cast their votes on the basis of symbols correctly and judiclously and in large number to make the referendum a grand

O H Kabir

## Crime in Mirpur

Sir, For some time past, criminal activities in the Mirpur area (especially in Block F, Section 2, near the water tank of Section 2) have increased manifold. The number of various shops, road side rickshaw repair shops, video clubs, etc has increased enormously. Block F is a residential area and the lease agreement between the allottees and government specially stipulates that nothing should be done by either party to destroy the residential character of the housing estate. Instructions were issued by government to the Executive Engineer of Mirpur Division to remove the structures immediately, but nothing has been done by authorities. The residents of the locality are greatly disturbed. There is a small space allotted in the plan for children's park.

However, this space has become a football ground and a lot of noise is created by football players and onlookers. Recently, a rickshaw passenger was robbed of her money and ornaments in broad daylight. A few months ago, a young man was slaughtered on the main road in this block. The police knows of the incident very well, but many people say that the accused moves about freely. People have become panicky. Nobody dares reporting the matter because no action is taken. These shops and video clubs have, reportedly, become dens of such anti-social elements. Drugs are also freely taken in these dens. I would earnestly appeal to

the authorities to do something about all this to the redress of the residents.

One who knows

## ATP flies again

Sir, ATP flies again after being grounded following an accident at Rajshahi eight months ago. Before resuming operation of ATPs the State Minister for Civil Aviation and Tourism in a press briefing, a few days ago, tries to dispel doubt about the aircrast's airworthiness by stating that they are safe and there cannot be any question regarding their airworthiness. If the ATPs are safe, as told by the State Minister, then it raises several questions in the public mind:

Why the ATPs remained grounded for long eight months incurring loss of 30,000 dollars each day? And who will bear the responsibility for the loss?

Why futile attempts were made with British Aerospace to return the ATPs?

Why the order for third ATP has been cancelled even by paying penalty in foreign exchange?

Lastly, as domestic passengers have no other alternative (unlike in many western countrics) but to fly by Biman, I have a suggestion to the concerned authority to double the compensation amount in case of fatalities or injuries in the event of an accident. This would also match the enhanced price of the ATPs and might give an aura of dignity to some passengers flying by valuable ATPs!

Zavad Hasan Kalabagan, Dhaka.

### **OP-1** winners

We would request the US government to kindly reconsider the cases of selected op-1 winners who are being refused visas even after completion of all other formalities.

M Zahidul Hague Assistant Professor. Bangladesh Agricultural Institute, Dhaka-1207.

Sir, The American authori-

ties have suddenly stopped issuing visas to OP-1 lottery winners in Bangladesh. This has created serious dissatisfaction and problem among the Bangladeshi genuine OP-1 winners who have been anxiously waiting to migrate to USA. Many have sold out their properties to arrange for their travelling expenses while others left their jobs or even returned from abroad for availing the chance.

Washington's decision to suspend Op-1 programme in Bangladesh has deeply hurted the feelings of Bangladeshis. We actually never expected such action from the side of the American government.

development and progress.

# OPINION Government and Party

The Star's bold and innovative proposal (editorial, Aug 29) to visibly separate the party activities of the party in power, and the activities of the Government, calls for serious consideration by our esteemed leaders.

The man in the street (whose profession is not politics, and he is not expected to think as a politician) is firstly interested in what is being done by the government. Secondly he puts a judgement tag on the performance: good or bad, acceptable or condemnable. Third on his checklist is who are doing the job (good or bad - curiosity value). The Government acts anonymously. Ideally, it should not be necessary to know who are governing — like the air we breathe, the way the body works, a child grows up, or watching the sunsct.

Politicians and political parties think in the reverse order: first the party interest; then the job (or policy) - of interest to the party; and then the functioning of the Government, or governing the country.

The people's representatives running the administration are supposed to talk about the government policies and activities most of the time; and the party workers should be doing the propaganda for the party activities. There should be a visible demarcation of these two functions (although not water-tight), for greater credibility in building up a clearer and better image of how the country is being run (not how the party is being run). Party propaganda and government actions are not to be mixed up, specially when the vast majority of the voters are not enlightened enough to

separate the two. A lawyer looks at situations from the legal angle, a politician from the political angle, and so on; but the layman is a small generalist, as life is a mix of all factors, though invisible. Hence there is a communication gap in the propaganda (or, politely, publicity) methods, between the ruling and

the ruled. What we find is the heavy dependence on hero-worship and precedents. Suppose there are none, then rely on which carrot or stick? This constant reminder of who did what (good or bad) appears to be a sign of insecurity and lack of self-confidence in one's leadership capabilities. And it is dangerous, or embarrassing recall the status of the great being thrown out in Moscow.

The pragmatic approach is to get on with the present job, whatever it is (we are not that incompetent, but we try to be too clever). Dependence on history, or reminders, are not needed at every public meeting for motivation, approval, or as alibis, to go ahead on what needs to be done; because in daily life, a family hardly think of politics.

We have to face a fundamental question: what is the place of politics in life (for the general mass, not politicians)? Why everyone has to indulge in politics? Why this meddling is not done in other professional and technical fields? Is it because there is the misguided notion that commonsense is enough to take part in political activities? Then what about social science — why do we need social scientists, when we can judge people so easily? Who analyse the behavior of society? We should not meddle at professional level; there are other professional at these levels for checks and balance.

We need to redefine political activities, as practised in this part of the world. Let us have a closer look at it.