The Baily Star

Dhaka, Thursday, February 27, 1992

Towards Mechanised Agriculture

Agriculture — the mainstay as it is of the country and promises to remain so at least for the next few decades - certainly needs a reorganization from within, desirably through a happy blending with industrialisation. Nowhere should the need be felt more acutely than in the age-old system of manual agriculture. Speaking as the chief guest at a three-day workshop on "Agriculture Mechanisation — Its Present Status and Future Strategy in Bangladesh" at the Bangladesh Agriculture Research Council (BARC) auditorium, agriculture minister Majed-ul-Haq underlined the need in no uncertain terms.

We wish we could agree more with the minister's contention in a land-scarce country like ours, the option for agricultural mechanisation certainly proves overriding specially in the context of falling output in the sector. To get optimum agricultural yield from our limited land. mechanised system in this area is going to be the most effective answer. But mechanisation also has its pitfalls which have to be taken care of First, large-scale use of mechanised agricultural implements is going to turn a huge number of people employed in the sector redundant-already the number of such people is quite highand a way must be found for their gainful employment elsewhere. Second, in no way should mechanisation be allowed to jeopardise the already endangered environment of the country. Third, if mechanisation means a mad race for agricultural machines and tools of foreign origin, we should better think twice before opting for it.

Even then the question of mechanisation has become more or less settled in that people have been forced to go for the move due to extreme shortage of bullocks. Tractors, tillers and pump machines have found their use- although not widely yet- in our agriculture not so much for their relative advantage but because of the absence of any alternative. It is heartening, however, to note that the people of rural areas are making most of the limited facilities. Their ingenuity in the multi-purpose use of the pump engines is indeed commendable and also indicates the range and scope of mechanised agriculture in relation to agro-based small industries. That way also the rural unemployment problem can be solved to a large extent. More to the point, if such industries and agriculture can be made complementary to each other, the country surely stands to make greater strides.

In this context, the development of indigenous agricultural tools and machines suitable to our condition is a prerequisite. As for the production of pump engines, tillers and tractors, there is a great incentive because the potential market for such implements indeed is huge. Unfortunately, no private entrepreneur is known to have made a realistic assessment of this market and decided to take the advantage of the situation. If produced locally, the prices of such machines and tools would surely have come down. Low-cost agricultural implements in turn were to give double benefits: first by offering the facilities to more people and second, by saving a substantial amount of foreign exchange. Then, of course, the increased production, which is the main purpose, would surely have been served

And there is no reason why such a venture cannot be taken up. After all, the production of such machines and tools does not require too sophisticated a technology. So the thrust for developing such an industrial base can also provide employment for yet another considerable number of people through its ancillary small factories. And an added advantage it will be if the engines find their diverse uses, for that is how the margin of profit for the farmers is best guaranteed.

Thanks

We would like to express deep appreciation and sincere thanks for the promptness with which the international community, especially the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR), the World Food Programme and the European Commission, have responded to our call for assistance following the influx of Rohingya refugees now estimated to be 1 lakh 12 thousand. As it is well known, Bangladesh tried up to the very last minute, to solve the refugee problem bilaterally and hoped that good sense will prevail upon the Burmese authorities. Only when all other possibilities exhausted, Bangladesh decided to internationalise the issue and sought the help of the United Nations. So far the UNHCR has committed US\$ 1.1 million, the World Food Programme US\$ 1.9 million and the European Commission US\$ 647.500. All of this is in emergency aid and we hope that they will soon take up programmes for longer assistance.

It is becoming increasingly clear that no immediate solution to the refugee problem is possible. This means that the unfortunate Rohingyas will have to suffer the hardships of being refugees for a while. This brings us to the question of setting up suitable camps for the more than one lakh refugees — whose number is rising daily — to live. Already an UNHCR official has described the suffering of the refugees as something quite unprecedented. There is the obvious need to provide food, shelter, clothing and a minimum level of hygiene. There is already talk of epidemic spreading, which leads us to focus on medical needs for these destitute people.

In all the above areas we are in need of international help. As is well known, Bangladesh is hardly in a position to sustain the burden of the refugees. The economy, which is already in a poor state, is now under additional pressure and without international assistance we will not be able to carry this burden much longer. In meeting this humanitarian challenge we need and seek the help of all concerned, including the assistance of national and international non-governmental organisations. Here, however, the government appears to be in double mind. There is some suspicion as to how the NGOs will deal with this situation. As a reaction Bangladesh seems too relucfant to allow them to participate. We are of the opinion that no blanket position about NGOs should be taken. Their participation must be judged on a case by case basis. There are good international NGOs whose humanitarian work is acknowledged the world over.

THE CHALLENGES OF THE NINETIES

Diagnosing Ills and Enforcing Cures are Imperative for Society

by Dr Kamal Hossain

The prime challenges of the nineties are to diagnose the diseases from which our society is afflicted by long years of authoritarian rule and to prescribe prompt and correct remedies

diseases from which our society is afflicted by long years of authoritarian rule and to prescribe prompt and correct remedies. The first symptom of the disease manifested itself in the policy making process. Policies were not make in the national or public interest, but were made arbitrarily to serve the narrow interests of a greedy and selfish ruling group. This in turn led to the manifestation of other symp-Decade of Eighties

HE decade of the nin-

Driven by our urge to survive

we had, through our united

efforts, brought about the fall of a corrupt authoritarian

regime. We had ended the long

agony of feeling helpless, as

silent bystanders, witnessing

the destruction of our

economy, our society, and our hopes for the future. We

regained in December, 1990

what we had lost : namely, our

confidence and capacity to

shape our future and our

tain what we have regained.

Democracy means that it is

people who must effectively

participate in guiding and con-

trolling the policies and deci-

sions of the government. An

elected government has to

serve its masters, the people,

and to fulfil their expectations.

The key problem here is that,

after long years of authoritarian

rule, the social environment

and the apparatus of govern-

ment are afflicted with author-

itarian habits of mind and

work. In these circumstances,

the holding of an election and

establishing of a democratic

framework by themselves can

not deliver what is expected,

unless the sickness with which

society and the governmental

apparatus have been afflicted

under an authoritarian regime

is properly diagnosed and

nose the sickness and identify

the organs which have been af

flicted. Only then can a pro-

cess of healing begin. As is true

fected organs are identified

and prompt treatment is done,

one can save a patient and re-

This is why the decade of

nineties is of critical impor-

tance in our nation's life. Our

nation is like a patient, who

has emerged from the opera-

tion theatre after a major

surgery. The removal of the

corrupt authoritarian regime

in December, 1990 is like the

removal of a cancerous tumour

from the body. Since, however,

this tumour had existed for a

long period, the cancerous

cells have spread to other or-

gans in the body. Unless these

organs are identified and nec-

essary treatment is done, the

possibility of regaining the

health of the nation can be

lost. On the other hand, cor-

rect and timely identification,

and prompt and effective

treatment can start the pro-

cess of healing so that by the

end of the decade, we can

hope for a healthy, strong and

The prime challenges of the

OR the Zionist move-

ment, immigration to

Israel is regarded as

the duty of every Jew across

the world. The term aliyah —

Hebrew for ascent - is used to

describe the movement of

those Jews who move from the

Since Israel was created in

1948 its leaders have viewed

aliyah as the principal means

of maintaining a Jewish major-

provoked sharp debate.

Palestinians, exiled en masse

in 1948, have complained that

the Israeli "Law of Return" of

1951 legally excludes them

from going back to their

Nevertheless, Israel has al-

ways encouraged Jews to im-

migrate. In 1989 the former

Soviet Union lifted emigration

restrictions and Israel braced

itself for a huge influx of Soviet

Jews. Expectations have been

met. Nearly 400,000 Soviet

Jews have arrived in just under

in Israel realised absorbing the

immigrants would not be easy.

Many knew next to nothing

about Jewish traditions and

Zionism. A number came to

Israel simply to get out of the

worsening internal situation in

the Soviet Union. It was not

realised that the real concern

for the immigrants would be

Israeli press has been filled

with horror stories about

Soviet immigrants. The source

of their misery is economic.

Some estimate that up to 400

immigrants commit suicide

every year, though figures are

In the last two years the

bread-and-butter issues.

Politicians and sociologists

The politics of aliyah have

diaspora to Israel.

homeland.

three years.

nineties are to diagnose the

vibrant society.

store him to health.

of cases of cancer, if the af-

We must, therefore, diag-

We have, first of all, to re-

destiny

eties began for us with

the rekindling of hope

The decade of eighties has, thus, been termed as a decade of stagnation by our economists. This was the result of lack of responsible economic policy making and management. The growth rate in the eighties averaged 3.1 per cent, having in fact declined to 2.7 per cent per annum in the period of 1985-86 to 1988-89. Agricultural growth came down to 1.6 per cent per annum in the 1980s from 4.2 per cent per annum in the 1970s. Manufacturing growth rate dropped to a mere 1.7 per cent per annum.

The share of the manufacturing sector in the total GDP stagnated at the level of 10 per cent during the decade of the eighties. This led some observers to term the eighties as the decade of de-industrialization. Gross domestic invest ment fell from 15.9 per cent in 1980-81 to 11.6 per cent in 1989 90. This contrasted to 24 percent in Sri Lanka (1988) and 22 per cent in India (1985-89). The already low levels of domestic savings decreased (as a percentage of GDP) significantly from 3.4 per cent in 1980-81 to 1.2 per cent in 1989-90. The gravity of this can be appreciated if one contrasts this with the savings rate in neighbouring countries - 11 per cent in Nepal. 22 per cent in India, 11 per cent in Pakistan and 13 per cent in Sri Lanka

The pervasive poverty in which the majority of our people live has deteriorated further. The recent report by the Bangladesh Board of

Statistics shows increase in

Soviet Jewish Immigrants

the proportion of rural hard core poverty from 22 per cent to 29.5 per cent. Poverty is also reported to have increased among the urban poor. Another disturbing dimension is the increase in rural/urban income disparity. The average per annum income in 1977/78 was about 21 per cent higher in urban areas than in rural areas. The corresponding figure in 1984 was 32 per cent. These rural/urban disparities have been further accentuated in the eighties. The average urban income was 49 per cent higher than average rural income in 1985/1986 and 56 per cent higher in 1988/1989. Economic stagnation and

the persistence of poverty were the result of lack of ac countability and total arbitrariness with regard to the mak ing of economic policy and economic management. The share of average government consumption expenditure as a percentage of the total expenditure increased from 50 per cent in the 1982-1985 period to 62 per cent in the post 1985 period. At the same time allocations of Annual Development Expenditure to agriculture and industry declined from 41 per cent in the first half of the eighties to 31 per cent at the end of eighties. It is noteworthy that the increased expenditure was not made from increased domestic revenues. Imports increased during the first half of the eighties at 4.2 per cent per annum, and at a rate of 9 per cent during the latter half of the eighties. There was a significant increase in the import of consumer goods at the cost of capital goods in the late

Non-productive Expenditure

The propensity to increase non productive expenditures and consumption while the saving rates continued to fall and domestic resources mobilisation remained stagnant could only mean increased borrowing the greater dependance on foreign aid. The share of external resources in financing development expenditure increased from 76 per cent in the early 1980s to 92 per cent in the late 1980s. The debt services-to-export earnings ratio increased from 13 per cent in 1979/1980 to 26 per cent in the latter half of the eighties.

There were persistent reports of corruption during that period involving procurement of machinery, equipment, planes, speedboats and ships at highly inflated prices and involving substantial illicit payments running into millions of dollars in the case of large public contracts. Despite the professed

priority given to education, the allocations in the Annual Development Plan (ADP) in 1991 was 7,8 per cent, far lower than that required to meet the targets set. There was only 1.2 per cent increase in the number of primary schools between 1985/1986 to 1989/1990. The proportion of the ADP allocated to health was less than half of education. that is, 3.6 per cent in 1990-

These were glaring symptoms of the ills which afflicted the system of governance under a corrupt authoritarian regime. There was a great gap between verbal commitments made and actions taken. There had during the decade been little or no public participation in policy making. There was hardly any information avail able to the public to assess the economic management. There was no transparency or accountability. It was only in the last stages of the regime that determined efforts by our economists and other professionals brought before the people the evidence of gross economic mismanagement and large-scale corruption. The banking system had been undermined by interventions by the corrupt ruling group. Telephonic directions from the highest levels led banks to disburse crores violating all the norms of banking and to protect defaulters against legal actions for recovery. The banks instead, of being an instrument for enforcing financial discipline, were used to promote

extreme financial indiscipline The educational system was undermined not only by failure to allocate the needed resources to cope with the increasing number of students at all levels, but also due to induction of armed musclemen ("mastans") to create terror in the colleges and universities. Certain agencies with unlimited funds inducted criminals into the campus and manipu-

lated activities to the extent of

inciting killing and other

forms of campus violence so

Civil Service

that students could not unite in a movement against autoc

A constitutionally protected civil service could effectively serve the public interest Without any constitutional protection however and subject under martial law to arbitrary transfers and removal. The civil service lost its capacity to exercise any form of check on the arbitrary actions of an authoritarian government. The civil service under an authoritarian regime was made to carry out arbitrary and unlawful orders. This was evident in their general disregard for the law, in the making of illegal orders of detention, in the closing down of newspapers

and in their being made to act as accomplices in corruption. To turn from the civil ad ministration to the law-enforcing agencies we find that they also were afflicted by serious atlments. The law enforcing agencies were used as instruments of repression against people striving for their rights. They were also used to carry out illegal tasks assigned to them such as rigging elections. participating in vote dacoity and harassing opponents of the regime. The law enforcing agencies were also made to look the other way when serious crimes were being committed by the privileged per sons of the ruling group. This led to total demoralization and undermining of the lawenforcing agencies as a force committed to uphold and enforce the law. What struck at the very core of the institution

was their being pushed into acting as corrupt accomplices of smugglers, drug dealers and other powerful groups of crim-

There was thus a process of systematic destruction of checks and balances. The absence of mechanisms of checks and balances of a democratic form of governance enabled the Government to misallocate and waste resources. Such waste and misal location undermined overall efficiency since, under such a system it is not productivity or efficiency which is rewarded but sycophancy and clien-

What then needs to be · done? First. I think I can say without fear of contradiction that there is in the country a clear consensus that we want to cure our society of the discases that afflicted it during the authoritarian period and to build a healthy society.

The movement to remove the corrupt authoritarian regime was impelled by the very basic urge of survival. Our population which is today around 12 crores, is expected to increase to 14 to 15 crores by 2000. During this period the new entrants into the labour market, it is estimated will be over one crore.

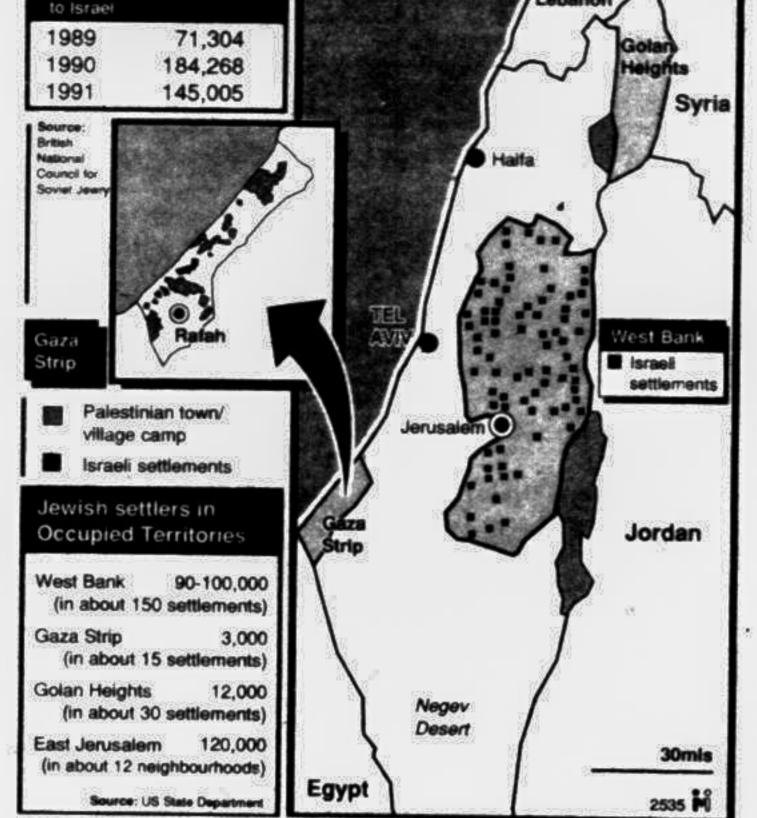
To envisage how we might cope with this increase in the population and the labour force, alternative scenarios of growth are presented by our economists. The base case scenario projects a growth rate of 3.5 per cent in the coming decade. A more optimistic high case scenario projects a 5.2 per cent growth rate. Employment of the bulk of the additional labour force would only be possible under the optimistic scenario. In order to reach 5.5 per cent rate of growth, the aggregate annual investments, both in the public and private sectors, must increase to at least 14 per cent to 15 per cent. Even this higher rate of investment would not be sufficient to achieve growth at the desired level without significant improvement in the efficiency of resources use. If the 5.5 per cent rate of growth is not achieved but only 3.5 per cent rate is achieved, the bulk of the additional labour force would not be employed, economic conditions of the poor est members of society would deteriorate and targeted programmes for alleviation of poverty, and in the health and education sectors, would also not be achieved

(To be concluded tomorrow)

Soviet Jews Still Seeking their Promised Land

by Benjamin Cohen

Israel has always encouraged Jews to immigrate. Since 1989, when the former Soviet Union lifted emigration restrictions, nearly 400,000 Soviet Jews have arrived. But Israel has now realised that absorbing the immigrants is not easy. Immigrants too are finding Israel is not the promised land. Gemini News Service reports their dilemma: to face renewed anti-Semitism in Russia or live in Israel's occupied territories.



hard to verify as they are subject to Israeli military censor-

Official data about immigrant unemployment confirms that conditions are indeed desperate. For example, by August 1991, the immigrants included 60,000 engineers.

7.000 artists, and 8,000 doc-

Skills like these are not in short supply in Israel. There is already a surplus of such professionals among the popula-

About 40 per cent of the immigrants are therefore registered as unemployed. Many perform the menial tasks previously assigned to Palestinians from the occupied territories - restaurant waiters, labourers and so on. While Palestinians from refugee camps could just about make ends meet on the paltry wages, immigrants in Israeli cities cannot afford to eat or pay rent.

They are increasingly realising that Israel is not the promised land its envoys make it out to be. The government has now been forced to admit that many immigrants are leaving the country. In December 1991. Uri Gordon. chair of the Jewish Agency's Immigration Department, said 7,000 immigrants had left the country and that 3,000 more were waiting to be resettled elsewhere.

Even so, finding another country is not easy. In January 270 Soviet Jews won refugee status in Germany after a protracted battle with the authorities. In Sweden, 500 Soviet Jews have been waiting since last August for temporary resident status.

In South Africa, 900 Soviet Jews are trying to get citizenship, and 9,000 more are understood to have applied for it. The United States - the favoured destination for most immigrants - has an official annual quota of 50,000. Most gaining entry have relatives al-

ready living there. These difficulties have arisen for two reasons. Firstly. Western countries are reluctant to admit refugees, as this could lead to a mass exodus from the economically troubled regions of Eastern Europe, as well as the developing world.

Secondly, many Soviet Jews who have left Israel have testi fied that Israeli diplomats in the countries where they are seeking refuge pressure the local authorities not to grant residency status.

The recent deportation of a group of Soviet Jews from the Netherlands is a stark example. About 200 who arrived there last September were put in refugee centres. On December 16 Dutch police stormed a centers in Eindhoven carrying deportation orders for 51 of them. Many immigrants alleged that the Israeli Embassy in The Hague had kept quiet over this incident.

A spokesperson for the Embassy said only that Israel had regarded the deportation as an internal matter for the dutch authorities.

However, Michael Kleiner, chair of the Immigration Committee of Israel's Knesset (parliament), declared that the immigrants should be put on trial for libelling the State of Israel.

Dmitri Zubrinski, a Soviet Jew who is appealing for asy lum in the Netherlands, says discrimination was a major problem for the immigrants.

Mixed marriages are common among the immigrants and in Israel non-Jews are not entitled to a range of benefits. Also, identity cards issued to every Israeli show whether a

person is Jewish or not. Zubrinski's reason for leaving Israel is related to military service. He worked on the

Soviet space shuttle programme and the Israeli army wanted him to help build missiles. He left Israel before giving them an answer.

Yet Zubrinski was equally shocked by the institutional discrimination he witnessed against immigrants and Arabs. In particular, he accuses the Israeli Absorption Ministry of having used a private company

- SSITM International Trade and Marketing - to compile lists of non-Jewish immigrants, in order to prevent mixed marriages (there is no civil marriage in Israel).

SSITM approached non-Jewish immigrants with the pretence of helping them resettle in other countries. A \$500 charge was made for the service, but no-one ever received an airline ticket.

At least 3,000 people registered complaints about SSITM with the Tel Aviv police, but nothing was ever done. When lda Ben Shitrit, spokesperson at the Absorption Ministry, was asked about SSITM she furiously denied any connection. The company has since collapsed following exposure of its activities in the Israeli

press. Zubrinski is especially angry with the Jewish Agency, which supervises the immigration. Agency representatives who met with him in his home town of Chelyabinsk said conditions in Israel were fine. "But in every area of life there". he says, "you feel humiliated and excluded."

The problem is likely to grow. The prospect of renewed anti-Semitism in the former Soviet Union will lead more Jews to Israel. Moreover, Soviet Jews are deeply unhappy with the idea of living in the occupied territories. where many are being settled.

Essentially, Soviet Jews are caught in a trap. They can either stay in the new Commonwealth Independent States, where their future is uncertain, or move to Israel, where they can choose between unemployment in Tel Aviv or a settle-

ment in the West Bank. Western governments are likely to be asked to help desperate Jews for the second time in 50 years. They will also have to contend with the pressure of a state which portrays itself as the immigrants home-

land. BENJAMIN COHEN, who is based at the Institute for War and Peace Reporting in London, writes frequently on Mtddle East issues...

People's representatives!

Sir, Against the backdrop of fierce competition from all sides for increase in pay, allowances and benefits, our representatives in the parliament have shown unprecedented and exemplary unity among themselves by more than doubling their benefits including pension and import of duty free cars. This certainly proves - how truly representative in character the people's representatives are ! Hat's off to them.

But the irony of the matter lies in that this news appeared parallel to another news on the same time wherein our Prime

Minister has reported to have urged for a 5-year moratorium on pay hikes and demands and warned that trouble-markers in the public sector enterprises raising "unjust" demands would be strongly dealt with. What a glaring example of what can be called - you do not practice what you preach!

While we do not deny the parliament members getting their due keeping in view their august responsibilities but at a time when every body admits that the country's economy is in bad shape, the 'entente' shown by the members of parliament - be in government or in opposition - in increasing their benefits was certainly not holy or ethical. One request to

the people's representative heal thyself before you prescribe for others. S A Moazzam Dhaka

Re-opening of BCCI

Sir, Bangladesh Bank, the

regulatory authority and li cence issuing authority of all scheduled banks in Bangladesh is completely mum for the last seven months regarding opening of Bank of Credit and Commerce International (Overseas) Ltd.'s branches in Bangladesh. We, citizens of Bangladesh, deposited our hard earned money/life's savings to these branches to earn a marginal profit by way of interest. We don't know how the

banking affairs are being controlled by our central bank and why they are not coming up with a solution to the problem of about forty thousand depositors. What role is being played by the Ministry of Finance which is the supreme authority and has declared immediately after closure of the bank that the interest of the depositors would be protected?

Now, we are exhausted. frustrated and want that Bangladesh Bank and Ministry of Finance should come forward to re-open the bank and start transactions in whatsoever manner they want to do it. We have become sick of the dilly-dallying tactics.

A Sufferer