

Fish as a Resource

Lack of natural resources has often been cited as a major reason for the poverty and underdevelopment of Bangladesh and its people. This excuse is used despite the existence of resources such as water, which may not be as glamorous or dollar-spinning as oil, diamond or uranium, but which could, with efficient management and exploitation, prove just as profitable in the socio-cultural context of Bangladesh. Water does not only make the soil of Bangladesh one of the most fertile in the world, it also provides an inexhaustible supply of fish. With such a resource in our possession, why is it that average intake of fish protein has sharply declined over the past three decades? Why is it that fish has gone increasingly beyond the purchasing power of a large section of the populace? The answer to all the whys related to this dismal state of affairs has to be that, over the past three or four decades, management of water resources has been poor, riddled with corrupt practices and bereft of ideas.

It is true that the government, in the mid 1970s, had taken up some projects, through the Department of Fisheries, to organise intense fish farming in government-owned khas ponds to increase fish production. But, as an article in this paper published last Sunday explained, corruption and mismanagement had succeeded in only decreasing the level of production, below even the level of natural and unmanaged water bodies. The failure of the Neemgachi Fish Culture Project in Rajshahi, due to floods, poor quality water, and poaching and plundering by local elite in collusion with DoF staff, meant that things could only go from bad to worse. But as the same article pointed out, in some detail, that the Grameen Bank, after taking over the project in 1986 and renaming it the Joysagar Fish Farm, has not only succeeded in reversing the decline in production, but has also given local landless people a sense of participation and social security.

The cooperative approach of Grameen may not be to everyone's liking, but the point is, the lesson of the bank's success can be learnt and applied in different contexts. For one thing, the government's current policy of granting leases of khas ponds to dubious middlemen has got to change. In addition to the short-term nature of those leases, the government should think about taking up a thorough study to determine the true potential of the fish industry in the country, and work out a comprehensive, long-term policy. The study should naturally focus on the role that local landless farmers and fishermen could play in invigorating the industry, thereby increasing their own income and generating greater economic activity at the local level. The cooperative approach of Grameen is attractive because it gives the people, collectively, a major stake in looking after the ponds as well as in resisting poaching. The government may need to take part in the development of fish farms, but its involvement ought to be limited to providing infrastructural support and finance. The management of the farms, ought to be left to development agencies such as the Grameen Bank, with the ultimate aim of handing over the farms to the farmers themselves after the project has been put on a solid footing, no matter how many years it may take to achieve that goal. In short, the central bureaucracy and local vested interest have to be removed from any major role in the projects, and landless and poor fishermen have to be regarded as the rightful "owners" of the water bodies as the bottom line, while formulating the policy.

Doomsday Alarm

South Korea has made tremendous progress in recent times. Its economic growth is simply spectacular. Of the four tigers that have marked a growth rate consistently unbeatable over the past few years, Taiwan and S Korea lead the way. With a stage of development comparable to ours 30 years back, S Korea's industrial achievement since is quite phenomenal. Yet that country has been making newspaper headlines for the last couple of days not for such outstanding records. The fact that preachers of doomsday churches in S Korea set a deadline at midnight Wednesday for the world to come to an end is another side of the progressive Korea less known to people outside of that country.

It is difficult to say whether the followers of the doomsday cult numbering as many as 20,000 were disappointed when nothing happened, as predicted by their priests, for their deliverance from the mundane world. Some were however not so strict adherents after the false alarm and dared complain openly. But there were others who strongly believe in the second coming of Jesus Christ and are equally enthusiastic about supporting the church. There is no point accusing one for one's belief. But the doomsday cult seems to have gone a step beyond by setting the deadline for the world going bust.

If people's passage to the heaven is linked to the death of this beautiful earth with all its living beings, one does really find the idea not so pleasant. Religions, indeed quite a number of them, hold such a view that the world will be no more once and the virtuous will enter the heaven on that fateful day leaving the sinners to suffer. However, according to those religions, the end will not come so soon. The 30 S Korean churches have, it seems, set about bringing the day much too early.

Nothing wrong with their preoccupation with the doomsday. But when too much enthusiasm about it runs the risk — actually 15,000 police were kept standby to prevent mass suicide or other untoward incidents — of inviting great tragedies, one is prompted to comment that something somewhere has really gone wrong. In this connection it is worth remembering the mass suicide committed by a cult Reverend with his 500 or so disciples in Guyana. Extreme fanaticism most of the times ends in such tragedies. Then there are people in every clime to claim witnessing revelation. There is not a single case where it has ultimately proved true. In the process it is the credibility of the preachers that is put into question and people lose faith in them. In countries like S Korea where hard work has made them what they are today, fanaticism of the order as demonstrated by the doomsday preachers is a positive disincentive to the workaholic motto. Notably, a critic of the cult was stabbed two hours after the deadline passed uneventfully.

It is going to be the third winter of fighting in the northern Indian state of Kashmir, and all signs indicate that the cold-blooded conflict will intensify.

Indian security forces have stepped up operations against Kashmir's Muslim separatists who enjoys widespread support among an increasingly alienated people.

The state administration claims 'Operation Tiger' launched two months ago has been a success with over 170 Muslim militants killed in combat, but most Kashmiris say many of those who died were executed after capture.

In Srinagar, Kashmir's scenic lake-side capital, the official Indian media has lost all credibility and rumour mills are churning overtime. The leader of the militant Hizbul Mujahideen leader, Saifullah, was killed recently. But no one here believes the official story that the cuts on his body are post-mortem marks. Most are convinced Saifullah was tortured and killed.

Indian and foreign human rights groups have reported gross violations of fundamental

Winter of Woe for Kashmir

A hard winter lies in store for Kashmir, where Indian security forces are cracking down on separatists and rapidly alienating the population. Ranjan Roy of IPS reports from New Delhi.

rights in Kashmir. A British parliamentary group claimed in London this month that over 200 people have died or disappeared in custody during 1990-91. India dismissed the report as "one-sided".

In Srinagar, governor Girish Saxena admits there are cases of custodial deaths. But he said in a recent interview: "In large-scale operations, where hundreds are arrested every week, some incidents do take place."

The incipient revolt in India's only Muslim majority state erupted into a full-fledged battle between well-armed militant groups and security forces in 1989. Since then, the Kashmir valley has been the scene of bitter clashes that have paralysed the state and left nearly 3,500 dead, according to official estimates.

New Delhi has not been able to douse the separatist fires in Kashmir where the majority of the state's four million people are Muslims. India has time and again accused Pakistan of financing and arming the rebels.

The two countries have fought three wars over the disputed state since independence in 1947. India and Pakistan presently control different halves of the divided state.

While New Delhi claims full sovereignty over Kashmir, Islamabad says the Muslim population should be allowed to choose between the two countries.

But even Kashmiri guerrilla groups are divided on the is-

sue. While some like the moderate Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF) are fighting for independence from India, others want to secede and join Pakistan.

The JKLF is based across the border in what India calls Pakistan-occupied Kashmir and Pakistan calls Azad (Free) Kashmir. It has announced plans to march into India on October 24 to commemorate the installation of its government in exile.

A similar attempt by JKLF supporters to storm the border in March was called off after Pakistani troops stopped marchers at gunpoint amidst worries that the event would trigger off a war. At least 16 people were killed when Pakistani forces fired to prevent JKLF supporters from breaching border barriers.

This time around, Sardar Abdul Qayyum Khan, prime minister of Azad Kashmir is quoted saying: "We will not use force against the marchers... we will persuade them."

Intelligence sources in New Delhi said the border crossing is planned at 40 points along the line of control and the 210 km international border.

India is likely to beef up heavy patrolling this month of its western border with Pakistan where both sides routinely exchange fire. In the latest shelling two weeks ago, three people in some border villages were killed and 700 others fled to safety.

Kashmir has been top of the agenda in recent talks between Islamabad and New Delhi, but there has been little headway on an issue that India insists

must be settled bilaterally under a 1972 agreement between the two countries.

Most Indian observers believe the insurgency in the strife-torn state can be solved only if both countries include the militants in peace negotiations.

New Delhi's peace efforts have been stalled since 1990 when the state was put under central rule. In recent weeks, the government has again started talking of elections in Kashmir. Junior home minister M M Jacob said they will be held "soon".

But officials in New Delhi do not think the state is ready. Ram Mohan Rao, adviser to the Kashmiri governor told IPS in New Delhi: "Political parties do not feel confident of holding public meetings."

The state government has opened channels of communications with militant organisations, but there can be no talks till they give up the gun. Writer is bound to harden attitudes on both sides, and make chances of a compromise settlement even more slim.

Chiluba Rides the Raucous Party Politics in Zambia

Fred Chela writes from Lusaka

Full-blooded politics has come to Zambia in its first year of multi-party rule. President Frederick Chiluba has had a stormy introduction to power and the political in-fighting has been relentless. First anniversary of Chiluba's rule is November 2. But he has battled through. Zambia is getting major support from donor countries and the distribution of imported maize has kept away famine threatened by drought.



KEBBY MUSOKOTWANE in the steps of Kaunda

ROCKY and bruising. That just about sums up the first year in office of President Frederick Chiluba, who topped Kenneth Kaunda after 27 years in power. Kaunda has now resigned as leader of the opposition United National Independence Party (UNIP). His successor is former prime minister Kebby Musokotwane.

In the face of many difficulties Chiluba is proving a tenacious leader. He remains buoyant despite politically troubled waters compounded by high consumer goods prices.

Zambia has received massive balance of payments support from the European Community to cope with the devastating economic problems inherited from the previous regime.

The British government has pledged £14 million for development programmes. Overseas Development Minister Lady Chalker pledged support for the economic restructuring programme while United States Assistant Secretary for African Affairs Herman Cohen said "Zambia was a model democracy and its market forces policies will be ably supported."

Japan, the largest donor to Zambia, has promised continued support. The World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) have pledged more than \$300 million while the Paris and London Clubs are to provide Zambia with about \$1 billion in the current fiscal year.

Even once world-ostracised South Africa is investing heavily in Zambia. Foreign Affairs Minister Vernon Mwaanga admitted: "South Africa is Zambia's largest trading part-

ner in Southern Africa. More than 100 commercial farmers have applied to set up farms in various parts of Zambia."

Kaunda had predicted that the Movement for Multiparty Democracy (MMD) government would collapse in nine months. For the time being at least, the grand old political tactician has been proved wrong.

The first eight months of power were gruellingly rough. The most devastating drought in memory to afflict Zambia piled on the political agony.

Food scarcity would have quickly brought down the new democracy, save for the massive donor support.

Chiluba's government was elected on the premises of transparency and accountability, but within six months, it was rocked by allegations of corruption in the cabinet. Two of Chiluba's closest political colleagues resigned, concerned at what they said was going on.

Chiluba rebutted the charges, saying: "The two cabinet ministers refused to serve in the cabinet from the very start. They have been looking for a pretext to get out." Cabinet colleagues agreed. It surfaced that both had wanted better posts.

To counter rumours of mass defections from the MMD, Chiluba dismissed his Information Minister, the Croatian-born Rev. Staan Kristofar and his uncle, Works and Supply Minister Ephraim Chibwe. Kristofar cried foul — "I have been a sacrificial lamb" — but later apologised. Chibwe accepted dismissal without demur.

UNIP accusations persisted. Musokotwane jubilated. "The MMD collapse is imminent," he said. "It is a question of months, if not days. They are an inexperienced lot."

Kaunda echoed him: "The government is composed of

cheats. They were a bunch of frightened little men being advised by western countries and bent on selling land and state-owned firms to foreign companies. This will breed land and unemployment chaos."

Lands Minister Dawson Lupunga dismissed the insinuations: "It is pure lies. We are scrutinising applications for farmers wishing to invest in agriculture with utmost strictness."

Chiluba's ministers mobilised donor aid to stave off famine. More than three million dollars worth of maize grain, the staple food for most urban dwellers, poured into the country.

Minister of Agriculture Dr Guy Scott came under fire from the interim president of the new United Democratic Party (UDP), Enock Kavindele, who accused him of importing rotten maize from Argentina to poison Zambians.

Scott said the story was the product of someone's imagination: "It is comic for people to dismiss maize certified by international scientists as not fit for human consumption." Donors rallied behind Scott and the maize meal is now available everywhere.

Commerce and Industry Minister Ronald Penza was also caught in the web of criticism, connecting him to the \$27 million Japanese aid grant.

Charged Kavindele: "Cabinet ministers with no kwacha cover benefited more than other deserved Zambian businessmen."

Chiluba published a full list of beneficiaries to vindicate his administration and asked Kavindele to produce his so-called list. Kavindele could not substantiate his claims.

A sign of the learning process is that the government has made some preposterous public statements which could have been avoided. Chiluba conceded: "Criticism is healthy because it keeps us on our toes. We must be seen to be transparent and accountable to the people who elected us."

He warned ministers: "They should not think or behave like surrogate presidents in their own right. Any minister who fails in his leadership and devotion to duty shall not be left unchecked."

Privatisation brought more controversy when Penza told an American business delegation that Zambia Consolidated Copper Mines (ZCCM), the Postal and Telecommunications Corporation (PTC), and the Zambia Electricity Supply Corporation (ZESCO) would be privatised.

Zambia Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU) president Fackson Shamenda chided Penza: "He is drunk with the subsidy of democracy we have

given them. Where will he take the entire labour force in these institutions?"

A chorus of attack came all the opposition parties and from government circles, showing signs of incoherence in the MMD public relations machinery.

Chiluba and his Vice-President, Levy Mwanawasa, told the electorate: "The mines will be privatised in phases, not for the time being after all, but in ten to 20 years."

Penza bravely said: "If we have to invite investors, we have to tell them the truth — truth hurts but that is the MMD policy." He added: "If you scare them they will go elsewhere and we shall lose. This is not the time to talk about socialism because it has not worked anywhere."

A UNIP central committee member warned: "We shall renationalise all state firms the MMD will privatise when we are elected to power."

Business circles shivered. Mwanawasa said: "That is the most irresponsible statement to come from an opposition party. That is very damaging." Chiluba pointed out that nationalisation had destroyed what was once a vibrant economy.

Many other thorny issues have marked Chiluba's first year — teachers' strikes, University of Zambia class boycotts by lecturers and students and escalating commodity prices. Despite all these, the government seems to be weathering the political tempest.

— GEMINI NEWS
FRED CHELA is editor of Media Services Africa, a small independent news agency in Zambia.

To the Editor...

Irregularities in promotion

Sir, The irregularities in the mass promotion of officers sometime back particularly to the posts of Deputy Secretary and Joint Secretary to the Government is unprecedented in the history of services of not only Bangladesh but in the whole of sub-continent including Sri Lanka since all the countries in the area more or less follow the old British system. The age old practice of giving promotion according to seniority has been totally ignored. A man having even around 10 years edge was also superseded by many juniors. This has created much frustration among the superseded officers thereby negating the propagated view of the Government that such promotion would give incentive to the officers and they could give their maximum to the Government. The scale and dissension of irregularities have gone to such an extreme that the State Minister in charge of Ministry of Establishment, had on one occasion confessed before the Hon'ble Prime Minister in an officers' conference that they (State Minister and others) had made mistakes as they were not angels and that the cases of superseded officers would be reviewed. Honest confession is appreciable but here it is regrettable because apparently, the mistakes were deliberately done to deprive eligible officers by following a system of interviewing candidates. Such interview is a new coinage to suit, maybe the personal whims not covered by relevant recruitment promotion rules etc. It is a kind of politicisation of the bureaucracy. It should be well understood that to change an age-old system needs a lot of thoughts and research before it should be put into practice, else it would boomerang and could only be counter productive. And actually it happened in the context under discussion. Further, it has been known that a one-man commission has been formed with the State Minister of the Ministry

of Establishment. It is not understood as to how he has been given this responsibility because it is he who has done the mistake.

Perhaps, it would have been fair if such a commission was formed with a neutral person like Chairman, Public Service Commission or Justice or High Court Judge. We have also heard that perhaps there would again be interview of the superseded officers. This exercise is not desirable since the superseded officers were already interviewed earlier along with their juniors. It serves no purpose to call them again and in fact, harass them. Besides, if someone is considered, he would become junior to the juniors already promoted earlier superseding him. This is against natural justice. Further, earlier even a man of the same batch if superseded was allowed pay protection under 'next below rule'. This rule is still not invalidated.

For the sake of justice and fairplay, it is now imperative that the cases of superseded officers are reviewed strictly in accordance with existing recruitment/promotion rules and the superseded officers are promoted giving seniority over the juniors who for any reason were promoted earlier. As juniors, they would also have no grudge if justice were done. It may be mentioned here that in the case of the erstwhile CSP officers, as far as I know, there is no instance of supersession. The same consideration perhaps could also be given to the members of other cadres for the sake of justice and equity.

It is expected that the Government committed to democracy both in words and deeds would take appropriate measures to redress the genuine grievances of the superseded officers at the earliest.

Ghulam Mowla
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In-flight safety

Sir, Lately, the incidence of aviation accident has increased alarmingly. In the last few months air accidents have

claimed several lives and caused fear among the air-passengers. Of course, in some cases, the pilots avoided accidents by returning back to the take-off airport soon after detection of technical faults.

It is evident that in many cases, the cause of accidents was technical faults in the aircraft. In my opinion, all the airlines of the world should discard the old aircrafts from their fleet and arrange weekly over-hauling of the new ones. This will obviously ensure in-flight technical safety.

M Zahidul Haque
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Taming the hapless

Sir, Why African refugees behaved weirdly at the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) in Dhaka recently must have provoked this UN organ to review its total operation.

This unique incident may also help reconsider the whole concept about caring for the displaced people of troubled states, especially in a distant LDC that is faced with grave economic crises for decades.

Probably the right time will justify the taking of Somalian refugees for Bangladesh when the burden of about 300,000 Myanmar refugees has yet to be loaded off.

While Bangladesh has her own permanent emergency relief programme together with various international humanitarian organizations ever since her emergence, the purpose of locating UNHCR facilities in Bangladesh must be serving any other humane premises; else the noble services of this part of the UN system would be appropriate anywhere on earth.

More or less, the necessity of UNHCR in Bangladesh must concern the thoughtful natives as regards national well-being, not simply for temporary helps for homeless aliens who are expected to be sheltered in this aids dependent country.

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OPINION

To Contain Corruption

Syed Mujtaba Quader

Two similar articles of special significance have recently appeared in 'The Daily Star' that need to be examined more closely. They hold the clue for the cure for all our troubles.

The first one written by Shah A M S Kibria titled 'Bangladesh Economy — A Crisis of Confidence' (20 Sep 1992) can serve as a mini expose of what is wrong with the banking sector of this country — that fountain of economic and industrial growth and regeneration in any modern economy. The inability of the administration, in the personification of the Finance Minister, to insert a sense of accountability in the banking sector because of wholesale corruption in the entire hierarchy of the banking establishment which feeds on inefficiency and degeneration is the crux of the problem. The foxes are guarding the chickens; and we should know the basic relationship between foxes and chickens. To save the chickens one has to kill the foxes, or at least drive them away.

The second article written by Shahed Latif titled 'The Changing Perceptions on Corruption' (21 Sep 1992) is an eye opening inside story of the causes, effects and emotion of corruption inside the walls of bureaucratic power — the prime mover of the cart of organised government. This superb expose of what can happen when need turns to greed and the gallant struggle of a few who do not give in was moving indeed. Half-baked and ill-conceived socialist policies imposed from without did take its toll. The country got the worst of both kinds of economies, the imposed central planning and the inherited market economy. If it may be added, it seems that some people got the best of both economies — the corrupt ones.

Syed Mujtaba Quader

That have been found over time to create or instil worth. If one wishes to increase one's self worth, one has to practise some values. The same may be applied to groups and nations. Worth, be it financial, intellectual or spiritual, cannot be acquired or enhanced without pursuing predetermined 'values'. Therefore 'value' is the most important ingredient, if not the only ingredient for development — 'development' being just another word for increasing worth.

Today, however, 'values' cannot be used without the hint of the ethical and the aesthetic being attached to it thus making it hard to be understood by the common person. But it cannot be considered as dictation to say that the relationship between 'values' and development is direct — instil 'values' and development will necessarily follow.

There are many scapegoats today in the economic landscape which is devoid of values. Some blame it on the type of government that was chosen for us. As much as it is debatable whether socialistic policies can claim any beneficial application basis in our cultural system, it is doubtful that the socialistic policies themselves were purely responsible for the present day rot. We have evidence that central planning in the early stage of a country's development is not all that untenable. Growth rates of over 7 per cent were not uncommon in the early years of socialist countries including China. This is a far cry from the growth rate of around 3 per cent in this country since 1971. Idealistic rigorous which require stringent application of the laws were well-known in socialist countries in the early years. In later years, however, this zeal is known to be on the wane, for whatever reason, which accompanies a gradual decline in the growth rate.

Even military rule does not

seem to so much affect a country's growth rate in the early years. It was surprising to discover from an interview with Mr Sartaj Ali, Finance Minister of Pakistan, published earlier in 'The Daily Star' that Pakistan, during the tenure of Ayub Khan, when East Pakistan was included in the geography, achieved a growth rate of 7 per cent which was slashed to around 3 per cent during the time of Bhutto and Ziaul Haq. As opposed to Ayub Khan's time when the law was stringently applied and corruption systematically contained, Bhutto and Ziaul Haq's times saw the gradual social acceptability of large scale corruption in Pakistan's society. Today in Nawaz Sharif's Pakistan a growth rate of 7 per cent is again being seen with corruption contained by the rationalisation of rules and procedures that aided corruption. These examples seem to suggest that the system of government followed by a people, at least in the early years, has nothing to do with the growth rate. It is rather the inability of a government to stringently apply the basic value system that is the cause of the low growth although no credence in any way is being given here to those forms of government which create peculiar polarisations in the populace and in time cause the whole society to be immersed in a sea of corruption and inefficiency. The self-serving and self-seeking abomination of a leadership circle that this country has endured so far has done little good.

If there is just one thing that we can do to turn the situation around in our country today, it is by the stringent application of our fundamental values as contained in our basic laws. Selective and irrational application of the law, encouraging the destruction of the value system, is the only cause of the curse today.

Can we do just that one thing?