

## Equal and Unified Rights for Women

It is reassuring to hear from the Law Minister that government is examining the extant body of laws with a view to making it secure the rights of women. We fully sympathise with the minister when he confides his difficulty in bringing all the law related to family and women within a consistent unified code.

What should be the ground on which the obscurantist positions as well as those built over economic exploitation can be engaged? Before going for an answer to this it must be understood that law neither establishes nor heals anything all by itself. There are laws enough against murder, rape and acid-throwing and girl-teasing etc. But women here continue to be the victims of the worst of the medieval barbarism all the same. The exercise of the social action groups like the Mahila Parishad or the government are addressing is to make sure that there is nothing in law that curtails a woman's rights and opportunities as a human being and if it is imperative for that to amend or throw out old ones and bring in newer laws — to do that. However difficult or delicate it may prove, there cannot exist in Bangladesh any law that militates against the application of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights to all the members of the female gender. More than this, all discriminatory or prejudicial parts of existing law should be so removed as to yield a unified code for all members of that sex — a code making them perfectly equal in rights and opportunities to the members of the other sex.

It is largely incorrect to see in local social practices affecting family and woman religious injunctions. As Islam is a religion international in following, regional, national, even tribal variation in the customs controlling those areas of social and individual conduct can be maddeningly different as evidenced in any unending feud on what's right and wrong — in any inter-district Muslim wedding in Bangladesh.

On top of this, religious authorities themselves have only interpreted what they thought the scriptures to mean. It is quite in order that the modern times and needs of it make for an interpreter by itself. There cannot be anything wrong in presuming that one of the first points of all religions is a fair deal to all — and that in modern times should cut across as much as the socio-economic classes as it should across the gender divide — the main ploy behind cheating the half of humanity by the other half and starting inherently from the very basis of social being, the family.

Equal rights for women may be an issue of socio-political debate in the US but in poor Bangladesh this is one of the last straws a nation at sea must tug at for survival. Credits here must be recorded for our successive leaderships in being very supportive — for more than the social situation would seem to allow — of women's progress in education and important jobs including policy-making ones. We are confident of the trend to continue. This leads inevitably to the question of equal opportunity. Right from birth the female one is at a disadvantage — opportunity wise. Women are lately coming out largely in the construction activities and the garment industry. It only looks as some opportunity but is indeed exploitation in disguise — the women are paid about half of what their male counterparts get.

Equal rights for all — irrespective of class, colour, sex and creed — must be encoded, there cannot be any question about that. Equal opportunity, encoded together with that, will need a lot more than law to realise.

## Rare Chance to Learn from

On hearing the news of the impending cyclone heading towards our shores we — being perhaps the only one — editorially urged our readers to "Pray for the best and brace for the worst." Praying is a spiritual act and judging its impact on human affairs is beyond us. We shall, therefore, restrict ourselves to commenting only on how we "braced" ourselves for what has become our annual, or nearly so, bout with natural calamity. From what we can gather on the basis of the initial reports, the local administration appears to have made a creditable attempt in evacuating people from the danger areas to the safer places inland. Government transport was made available in many instances to facilitate the evacuation process. The warning system also appears to have reached most of the people in the danger areas and, save for the desperate few, all responded to the warning and cooperated with the authorities in taking shelter.

It is seldom, if ever, that we get a chance to have a 'dress rehearsal' of an event of this nature. Having gone through all the motions of preparing and organising ourselves as if everything was for real, we should now try and learn the maximum from whatever we may have done incorrectly or not done at all. It is not yet clear as to what we found to be the weak links in the exercise of rescuing the people. We are afraid that truth may never come out as it is not in the nature of bureaucracy to make public its faults unless it is forced to. Therefore the first step that we would urge the government to take is to go for a thorough investigation of how scrupulously the laid down procedures were followed in this instance and what we can learn from this experience. This exercise will be undertaken, not with the intention of punishing anybody or organisation which may have failed to respond adequately or in time, but only for the purpose of learning from the mistakes and improving ourselves for the future. It is not only the steps for early evacuation, but the more difficult task of organising the logistics of relief, especially food and medical facilities, that we need to examine. As we have said, let us benefit to the maximum from this rare chance for a 'drill' as far as natural calamity is concerned.

There are the other vital issues of permanent shelter that needs to be addressed at the same time. We had raised this question earlier — that of constructing shelters in the cyclone and tidal wave prone areas. The ambitious plans that we so forcefully brandish in public once we are hit by a calamity and that almost inevitably disappears from sight soon after, should now receive our undivided attention. As we thank the Almighty for having spared this natural disaster, we must learn as much from this experience to better equip ourselves for any future calamity — God forbid.

# India Opens New Drive to Bust the Baby Boom

A J Singh writes from New Delhi

INDIA is caught in a demographic trap. Death rates have been declining over the years but population growth has remained high, despite government family planning drives in the last decade. The country has a population of 872 million with an average growth rate of 2.35 per cent a year in the last decade. Forty-nine babies are born every minute; 17 million added every year.

"If we continue to grow at this rate, we'll touch the one billion mark by the turn of the century," says Tara Devi Siddharth, Minister of State for Health and Family Welfare. Experts say that in 35 years India's population will double unless the growth rate is decreased sharply.

Out of the 25 states Uttar Pradesh in the north has the highest population of 140 million. "It can be called the seventh largest country in the world, coming after Indonesia," says demographer K Mathews.

Under a new thrust to control population, the federal Cabinet Secretary has identified those states where family planning has not been successful. The chief secretaries — topmost bureaucrats in the provinces — have been asked to send a monthly progress report. "Such bureaucratic will should have a significant impact," said an official.

Political leaders also seem to have shed their inhibitions to talk, and even take unpleasant decisions about birth control. For instance, Rajasthan state has enacted a law barring candidates with more than two children from contesting elec-

tions to village councils, known as panchayats.

A scheme called Jag Mangal (people's welfare) has been launched, under which trained volunteers will educate couples in the rural areas on family planning methods and distribute free condoms. In some states like Haryana, Punjab and Andhra Pradesh, condoms are sold at a nominal price in the government-run shops.

Administratively, India is divided into 490 districts. Experts have identified 90 which account for 40 per cent (or 340 million) of the country's population as 'problem districts'.

Bursting at the seams in population are states like Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan — 85 of the 90 problem districts belong to them. Administrative heads of these districts have been asked to formulate plans to check population.

Educated Indians blame this demographic mess on the ruling politicians. Family planning became a dirty word after 1975-77 — the years when India was put under an emergency by Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. During this period her son Sanjay Gandhi launched a vigorous sterilisation campaign which lapsed into coercion. To fulfil sterilisation quotas, the police forced people all over the country to be sterilised in mobile clinics.

This bred resentment and the people voted Indira out of power in the 1977 election. The new Janata Party government brought about only cosmetic change: It renamed the Family Planning Ministry as the Family Welfare Ministry.

Since then family planning

A meeting of the International Planned Parenthood Federation has just taken place in New Delhi. The venue could not have been more appropriate. Since independence in 1947, the population of India has almost tripled. Today it is 872 million and experts say that in the next 35 years, it will double unless the growth rate is cut sharply. Gemini News Service reports on the measures now being taken at the district level to stop the population explosion.



programmes have moved at a snail's pace. Having burnt their fingers in 1977 by imposing strategies and programmes from New Delhi, the leaders have become wiser. They now want the locals to plan and execute policies.

An analysis of the 1991 census showed that while the three southern states of Kerala, Goa and Tamil Nadu had lowered their birth rate after 1981, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Bihar and Rajasthan showed a surge in

growth. The analysts found a co-relation between female literacy, a balanced sex ratio and low population increase. Officials say the key to success in population control lies in overcoming psychological and social attitudes, such as the age of marriage.

K K Mathur, Secretary of the Family Planning Department, says that by raising the age of marriage for girls by two years from the present age of 18, a 25 per cent reduction in birthrate can

be achieved. He adds: "But this is something the law cannot dictate. There has to be some social machinery."

People do not listen to the politicians when they ask them to have fewer children because most elected representatives to the parliament and state legislatures have big families. Said government employee Ram Singh: "How am I expected to follow a minister's advice to limit my family when I know that he hasn't limited his own?"

The eastern state of Bihar is perhaps the worst offender. Its Chief Minister Laloo Prasad Yadav has nine children. The Prime Minister of India, Narasimha Rao, has eight and nearly 60 per cent of his ministers have more than two children — the country's norm.

Kerala continues to be a model state in family planning. The Chief Minister K Karunakaran has just one son and a daughter. "The strides made by the state in family planning has enabled it to achieve high levels of literacy (nearly 100 per cent) and a good standard in education," says Sudhakaran, Kerala's Minister of Sports.

Research into finding new, affordable and acceptable family controlling techniques is also progressing. Researchers at New Delhi's Indian Council for Medical Research (ICMR) are working on three new contraceptives for males and two contraceptives for females. A spermicidal cream produced from reetha (fruit of an indigenous tree) by the Central Drug Research Institute is also in its final clinical trial stage.

Dr S K Guha, of New Delhi's Indian Institute of Technology,

in collaboration with ICMR researchers, has produced a biodegradable plug that prevents passage of sperm. With this, males need not undergo sterilisation operations for birth control.

The plug, a polymer called Styrene Maleic Anhydride (SMA), has completed human safety trials. "It can be removed any time by a simple alkaline wash injection which dissolves the plug," says Dr Guha. The plug will not be felt nor will it detract from the enjoyment of sex.

Work on perfecting contraceptive vaccines for men at the Indian Institute of Sciences, Bangalore, is in an advanced stage and so is a once-a-week pill for women to avoid conception (named sahel or friend).

The burgeoning middle class has taken to contraceptives in a big way, but the poor still mostly do not practice birth control. Their logic: the more working hands, the more money they bring home to keep the hunger away.

Unlike the middle class, the poor have neither the money nor the time to give decent education to their children for professional careers. Under the new family planning drive, the target group is the poor.

The government is now considering a legislation to bar those with more than two children from elected offices, and to create a population commission headed by the Prime Minister.

A J SINGH is an Indian freelance journalist who writes regularly on environmental and development issues.

## TRENDS OF JAPAN'S OVERSEAS INVESTMENT AND CASE OF BANGLADESH-III

# Factors Other than Availability of Cheap Labour

by Ahmad Mahmudur Raza Chowdhury

IN the initial years after liberation, Bangladesh could not adopt adequate policy measures at home to attract foreign investment. There were also lack of promotional work in the Japanese market during this period. Consequently, Bangladesh failed to receive a share of Japan's first and the second investment booms. It was only towards the end of the third boom period that the case of Bangladesh (as a potential country to invest) began to be projected in Japan. An intensive PR work was needed in Japan to offset the prevalent ignorance about Bangladesh and to erase its negative image from the minds of the Japanese people. It was in fact a sine-qua-non in securing a foothold in Japan's overseas investment market which we had failed to mount. It may be recalled that the present rush of Japanese investment to ASEAN countries was preceded by years of intensive promotional work undertaken by the recipient countries jointly as well as individually within Japan. An excellent investment climate coupled with the favourable opinions formed by the satisfied Japanese tourists visiting ASEAN countries acted as the prime mover for the rush of Japanese investment to those countries later. However, through intensive promotional efforts in last 4 years, the name of Bangladesh and its EPZ have reached a substantial segment of prospective Japanese investors. It is now one of the countries in the portfolio of small and medium size Japanese investors who are looking for a lucrative manufacturing base overseas. Given the resource constraints under which the Mission in Tokyo had to work and in view of the short time-span, this can be regarded as a modest beginning which can be steered to the shore of success with sustained efforts at home and abroad.

Availability of cheap labour in a country is only one of the many variables that influence the time-consuming decision making process of a Japanese investor. Experience in Japan suggest that following factors are given detailed consideration by the Japanese investors before arriving at a decision concerning overseas investment:

**SIZE AND QUALITY OF LABOUR FORCE:** Large size of the labour force that guarantees a fairly stable wages over years is an important consideration. Availability of technicians, mid-level management cadre and the quality (adaptability) of the workers and the technicians are immediate concern of Japanese investors. Since investments are made on long term consid-

eration, the standard of education imparted in the technical institution, training facilities and average rate of passing outs from various institutions are also considered.

**INFRA-STRUCTURAL FACILITIES:** These include air, sea port and container facilities, frequency of direct cargo vessels between Japan and Bangladesh without undergoing transshipment at Singapore or elsewhere, stable and uninterrupted supply of electricity, direct international telecommunication (particularly fax and telephone) facility and the availability of dependable local workshops for handling sundry repair and servicing works. The extent to which the required raw materials are locally available is also an important consideration.

**GOVERNMENT POLICIES AND SIMPLIFIED PROCEDURE:** Consistency in governments fiscal and commercial policies go a long way in boosting the confidence of the investors. Also important is the law guar-

anteeing safety of the foreign investments. A country enjoying GSP benefits becomes all the more attractive for manufacturing items designed for third country export. Simplified procedures are desirable. The president of a US company had maintained in a seminar in Tokyo that he had to put signature at 32 different places in numerous forms and papers while submitting applications for setting up manufacturing facilities in an Asian country. He termed this onerous procedural requirement as "incredible". Board of Investments and BEPZA's one-stop services have been praised in Japan. Indeed, investors do not expect that all the people in a country to be

product in the local market is an added attraction compared with making an 100 per cent export oriented product.

**OTHERS:** Factors like proximity of the country, convenient air links, size of Japanese community, availability of liquor and Japanese foods and recreational facilities are few other considerations that a Japanese investor may not enquire directly. But he would invariably make a discreet survey of these aspects before coming to a final decision. Japanese people tend to ascertain the facts from their compatriots like those Japanese investors and manufacturers who have been actually operating in the country/EPZ. The success story

added attraction of its being close to the capital and the international airport.

**Epilogue**

Two distinct trends could be discerned hitherto in the flow of Japanese investments abroad. In the first category, large industrial units were first set up abroad, mostly assembly plants, to meet local market demands. This was gradually followed by shifting of the subsidiary units of affiliated industries to that country that made parts or components to feed the main plant. This process helped reduce cost of production by cutting back imports from Japan/home bases. In the second category, the affiliated or subsidiary units that manufactured components were shifted first to

settles down and the expected economic recovery begins by the middle of 1993 as a result of the pump-priming measures announced by the government to resuscitate the sagging economy. The need for overseas investment would be further accentuated by the factors like continued shortage of labour, higher wages and further appreciation of Yen against dollar. The need would be particularly more acute in the so-called sankans (meaning 3 Ks) industries. These are Kitanai (meaning: dirty), Kiken (risky) and Kitsu (difficult). These industries will have to look for alternate production bases outside Japan for their own survival and to keep upto the pace of the growing economy. Although the upcoming resurgence of Japanese foreign investment may not reach the level of the "Roaring 80s", it is likely that the gap during the lull period would be filled up by the rising foreign investment from the NIEs, particularly cash-rich Taiwan.

Situation prevailing in various regions have been enumerated earlier. Japanese investment is globally in high demand and countries are vying to get a share of the pie. Much will, however, depend on how the aspirant countries manage their economies at home and bring about desired changes to make their country more attractive to foreign investors in terms of infra-structural facilities, ease of operation, economic profitability and above all 'dependability'. It is high time that concrete short and long-term work plans are drawn in this direction. The democratically elected government in Bangladesh has the unique credibility to accomplish this goal now.

**Concluded**

The opinion expressed are essentially those of the author and do not reflect government's views.

coming from one satisfied Japanese investor (already operating in the country) would be more effective in convincing a new/prospective investor than promotional works combined otherwise.

Most of these factors are favourable in Bangladesh. The prospect has further brightened after the emergence of a democratically elected government in the country. But there remains scope for further improvements in some areas to gain confidence of the Japanese investors. Quality of our engineers have been unhesitatingly praised by the Japanese investors. They, too, agree that our labour force is easily trainable. But the fear of flood and the carnage of unprecedented cyclone at Chittagong in 1991 remain major concerns of Japanese investors. They have, however, showed interest in early commissioning of the airbased EPZ near Dhaka which they feel would be less vulnerable to natural calamities besides the

overseas countries and the items manufactured there were imported to Japan to feed the mother industry. As the size of local market expanded and by the time substantial components began to be produced in the host country, the production unit of the main product was shifted to the foreign land. In view of the present state of the economy, purchasing power of the people, infra-structural facilities and the market size, Bangladesh ostensibly falls in the second category where parts and components made therein would be able to feed the major industries in Japan, NIEs and even Thailand where investment climate is growing increasingly severe due to overheating of the economy.

There has been a marked ebb in Japanese overseas investment since middle of 1990. Country's economic indicators suggest that a resurgence of Japan's overseas investment is likely to occur once the mist raised by the burst of 'soap bubble' in the economy finally

## 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.

### The best investment, but...

Sir, While expressing his sheer disgust at ICB as an investment, Mr Sadiq Alec in a recent letter wanted to know where one could invest one's savings "so that one could spend one's last days in peace".

Well Mr Alec, I thought I had the right and patriotic answer 13 years ago when at 46, I decided to invest my savings to regenerate our barren hills. On 30 degraded acres, I planted 70,000 trees (60 species). While they grew and prospered, I contentedly gloated on getting a minimum of Taka 5 lakh per annum for the next 30/35 years when my fast-growing trees (planted from 1983) matured, were harvested and naturally regenerated every 6-8 years. I spent the interim writing rosy letters in the media and exhorted friends and visitors to follow in my footsteps to make the whole of Bangladesh GREEN as it once was not too long ago. Not one of them did and now I know why!

In Oct 1990, I applied to the Forest Deptt to harvest the first 5,000 mature trees (just a formality, they said). Fourteen months later after dozens of trips up and down Chittagong district (this Forest, that Revenue Office), I had to reach right upto the sacred sanctuary of the Forest Ministry, who sanctified and sanctioned Permit No 2 of 1991 (God! How hard they work — two whole permits in the whole year!). Unilaterally, they allowed me

to harvest just 50% of the trees applied for, which I had planted, nourished and protected on my own land, with my own money and by my own hard work. The permit, over 20 pages of it, contains innumerable Acts, Sections, Sub-sections, Clauses, Laws, Procedures and Regulations which must be strictly followed, which I am still trying to unravel. I have forgotten what my beautiful trees look like — all I see is the 'forest' of open palms, all waiting to be heavily greased. To date, I have stoutly resisted all efforts, exposed all in the media (40 letters in the last 3 years) without any comment or rebuttal from anyone; even those specifically named, which must mean that I must be telling the truth and that this nightmare is really a dream (or vice versa).

Mr Alec, if in spite of the above, you still want to go in for private agro-forestry, which is indisputably the most profitable and aesthetically the most satisfying of professions, BEWARE of the pitfalls which lie ahead, apart from the above: 1) Don't expect any help from anyone. 2) DFIs look on aid to

Private Forests as a virus. 3) Stock up on walking shoes, tons of paper and limitless patience. 4) Keep a good lawyer handy. They can hang you for murder! (Clause 3), provided the mastaans don't get you first.

Of course, you can always cave in and buy your way out with lots of greased paper but then you will have little left. Or you can become a big-time operator and 'manage' one of the 'cigarette packet' permits, but these are usually for 'extraction' from Reserve Forests. Whether you wish to become a poacher in your old age and compete with those already entrenched is upto you.

A high level team of foreign and local experts is presently formulating a 20-year forestry master plan. Only they, strong and vocal public opinion and sagacity in our rulers can save us and our forests. If they give it all back to the Forest Deptt we might as well get used to seeing trees in the National Museum and start breathing CO2.

S Sikander Ahmed  
M M Ali Road, Chittagong

### Determination

Sir, S M Ali's column, My World (30th July), took me back to that February afternoon in 1976 when I picked up the Penguin volume in a bookshop in the stadium market. The book was 'Face to Face', Ved Mehta's autobiography, which told a young man's story of his early life in India. What made the book absorbing was that it was a young Indian's story who lost his sights at the age of three. Yes, Ved Mehta was born in 1934 and meningitis took away his sights in 1937. He writes, "I went blind in November 1937. At that time we were living in Gujrat, in the province of Punjab in northern India."

His father was a doctor working for the government. He accepted the tragedy and knew that any course of action for his son must begin with the realization that he (Ved) would be blind for the rest of his life. Ved's mother could not accept the inevitable. She went on seeing 'Pandits' and 'Hakims' who prescribed various 'drops' and 'surmas' for her son. But

father knew better. He sent Ved to Bombay to Dr R M Halder's Dadar School for the Blind. It was 1939 and Ved was five years old. He spent about four years there and learnt Braille reading and writing in English. He then attended Emerson Institute in Lahore where his father was the Assistant Director of Health.

Immediately after partition, Ved's father was made the Director, Public Health Department of the new Indian State of East Punjab and Ved was admitted to St. Dunstan's Hostel for the War Blinded in Hadratun, a school run by a totally blind Englishman, Sir Chutha Mackenzie. All this time Ved had been writing to various British and American schools for the blind. In February 1949 he received a letter from the superintendent, Arkansas School for the Blind, Little Rock, Ark, USA informing him that they would be happy to have him. In August 1949 he left for USA.

A Z M Abdul Ali  
Shahjahanpur, Dhaka