

The Philippines Experience: A New Approach

A Welcome Visit

British Home minister Kenneth Clarke, now on a visit to Bangladesh, has been accorded a warm reception on his arrival here. We also take the opportunity to welcome the minister. The visit by the British politician certainly shows the interest of Britain in dealing with problems and matters of common concern with members of south Asia — India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. Such high-level contacts reflect the continued endeavour for maintenance of a healthy state of Dhaka-London affairs. But this is only natural because, as members of the Commonwealth, the two countries have the roots of their ties spread further down the history.

Currently, however, Britain and Bangladesh have no outstanding problems. Still there are subjects for discussion such as immigration, drug trafficking, economic co-operation and cultural exchanges. The number of Bangladeshi settlers in Britain, including the second and third generations, has passed a million mark. So it is understandable that Britain, now going through one of its worst post-war recessions, should naturally maintain a legitimate curb on the flow of people from Bangladesh. This does not, however, mean that the British immigration laws ought to be unnecessarily tough. What we would like to see is a liberal policy of the British government to enable the nearest dependants in joining the migrants from Bangladesh in Britain. On balance, we find British immigration policy quite helpful.

In this connection, it is highly satisfying to note that the majority of the settlers from the sub-continent have absorbed the liberal humanism which provides a strong undercurrent in British society. An increasing involvement of social workers in socio-cultural activities in Britain will certainly help the educated elite of the migrants to merge in the mainstream British politics. Signs so far have been quite encouraging. To overcome the racial tensions, now becoming increasingly manifest in some of the European countries, an appreciation of mutual contributions between the local population and the settlers is most necessary. Britain has demonstrated an appreciable amount of tolerance, no doubt, but more understanding of each other's problems will be in order.

Drug trafficking has for long proved to be a sore issue for both the countries, for it is now widely known that Bangladesh has turned into a transit point of the Golden Triangle — one of the largest opium-producing zones in the world. Britain's concern in this matter too is justified, because one of the natural destinations of the opium passed through the transit point is the United Kingdom. Co-operation between the two countries can enforce effective vigilance both at the supply and end points. Elimination of such clandestine and illegal deals naturally proves favourable for increasing economic co-operation.

Last but not the least, with Bangladesh attaching more importance to the learning of English, new possibilities in cultural exchanges have opened. In raising the level of teaching of English in Bangladesh some assistance through the British Council would certainly be appreciated. This is one of the areas not likely to figure in the current deliberations at the ministerial level. But if Kenneth Clarke's talks with the representatives of our government even lightly touches on the issue, he would be able to report back on return to London. We wish the two sides all the luck for successful negotiations on all matters on the agenda.

Homage to Three Great Men

The birth anniversaries of painter Zainul Abedin and poet Jasmuddin and the death anniversary of singer Abbasuddin fall within this week. The nation observes these three occasions through exhibitions, song recitals and seminars, highlighting the contribution they have made to our culture. Though their fields were different, yet they were woven together by a deep commitment to rural Bangladesh. It is remarkable how these artists — writer, painter and singer — literally spoke in one voice about the trials and triumphs of the rural men and women. Zainul Abedin's paintings on the Bengal famine of 1943 remain as the most harrowing testimony of the agony and misery that our people had to suffer as a result of the machinations of a colonial power. Volumes of books or journals cannot match the intensity and depth of feelings brought out in those immortal paintings. To singer Abbasuddin belongs the credit of giving our folk songs a critical push that not only raised their standard but endeared them to a far larger crowd than ever before. He gave our folk songs a new and dynamic form making them popular to the city folks, as well as to the rural areas. Till this day Abbasuddin remains unmatched in the superb rendering of those heart rending tunes. Frankly nobody has ever sung our 'Palligeeti' (folk songs) as Abbasuddin did. Poet Jasmuddin's poems and dance dramas remain the most authentic and touching depiction of our rural life. Together, these three giants, have enriched our culture tremendously.

However, a question remains as to whether we have delved deep enough into their works to reap the maximum benefit from them. The research on their works remain sparse. Availability of their works is sporadic. Books on their lives and works are not yet easily available. Abbasuddin's songs, Zainul's paintings and Jasmuddin's writings should all be made accessible to the public, especially our students.

Frequent exhibitions, song recital and seminars on the lives and works of these three artists should be held. An annual national folk song and art festival may be organised in Abbasuddin's and Zainul Abedin's names. Something similar can be thought of to make Jasmuddin's works better known. Whatever measure we decide to take, the fact is that greater initiatives are called for to give due respect to these towering personalities of our culture.

THE Philippines Archipelago is one of the most disaster prone areas of the world. The country is affected regularly by cyclones (typhoons), landslides, storm surges, earthquakes and volcanic eruptions. On an average 19 to 22 tropical cyclones enter Philippines area of responsibility (PAR) annually, while five to nine actually make land-fall each year causing widespread damage. Flooding often results from heavy rainfall associated with tropical cyclones. Coastal areas invariably gets inundated and severely hit by storm surges generated by these cyclones and communities suffer.

The Philippines is a developing country. There is growing scarcity of housing due to rapid family formation, increasing land and construction cost and financial inability of many families to own a house. Traditional houses which are most common in rural and coastal areas and made from locally available materials lack basic cyclone-resistant features. Millions of families live in these houses and several thousands of them get destroyed year after year in cyclone rendering the families homeless and making them victims of cyclone disaster.

Cyclone Sisang hit the Philippines on November 25, 1987 with a wind speed of about 220 km per hour and destroyed 207,000 houses and affected 490,000 families. Several towns and adjoining areas were severely affected. This was the most devastating cyclone during 1987 and people were caught absolutely unprepared.

After this disastrous cyclone, the Asian Disaster Preparedness Center (ADPC), Asian Institute of Technology, Bangkok, in cooperation with many government and non-government organisations in the Philippines arranged for its Senior Research Scientist (now Senior Consultant) to visit the cyclone battered areas. The recommendations arrived after a visit to the affected areas and one of the main recommendations was that in any rehabilitation programme emphasis must be given to the construction of cyclone resistant houses.

EVOLUTION OF CORE SHELTER ASSISTANCE PROJECT: The Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) and

Government of the Philippines is specifically tasked with extension of emergency relief assistance and social services to disaster victims, helping rehabilitation and eventually return them to a normal life. DSWD's long experience in relief operations has conclusively proven that majority of people are victimised due to destruction or extensive damage to their structurally inadequate shelters. Secondly most of these weak houses are also located in high risk areas like the shoreline. The responses generated by Cyclone Sisang devastation brought donations that were allocated for shelter assistance. Its timing coincided with DSWD's interest in



Completed Core Shelter Unit Frame during training at Lucena City (left) and houses occupied by inmates after completion (right).

improving its shelter services and the department created an emergency shelter committee. The core shelter assistance project is a result of the committee's effort in improving housing standard in cyclone-prone areas. The main philosophy was to design and build a low-cost cyclone resistant house. This would not only help the disaster victims to rebuild their destroyed homes, learn a new skill but would also have the long term benefit of mitigating the impact of future cyclones.

Design of Core Shelter Unit

Under the expert guidance and advice of ADPC's scientist, the DSWD developed a core shelter unit for the cyclone victims. The design was such that it used only locally available indigenous material for construction. Traditional building skills of the local people were to be employed, and all good cyclone resistant features

were incorporated to enable it to withstand a wind speed of 180 km per hour. The drawing and specifications were finalised through consultations between DSWD and Asian Disaster Preparedness Center. The units were built by the people themselves under supervision and pilot tested in the high cyclone prone areas of the Philippines. Initially 450 units were constructed in 1988 and these houses faced two typhoons in the same year with wind speeds reaching 160 to 175 km per hour in successive cyclones in two months. All shelters success-



Completed Core Shelter Unit Frame during training at Lucena City (left) and houses occupied by inmates after completion (right).

fully withstood the cyclone onslaught, where other village houses collapsed as usual.

UNDP Technical Assistance

The government of the Philippines attached high priority to the Core Shelter Assistance Project through its Department of Social Welfare and Development and sought UNDP technical assistance to expand the pilot testing work further in the three regions of the country most regularly struck by cyclones. UNDP technical assistance would facilitate the identification of most suitable technology transfer process suited to the conditions in the Philippines. Under this UNDP pilot scheme 5,613 cyclone resistant core shelter units in 15 provinces and four cities were planned to be constructed. UNDP-Geneva was invited to join this program as a cooperating agency to facilitate the participation of Asian Disaster

Preparedness Center, Asian Institute of Technology, Bangkok.

Aims and Objectives

The aims and objectives of the project are: to assist in the safe rehabilitation of disaster victims; to progressively reduce the number of families rendered homeless every year by providing a structurally strong (cyclone resistant) core shelter unit to withstand a wind force of 180 kph; to develop and promote self reliance among the beneficiaries and community; and to maximise the participation and

survive during cyclones and it has been strongly emphasised in this project. Cost-effectiveness is very effectively achieved by providing for roofing, walling and flooring made of indigenous and cheap materials. To accommodate gradual subsequent core shelter upgrading to suite beneficiaries' income potential, the design involves self-contained modules, namely:

- Module A: Provision of a core shelter unit consisting of foundation, wood post and framing, roof and floor, with indigenous local material for roofing, siding, doors and windows.
- Module B: Upgrading and improvement through provision of cement hollow block (CHB) walls and concrete slabs for main floor and toilet.
- Module C: Upgrading through provision of door and window panels and interior finishing.
- Module D: Upgrading through provision of GI corrugated roofing sheets, gutters, downspout, etc.

This modular design incorporates all features of a good modern house without imposing it on the beneficiary. On the positive again side, motivated by an improved perception of the importance of housing, the beneficiaries learn a new technology that will permit them to sequence the upgrading of the units. An issue that has been considered in this project is beneficiary participation in assessing needs and identifying existing resources with capabilities. This has ensured that the type of shelter provided is exactly what beneficiaries want and their needs are not exaggerated. It guarantees building up of human capabilities, which if ignored, will give rise to dependence.

The estimated construction cost of materials for the core unit is about US\$ 200. Cost of provision of walling and roofing using indigenous material is assumed to be \$40 (Peso 900). These prices are based on 1988 estimates. With the increase in cost of construction materials every year the

government revises its contribution.

Project Strategy

It has been well recognised that there is a large existing gap in the provision of shelters for disaster victims as their number is really very high. Thus to channelise the effective use of scarce resource, to build up a strong foundation for the programmes to device good methodologies, the project has adopted the following basic strategies:

- (a) Consultants (one international, one national and four regional) provide advice on planning, refining and interpreting physical design and further transfer skill through training and demonstration work.
- (b) Preparation of a housing plan and development of all specifications with implementation guidelines and preparation of other useful materials for project implementation, facilitating beneficiary participation in the project.
- (c) Establishment of community organisations to involve beneficiaries in the project in planning and decision making as well as unit construction with future maintenance and upgrading of the core shelter houses.

The funding available with the government necessitated establishment of stringent criteria for selection of beneficiaries for the project. The philosophy was to ensure that poorest of the poor who cannot raise help be given benefit under this program to start with.

In summing up there are four basic innovative aspects to the project: appropriate design of the shelter itself, the role of community involvement and participation, strict emphasis upon quality control and training, and the modular approach to construction.

To be concluded tomorrow

Dr. Satyendra P Gupta has led several missions on disaster mitigation to several countries and is Consultant to UNDP, UNDRR. His innovative work on rehabilitation of Typhoon victims in the Philippines (Core Shelter Project through DSWD) won World Habitat Award last October. He is currently attending a workshop on Coastal Zone Management in Dhaka Dec. 27-31.

Sauce for the Economic Goose

by S Alam Rashid

It seems that the economists (and politicians) of the world are searching for an "engine" that will pull the economies of the world out of the recession that afflicts us today. They have begun to call it "an engine for growth" as it is hoped that it will revive flagging economies, restore lost jobs and then create new jobs. The search is an unrelenting one and is being carried forward by experts in a subject that is as reliable a subject as the entrails of animals, since it has as little to do with common sense or a knowledge of human nature.

The engines for growth that have been the traditional means of economic propulsion were not invented deliberately and specifically for the achievement of preconceived goals; but today it is felt by politicians and economists that society should be made to believe that it is possible to invent a purpose-built "engine" that will restore a recent level of prosperity that the advanced economies had begun to take for granted. It is also felt that the new invention should offer a painless remedy; it must not demand a sacrifice of inflated expectations. It must, on the contrary, once again make both possible and desirable the material goals immortalized in song by people with ironic names like Madonna, the "material girl."

Such an engine has not yet been found and it is just possible that it does not exist in a form that is wholly acceptable to advanced societies; but these are hard times and a degree of comfort and convenience must be sacrificed if recession is to be arrested and reversed.

While the first and second worlds seek a new but so far elusive engine, the politicians of the third world, egged on by elderly, slightly out-of-date economists taught by socialists when socialism was intellectually fashionable, are still looking for an engine that will satisfy the needs of large, hungry populations without offending bureaucrats that keep politicians in power. These engines, in the form of large, ego-boosting projects are still quite easily available to the public sector in third world economies although they may have proved economically unsuccessful in previous experiments elsewhere.

An engine is immediately available. It will, in the countries of its adoption, do the following things: bring about a transfer of technology; create new capital investment opportunities in industry; create new jobs for industrial and transport workers and law enforcement agencies; generate more revenue for the state; encourage investment by the state in the construction of correctional facilities; invigorate the construction industry, thus creating more new jobs for construction workers, engineers, architects, plant, equipment, steel and cement manufacturers and a wide variety of service companies and support industries.

It is clear that a boom will result; but, as experience has taught us, booms give rise to social expectations that are summed up in the phrase "a better quality of life." Again, experience has taught us that this phrase means "the right to get paid for doing nothing against the public interest."

The proposed engine for

growth allows for this. It will initially enable workers in the transport sector to use intimidation in ensuring their quality of life by doing nothing against the state as long as the technology they control is not superseded by new technology. It will also enable state employees to reinforce the private sector through personal investments of public capital and time, thus improving their own quality of life.

A new political equilibrium will come to pass, bringing with it new leisure opportunities and scope for the creation of a "leisure industry" which is, again, a great employer as it is based upon that dream of modern man, the serious pursuit of triviality.

It may be thought that this engine lacks traction, that it will provide only a feeble nudge where a healthy push is needed; but this view would be short-sighted as adoptive economies would be benefited in the following additional ways: Reduced motor vehicle manufacture/import, but; greater consumption of fossil fuels. Therefore, greater volume of international trade;

Increased state revenues from import duties, taxes, super-taxes, sales taxes, value-added taxes, octroi, levies, fees, dues and cesses; Increased state revenues from the vastly increased import of spare parts; Steadily growing demand for new healthcare facilities with special emphasis on treatment of respiratory and cardio-vascular complaints, resulting in a reinvigorated pharmaceutical industry, shrill demands for more doctors, more medical colleges, more female employment in nursing.

The domestic implications are, as can be seen, truly vast. The international dimensions of the transfer of technology involved in launching this new engine for growth can only be prophesied in these words: advisory and admortory delegations of the future will reverse their direction of travel and McDonald's all over the world will change over to "Italy" style meals.

It is not difficult for the rickshaw to be the engine for growth, to earn the grateful thanks of a troubled world. In the words of generations of writers of letters to the editors of our local press, "Will the concerned authorities take necessary action in this regard and oblige?"

To the Editor...

Careless and callous

Sir, As foreigners in your country my wife and I are always on the lookout for interesting entertainment. Since we are also movie-lovers, we were quite excited to see the announcement in your paper last week of the Dhaka Film Festival, sponsored by the Rainbow Film Society. Unfortunately, your article did not provide enough information. For instance, it said nothing about what movies would be shown, when they would be shown, or how to get tickets, only that the films would be screened in four places.

We started asking around among our friends (both foreign and Bangladeshi), but we could find no one who knew any more than we had learned from the Star. Undaunted, we went to Alliance Francaise, one of the screening locations, to see if they had tickets. They didn't, nor did they know the names of the movies being shown, but they knew the office of the Rainbow Film Society was somewhere on Elephant Road. Hoping for a little more specific information, we went to another of the screening sites, the Goethe

Institute. They too didn't know the names of any of the movies, but they gave us the address of the Rainbow Film Society.

It seemed as though everywhere we went that Thursday we saw huge blue signs advertising the Film Festival, but none of them provided any useful information about the event. Even more surprisingly, there were no signs for it anywhere on Elephant Road. Not only that but we couldn't find the address we had been given. Finally, we asked our driver to walk around the street and see if he could locate the place. He did — after about 20 minutes. Scrambling over to the office, which was actually in an alley and not really on Elephant Road at all, we found it was closed. Bad luck. But, good luck, there was a list of the movies on the door. Still no dates or times, but at least we could figure out which ones we might want to see. There also were instructions in Bangla that the driver translated for us: Get a registration form from the Public Library, fill it out, and return it, along with a photograph and 100 taka. This would get us into any movie we wanted.

The Public Library was closed that day, a government holiday. The next day was Friday and Christmas to boot, so we didn't even try to see if it was open. Because of other commitments we were unable to do anything more until Sunday, the day after the film festival started. We asked our driver to pop over to the library in the morning and round up a couple of registration forms. He came back in a little while. "Sorry", he said, "They don't have any registration forms. They have a large book they will sell you and then they will give you tickets to see three movies." Once again, however, they didn't know what the movies were or what time they would be shown. There was also, of course, a new mystery. What was this book they wanted us to buy? Hoping the Rainbow Film Society might be open on a normal work day, we asked the driver to go around there and see if they had any forms. Once again the office was closed, but he had decided on his own to go back to the library, where he learned that the deadline for submitting registration forms was December 24. That, of course,

was the day that we had first gone to the office and found it closed.

I realize that you have no control over how people conduct their businesses, but it would be most helpful if, when you print information about any upcoming event, you insist before publishing the information that the people involved provide you will all of the details of the event and how to get tickets. Had my wife and I known all of the requirements enough in advance we (and many of our friends) might have been able to attend the Dhaka Film Festival.

Bill Hurlbut
Gulshan, Dhaka

West Bengal invests in Bangladesh

Sir, Bengal Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Calcutta (India) is investing in dairy, power, aluminum foil, cargo, and jute items of Bangladesh. Indian products have already occupied a large portion of Bangladesh market "illegally" causing losses to the domestic productions. Indo-Bangla joint venture

projects will expand cooperations promoting neighbourliness in line with SAARC motto.

The advantages of traders with the nearest neighbour include substantial savings on foreign exchange and time. A market mechanism based on preferential trades can develop lasting partnership between these South Asian nations.

Bilateral trade imbalance can be minimized with Indian market made available to Bangladeshi goods and entrepreneurs.

Competition over quality and price of the commodities can offset the smuggling syndrome.

Joint venture projects

Sir, The floating of industrial projects under joint venture scheme is a modern concept in the world economy. It is likely to stem from the idea that no one can go alone in this age of interdependence. This may be the reason why the popularity of joint venture enterprises, particularly in the private sector is gaining ground from day to day mostly in the developing countries of

the world. Usually, it takes place through a formal agreement between the interested entrepreneurs of two different countries based on mutual understanding. It is needless to say that the setting up of this kind of projects entirely depends upon the mutual benefit of the parties concerned. They tend to identify the areas of cooperation on the basis of their available resources and technological know-how.

However, it should be always borne in mind that a favourable economic policy especially on investment, industry and fiscal matters is of vital importance for such international collaboration. In view of this fact we can say that our state policy in regard to these matters is amply good and enthusiastic enough for the foreign entrepreneurs.

Actually, what we badly need in Bangladesh is an institutionalised political system. Yes, I honestly feel, it is the political stability that can only create a congenial climate for the growth of investment and development of joint ventures in our country.

Nitin Roy
Pakirerpool, Dhaka