The Daily Star

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An Agenda for 1993

Together with the rest of the world, Bangladesh has just moved into 1993 in hesitant uncertain steps, a little unsure about what lies ahead. If the mood in the country is anything but a confident one, part of the reason lies in the fact that we enter the new year without solutions to most of the problems we either created or faced in 1992, at national, regional or international levels. True, several of them, like the demolition of the Babri Masjid which touched off communal frenzy in different parts of South Asia, were produced by forces outside our control. But most of them were essentially of our own making and, in many cases, their solutions were very much within our reach. By the time we reached the end of the year 1992, our failure to find solutions to our problems were no longer lapses which could be set right in a matter of weeks or months. A cross section of our people had started seeing them as blunders, if not as tragedies, which had marred the second year of our democratic regime, leaving behind some deep scars in our national psyche.

Yet, there are no reasons why we, as a nation, should feel so diffident as not to be able to look ahead with a measure of courage or the kind of doggedness that, in the past, had seen us through many crises. However, courage *per se* may mean nothing. It must provide the basis for a practical plan of action.

In our view, this practical plan of action is nothing but a broad-based agenda for 1993. We, as a nation, should ask for it, call for it, plead for it.

However, we cannot even think of an agenda unless we identify the areas of our failure during 1992. But it is not for us to tell our government and the opposition or, for that matter, *all* the political parties where they went wrong or to tell the business community and the academic circles, among others, how they might have failed the people. Let it be their evaluation, a sincere and honest one, which is based on their own perspectives. Once such an evaluation is there, they would know what kind of agenda should be adopted, in their respective fields, for 1993.

To start with, our national leaders may discover that there is really no need for a brand new agenda that offers a set of magic cures for our old ailments. It may well be just a question of adopting solutions that the non-partisan section of the media, independent experts and the back-benchers in the parliament, among others, had pleaded for during last year. It may also be a question of Bangladesh learning from several countries in Southeast Asia which have moved along the road to spectacular economic progress, through politics of consensus, overcoming such obstacles as ethnic and religious differences, as in Malaysia and Singapore, and repeated army coups, as in Thailand. Again, it may be just a question of reviving some old-fashioned values and standards in our everyday political life, with our politicians finding out for themselves what's right or wrong, how they can raise the level of political debate, how criticisms can be fair and constructive and how parliamentary democracy can be turned into an effective tool for national progress in all fields. Specific solutions, good, bad or indifferent, for specific problems whether they relate to economic reforms, the fight against illiteracy or the battle for the reduction of poverty can work only if our national leaders, Begum Khaleda Zia and Sheikh Hasina, can make new political commitments to meet the challenges of 1993. It is this commitment that will give an auspicious start to the New Year and offer the troubled nation the promise of a new dawn.

A Plea for the Homeless

The freezing winter, with shortage of food and drinking water, now faced by some 415 Palestinian deportees, now stranded in a no man's land on the border in Lebanon, at once symbolises the fate of homeless people almost anywhere in the world as well as the ordeal of millions of Arabs in the occupied territories in the Gaza strip, the West Bank and the Golan Heights.

For all these people, there is no joy in welcoming the New Year and no hope that their suffering would come to an end soon. It is also the same for other homeless people, like the refugees from Bosnia, the Rohingyas chased out of Myanmar and stranded Pakistanis in Bangladesh waiting to go home. Then, there are the famine-stricken millions in Somalia, victims of a growing food shortage in Ethiopia and innocent civilians, especially women and children, caught in political crossfires elsewhere in the world.

These situations are products of man's inhumanity to his fellow human beings, indifference of nation states to fundamental rights of their own citizens.

At this stage, one can only hope that the year 1993 will show a change in the situation, a change that no longer leaves countless uprooted human beings out in the cold.

In this context, a priority case is that of the Palestinians who have been deported from the occupied territories by Israel and who remain stranded on the border of Lebanon. Repeated efforts by humanitarian agencies have failed to persuade both Beirut and Tel Aviv to agree to the supply of even basic relief to the deportees who face the prospects of dying in cold or in starvation. While Israel refuses to let them return to their homes, Lebanon would not let them in either, fearing that such a gesture would amount to a political concession to Tel Aviv. So the region that produced so many prophets who left behind the message of peace and love plays politics even where survival of ordinary men, women and children is at stake. Herein lies a tragedy, a tragedy of immense magnitude, a tragedy that we can do without.

THE YEAR IN REVIEW

The Decline in Consensus, an Increase in In-fighting Marred Politics in 1992

by Chapal Bashar

Whether the tense and conflicting political situation will persist in 1993 or there will be a rapprochement and more understanding between the two sides, remains to be observed.

A tense atmosphere prevailed in the political arena during the whole of 1992 when the country witnessed growing conflicts and sharp contradictions among the major political parties.

The year 1991 was gracefully marked by understandings and consensus between major political forces leading to the much-cherished switchover to the parliamentary system.

But the scenario changed in the following year 1992 when the differences among the political forces, particularly between the ruling BNP and mainstream opposition the Awami League (AL) widened. After a year of tussle, the BNP and the AL have now virtually reached a state of confrontation.

The stream of events in the year also led to the polarisation of antagonistic forces — mainly the pro-liberation forces and the rightists-fundamentalists.

Following nine-years of relentless and united struggle, the democratic forces were crowned with victory at the end of 1990 when the autocratic regime of Ershad was ousted. The next year passed in the process of consolidating democratic achievements through holding of elections to the Jatiya Sangsad, amendment to the constitution for a parliamentary system and establishment of a full-fledged parliamentary form of government. And all these were done in an unprecedented spirit of understanding between the BNP and the AL.

A split in the much-eulogized understanding was sensed in the second half of 1991 on the Indemnity Ordinance issue raised by the AL. The split, visible from the very beginning of 1992, only widened with many more conflicting issues.

The year began with agitation against the fundamentalists after the installation of Golam Azam as the chief of the Jamaat-e-Islami on December 29, 1991. The Ghatak Dalal Nirmul Committee, an organisation providing a common platform to pro-liberation forces, was formed to wage a movement against anti-liberation elements in January 1992. The Nirmul Committee's movement gained momentum with the open support from the AL and other liberal and left parties.

In the course of extending support to the Nirmul body, the AL did not spare the BNP and accused it of protecting the Jamaat and its leader Golam Azam.

Just two days before the planned public trial of Golam Azam by Nirmul Committee, the controversial Jamaat chief was arrested March 24 under Foreigners Act.

But this government action did not pacify the movement, particularly because of the issuance of warrants of arrest against 24 organisers of the public trial that took place March 26 at the Suhrawardy Uddyan in Dhaka.

The ruling party came to an agreement with the opposition in Parliament for the trial of Golam Azam and withdrawal of cases against 24 of Nirmul body. This agreement eased the tense situation for a while, but the problem remained as the accord was not implemented.

The BNP government had to face five hartals in 1992, of which, three were called by the Nirmul Committee in support of their demands. Of the other two, one was called by the AL on August 15 to protest the killing of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in 1975. Another hartal was organised on August 20 by all the opposition parties to protest attempt on the life of Workers party leader Rashed Khan Menon.

The first of the hartals called by the Nirmul body June 21 was marked by clashes between the supporters of Jamaat and its opponents. Newsmen were alsoassaulted at the National Press Club by police creating much embarassment to the ruling party.

The attempt on Menon, the killing of CPB leader Ratan Sen and the overall deterioration of the law and order situation sparked severe criticisms against the ruling party both inside and outside parliament. The BNP government even had to face a no-confidence motion, the first of its kind in Bangladesh, from the opposition in parliament.

The issue of the Indemnity Ordinance (Repeal) Bill submitted by the AL in August 1991 remained unresolved until the end of 1992 though the Special Parliamentary Committee met several times to discuss it. Lack of understanding between the BNP and the AL on the Indemnity bill only increased misunderstandings between them.

There were widespread campus violence in the country during the past year, and in most cases the clashes occurred between the student organisations supported by the BNP and the AL. Observers believe that those clashes were the reflection of the strained relationship between the two political parties.

Political analysts also noted increases in the exchange of hot words, accusations and counter-accusations between the leaders of the ruling and the opposition parties in the year.

Whether the tense and conflicting political situation will persist in 1993 or there will be a rapprochement and more understanding between the two sides, remains to be observed.

Meanwhile, the past year was also marked by some developments in major political parties.

From the beginning of the year, Awami league faced problems with its youth front leader Mostafa Mohsin Mantu which led to a split in Juba Leage and finally, Mantu was expelled from the party in May.

AL leader Dr Kamal Hossain latnched Bangladesh Democratic Forum on June 19 and was elected its convenor. Kamal's move was disapproved by AL's central leadership and he was dropped from party presidium during AL council session held Sept 19. However, he was included in AL's newly constituted advisory council, which Kamal declined to accept.

Zillur Rahman, a senior leader of the AL was surprisingly elected General Secretary of the party in its council.

There was a significant change in AL's economic policy and the party adopted market economy instead of socialist one.

There seemed to be a lull in the organisational activities of the ruling party BNP during the year. Party central leaders came under sharp criticism for the lack of activities at the meeting of BNP central executive committee held in December. BNP also shifted its central office from Dhanmondi to a more central location at Naya Paltan.

Jatiya Party of deposed president Ershad had some activities in the year. JP's Secretary General Shah Moazzem Hossain was replaced by Khaledur Rahman Tito who was later arrested and charged under anti-terrorism act.

Parties Go their Separate Ways in Parliament without Much of a Strategy

by Nurul Kabir

IT started with a boycott and so did it end. Boycott was also in the middle.

One can easily say, Opposition boycotts marked last year's Parliament proceedings that spread over a total of four separate sessions.

The first Opposition boycott of the year came minutes before President Abdur Rahman Biswas stood to address the House at the opening session of Parliament on January 4.

The Awami League (AL)-led Opposition boycotted the presidential speech on the ground that the government was bypassing Parliament through promulgating ordinances one after another. Incidentally, the President promulgates ordinances.

The AL-led Opposition's boycott of the presidential speech in Parliament was followed by the Jatiya Party's.

The JP protested promulgation of a specific ordinance that abolished the upazila system, the body of the JP chief and former President Ershad.

The first Parliament session of 1992 witnessed, except the first opposition boycott of the year, the first ever defeat of the Treasury bench — in terms of voting taking place in the House-to the combined Opposition partics in Parliament.

The defeat came on January 9, when a private members resolution seeking setting up of a marine police forces was adopted in Parliament by 62 to 57 votes. In the division vote on the issue, the Treasury bench opposed the resolution while all in the opposition voted for it.

Despite the opposition boycott at the beginning and bitter accusations and counter-accusations against each other, the Treasury bench smoothly secured Opposition support in passing a bill on February 16.

The bill passed unanimously was the Members of Parliament (Remuneration and Allowances) Amendment Bill that doubled their allowances.

The second opposition boycott of Parliament in 1992 came April 18 after parliament got into its second session of the year on April 12.

Parliament's second session of the year began with a general discussion on the Jamaat's election of Golam Azam as its chief in the last week of December 1991 and the consequent formation of the People's Court to try Golam Azam for his active involvement in the genocide conducted against our people by the Pakistan occupation forces in 1971.

The People's Court pronounced capital punishment to Golam Azam on Independence Day March 26.

The AL-led Opposition while arguing for the trial of Golam Azam as a war criminal maintained in the House that there could be no doubt that the Razakars under the leadership of Golam Azam was an auxiliary force of the occupation army and that he should be tried under the International War Crimes (Tribunal) Act, 1973.

The leader of the Opposition Sheikh Hasina moved a resolution in the House and demanded that a special tribunal under the law be immediately formed to try Golam Azam as a war criminal.

The Deputy Leader of the Treasury bench, Prof. Badruddoza Chowdhury argued that the BNP had no confusion that Golam Azam was a foreigner and that he along with the Razakars was an auxiliary force of the Pakistan army that indulged in the 1971 genocide.

Prof. Chowdhury also moved a resolution, countering the one moved by Hasina, that sought 'constitutionally acceptable legal action against non-citizen Golam Azam and speedy disposal of the actions'.

Shaikh Razzak Ali, Speaker of Parliament, who was expected to give a ruling on the issue or put it to a vote asked the MPs to switch their discussions to the Rohingya issue before concluding the Golam Azam one.

The Opposition refused to move to any other agenda before settling the Golam Azam controversy, and, in the face of the Speakers insistence on changing the agenda, the Opposition announced its second boycott of Parliament April 18.

A seven-hour backstage parley between the Treasury bench and the Opposition barring the Jamaat on the day failed to bring back the Opposition to the House.

During the parley the AL-led Opposition put forward a four-point demand to the ruling party that included trial of Golam Azam as a war criminal, withdrawal of charges against the 24 people involved in the People's Court, assurance of democratic behaviour to the opposition parties and due honour to the Leader of the Opposition in Parliament.

Following a fruitless negotiation between the contending parties, the House passed the Treasury bench resolution on Golam Azam with the AL-led Opposition along with Jatiya Party, which demanded immediate release of Ershad at that moment, boycotting the proceedings and the Jamaat staging a walk out protesting the resolution.

The boycott announced in the year's second session of Parliament affected the smooth sailing of the third session as the boycotting Opposition did not join its proceedings until the contending parties reached a four-point accord eight days after parliament went into its budget session June 18.

The four-point accord signed between the AL-led Opposition and the ruling party accepted, along with three demand of the four-point charter put forward by the Opposition at the previous session, 'trial of Golam Azam as aware criminal under the law of the land.'

The Jamaat walked out protesting the accord and the JP continued its abstention as its demand for the release of Ershad was ignored in the accord. The JP however, went back to the House the next day July 2.

The third session of the year, the budget session, witnessed with the debate on the proposed budget, a general discussion on the law and order in the country.

And on top of all, the budget session witnessed the first ever no confidence motion moved against the cabinet in the parliamentary annals of the country.

Seven out of ten opposition parties in Parliament submitted identical but separate notices of no-confidence against the Cabinet headed by Prime Minister Khaleda Zia and accused the Cabinet of nine separate failures.

The charges against the Cabinet included failure to improve law and order, curb campus violence, free the industrial units and enterprises from the grip of hoodlums, ensure freedom of press and protection to the working journalists, suppress anti-independence activities, resolve the Chittagong Hill Tracts problems and ensure human rights to the people living in the area, resolve Rohingya problem, ensure security to the foreign embassies and diplomatic missions.

The no-confidence motion was moved August 5 and the House voted on it August 12.

The ruling party survived the no-confidence by 168 to 122 votes.

The fourth boycott by the Opposition came in the fourth session of Parliament last year fallowing the Treasury bench bid to pass the controversial Anti-terrorism Act.

Promulgated as an Ordinance earlier, the bill was placed in the House on the opening day of the fourth and last session of the year. It was introduced in the House for consideration on October 28 amidst the Opposition boycott.

The Opposition termed the Bill seeking capital punishment for certain crimes worse than the Special Powers Act and urged the Treasury bench to withdraw the proposed law.

The Opposition walkout later turned in to the boycott of he proceeding and the Treasury bench got the bill passed November 6 with the AL-led opposition, along with the JP, boycotting the House and the Jamaat and others staging a walkout. The bill was virtually passed by the Parliamentary Party of the ruling BNP.

The AL and the JP, along with their allies in Parliament, later announced that they would continue boycotting the remaining days of the Fourth Session of Parliament protesting the passage of the Anti-terrorism Act and demand implementation of the four-point accord signed earlier.

The year's final session however witnessed a unanimity of parties protesting India's push back programme under which 'Indian citizens were being sent into Bangladesh'. In the face of coercion by the Indian law enforcing agencies. The parties however failed to unanimously adopt a resolution against India's behaviour.

The Treasury bench resolution was adopted by 161 votes while two other resolutions — one moved by the AL chief Hasina and the other by the JP leader Mizanur Rahman Chowdhury — secured 67 and 20 votes respectively.

The last parliament session of 1992 that began October 11 was prorogued November 6 with the main Opposition parties still on a boycott.

More reviews and interpretative pieces appear in the supplement on pages 8-11.

We will be publishing other reviews on this page during next few days.

Long-term Rehabilitation of Disaster Victims-II

The Philippines Approach : Replicable Elsewhere

by Satyendra P Gupta

THE performance of a structure in cyclonic wind forces depends on various factors. A few basic requirement that must be met are sufficient weight of the whole dwelling, configuration of the roof, strength of various elements in the dwellings and how they are connected with each other, proper anchoring of whole house to the ground and firm attachment of whole roof to the wall members. There are various ways that the above could be achieved and wherever it is done in a right way the better result will be seen. Many times an engineered structures also cannot fulfil the above stringent requirements because of design or construction faults or sometimes due to poor quality control supervision during work. A traditional construction which is invariably seen in many parts of the developing countries many times satisfies the above requirements too and behaves better during cyclones and people have been quick to react that our old or traditional construction is better than modern ones. One has to understand the implications of each natural hazards and how they unleash their energies. The technical design of the core shelter unit incorporates all above principles of cyclone resistant construction. It has a simple wooden frame in which each and every member have been properly connected to each other to develop a chain of strength. The whole wooden frame is tied securely with the help of anchor bolts to the four concrete footings. Additional tying has been done with simple concrete footings provided in between the corner footings. The footings are properly buried in the ground. A four sided roof design provides better wind behaviour than any other slope of the roof and has been used.

Training and Quality Control

As emphasized before attention to both training and quality control has been of crucial importance in determining the success of this project. Great efforts have been taken to ensure that the beneficiaries understand not only how they have to build the house but also why they have to follow the drawing and technical specifications so exactly. It can not be stated that everything went exactly as per plan but there were all kinds of problems encountered in the beginning and at every stage corrective measures were taken to bring the project implementation on correct path from deviating.

The training are carried out in two phases: The first training is limited to DSWD regional technical staff, provincial and city technical supervisors, DSWD social workers and other field workers. The course focusses on theoretical aspects of the project and is programmed for one and a half day only. Topics for discussion include aims and objectives of the project, criteria for the selection of beneficiaries, the technical and financial aspects of houses construction, planning and monitoring.

The second level of training is designed for three days of work consisting of providing details on the technical components of house construction as well as proper monitoring and evaluation of the progress of the project based on the action plans made during the first phase of training. In this training one house unit is built by way of training to learn the methodology (technology) of construction and then on completion this is used as a demonstration house for that area. Participants to this training include national consultant, regional technical consultant, provincial and city supervisors, DSWD project implementors and foremen, who are then able to pass on this real learning experience and knowledge to the beneficiaries.

Project Funding

Funds for construction of the basic core shelter unit before any upgrading (Module A) comes from the beneficiary, local governments (city mayor's office or provincial governor's), the DSWD (central government), a food for work contribution and NGOs. The contributions of the beneficiary is assessed at the needs assessment stage early on in the project. This includes the provision of land, labour (by beneficiary and his friends and relatives), materials, either salvaged from his damaged house or obtained from other sources, and a financial contribution if he has any savings. The local government is responsible for providing resettlement areas for those who are landless and for those who live in high-risk areas near the sea shoreline. The DSWD provided building materials and technical assistance for the construction of core shelter units through the services of various consultants, foremen and area social workers and other field staff. A proper scheme has been devised to provide fund transfer to beneficiary for purchase of building materials. A beneficiary will loose his income because of the time he spends on building the shelter and in such cases partial food for work assistance is being given. NGOs working in the Philippines provide funds and other material help to beneficiaries where their resources are insufficient.

Achievements So Far

With the initial good performance of a few hundred units in several areas, the pilot project in three most severe regions of the country built 8,764 units by 30 September 1992. It already exceeded substantially a UNDP project target of only 5,613 units. The project during all these years have been already extended to other regions of the country. A total of 23,000 units have now been built or are under construction throughout the country in the four years, in which the project has been underway. The performance of all units constructed so far have been quite satisfactory in as much as not a single unit under occupancy has collapsed so far during any cyclone passage. Most of the units have faced a few to several cyclones in last four years.

Future Tasks

The project is set to continue well into the future as a proven success. It has received wide ranging political support. The task is not finished as yet. Construction of 23,000 units does not solve all housing needs for victims. A beginning has been made and the programme must be expanded. Ways and means must be found to enlarge it with strict supervision and quality control component. There is a need also to spread this knowledge and methods of construction among those who would like to adopt it. One of the way to achieve this is to develop "Do It Yuorself Manual" for core shelter construction.

Availability of timber is becoming scarce, its cost is also rising rapidly and due to recent promulgation of logging ban there will be too much of undue pressure on timber and hence some alternate easily available indigenous material must be found. Coconut timber which is abundantly available in the Philippines could very nicely fill this vacuum, but it has some technical and construction problems, which needs to be sorted out.

Replicability in Other Countries

This simple and well proven technology and the concept of beneficiary participation with community organisation could be easily replicable to several developing countries which face cyclone problems or any other disaster situation. Many countries which use timber as the building material, this technology could be very suitably applied with appropriate modifications to suite the shelter size requirements and other local variations. Where any other building material like hollow cement block, bricks or stone, bamboo etc. are common, it will need a separate development of shelter plans but the community organisation, beneficiary participation, management, evaluation and monitoring etc. can still be replicated very easily.

CONCLUSIONS: The Philippines core shelter assistance project started with a simple concept and with the cooperation of various agencies working together has been able to achieve common objectives.

All other disaster prone countries all over the world can learn from this unique Philippine experience.

Concluded

*The regular column **"To the Editor..."** (Letters) could not be accommodated today due to reason of space, It will appear tomorrow as usual.*