Dhaka, Monday, June 7, 1993

## Women's Education

The cause of women's education plods on as if compelled by some historical force. In the recent times, successive governments haven't come up with any action geared to structural changes in society that would generate big leaps in women's education. There has neither been individual nor group missionary efforts after the manner of Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar or Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain to kindle torches that could enlighten generations and bring more and more of the discriminated gender within the pale of self-realising education.

Instead, there has never been any let-up in the streaming lip-service done to the issue of women's education. We know these are not designed to help the cause but come as some handy tool to bale out eminent people from uneasy situations. One shouldn't think that such was the case when Law Minister Mirza Golam Hafiz held forth on the need of progress in women's education in a Panchagarh function recently. Not only as the spouse of a highly accomplished lady but also in his own right as one of our few enlightened politicians he must have spoken from knowledge and conviction. The question is how do observations such as his help the problem at hand. If women's education is so important to the economic development of the society, what is its priority placing in the present government scheme of things?

Mirza Hastz, in course of his Panchagarh speech also underlined the need for mobilising the women community by imparting mass education and vocational training to them and making them selfsufficient by setting up countrywide co-operative for them.' Who are supposed to deliver these 'orders'? As far as the minister is concerned, it should be the task of his government in the first place - and then of his party. How do things stand with these two all-powerful agencies in the matters he talked on?

It is totally wrong to base the arguments for women's education on the needs of economic development. If such a thing as a spurt in per capita income and GNP were possible without massive literacy in women - Pakistan is a case in point should we say education to them would then be a wasteful investment? It could also be a bad bargain then disturbing the social and familial fabric and status quo. No, every citizen must get his or her food and shelter - whether it helps development or not. Every woman must get her education - true education and not literacy alone - as a matter of right to life in the absence of which she is barred from graduating into true humanity.

This being a far better approach, we come up to a paradox we cannot unravel without much ado. When far more than a half of the male population is outside the pale of literacy — and very little is being done to remedy the situation - what can we hope achieve on the women's front? Where should the emphasis go? It can indeed be argued that women's education, as a surer and sooner way to bring about an educated polity, should get more attention than the males are getting. Will the government agree to that?

Education, specially women's, is crucial to our survival as a civilised society. Government is yet to address itself in the manner the size of the problem demands. Meanwhile, the society continues to be anti-education in its ways and aspirations, compounding the challenge beyond any known way to grapple it.

## Fish as Nutrient

Pisciculture, like agriculture, is one area that has undergone phenomenal changes in the country over the past decades, thanks to the High Yielding Varieties (HYV) rice cultivation. Whether the change has been for the better or not is however a different question. But about one thing there is no doubt that the country's genetically diverse fish species will never have the same share in a common man's dish. The loss is both qualitative and quantitative for the Bangalees whose main source of nutritional supply was fish and fish alone. The per capita daily consumption of fish has fallen as low as 14 grams of which the affluent class account for a disproportionately high share.

When the jute minister subscribes to the new prevalent view of adopting modern scientific pisciculture to meet the country's nutritional requirements, he simply adds nothing to the conception that has been here for quite sometime without placing the food issue in its right perspective. Directly linked to agriculture, which has been putting an ever-increasing demand on our limited land area, the fish production as part of the country's total food requirement, unfortunately, has a very nominal role to play. The process began with the land earlier set aside for fish production coming under HYV cultivation, leaving few or no natural breeding grounds for local varieties of fish.

A highly low intake of fish by the poorman at the end point will be further exacerbated by the proposed fish culture for reasons not readily acknowledged. The fact that both technical and marketing supports are responsible for the success of such projects illustrates the point that the products are dear and aimed at earning foreign exchange instead of meeting local poor people's need. Under the scheme the local consumers are never the target, only the rich section receive some of the benefits because they are in a position to afford the high prices and also invest in such investment-intensive projects.

The logical conclusion is that even a higher production without the internal mechanism of rational distribution of foods does not guarantee any improvement in the country's average nutritional situation. It is this consideration that ought to be incorporated in the national food policy. Otherwise, we run the risk of relegating ourselves into a nutrition-deficient nation. Modern technology is good but one must know how to apply it for the benefits of a greater number of people. The question of genetical diversity is no less important because the ecological balance is largely dependent on this factor. After thorough studies and research only can we be on the safe side to go for methods prescribed by policymakers in the West.

# A Welcome Move in Crop Diversification Programme

T is somewhat reassuring to see that the need for crop diversification is drawing attention of the concerned authorities. This newspaper had recently commented editorially on the priority for ensuring a balanced growth of agricultural output in the country. It now transpires that late last month, a workshop was organised which underlined the need for crop diversification to increase the production of pulses, oil seeds and tuber crops, side by side with foodgrains. It is further understood that an inter-disciplinary Farming System Research (FSR) is being taken on hand to diversify crop production in the country.

It can not be denied that the country has made significant progress in the area of foodgrain production. Our agricultural experts are said to have evolved as many as twenty-five new varieties of rice over these years. According to the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) data, Bangladesh comes nearly at the top of productivity list in respect of rice in South Asia. Yield of paddy in terms of kilogram per hectare (Kg/Ha) in this country in 1991 stood at 2604 - coming second in the region to Shri Lanka which notched up an output of 3077 Kg/Ha. Yield of paddy in India in the same year was 2576 Kg/Ha, 2514 in Nepal, 2380 in Pakistan and 1654 in Bhutan Performance on productivity score, of course, remains far below the records of the leaders in Asia in this respect. South Korea scored highest in Asia in 1991 with a paddy yield of 6463 Kg/Ha, followed by China with 5522 and Taiwan with 4900. However, given the world average of an yield of 3581 Kg/Ha, performance of these three

countries appear more as ex-

HIS year's International

world's working people as

market forces dictate the

global social and economic

agenda. Moscow witnessed its

worst civil disorder since the

aborted coup in August 1991

when workers were not

allowed to march in Red

Square, once the focal point of

unions rallied support for the

steelworkers, who are holding

the first strike there since the

fused to sign the European

Community (EC) Social Chap-

ter guaranteeing worker's

rights, the existence of the

May Day holiday is itself under

threat from the Conservative

government who find the so-

cialist association distasteful. A

holiday in October celebrating

the defeat of the French at

Trafalgar is one suggested al-

line how much labour relations

have changed with he discred-

iting of socialism and lab-

ourism in Europe. This comes

at a time when the global

picture of working life has

some disturbing features, as

shown by the 1993 World

the Geneva-based International

Labour Organisation, finds that

overall world employment is

depressed. The highest in-

crease in unemployment has

been in eastern Europe, where

the state used to guarantee ev-

ery worker a job. In 1990,

there were only 100,000

unemployed people in eastern

Europe. In 1992 it had risen to

In Latin America urban

unemployment remains at a

level of eight per cent. And for

those in work, says the report,

wages have fallen sharply:

Between 1980 and 1991 the

average industrial wage fell by

17.5 per cent, and the average

minimum wage by 35 per cent.

in sub-Saharan Africa, with ur-

ban unemployment reaching

20 per cent and affecting 14

million people. The number of

those out of work has been in-

creasing by about 10 per cent

per year. Up to 75 per cent of

the jobless, the ILO says, are

of unemployment is around

eight per cent. However, May

Day saw rallies all over Spain

where unemployment is soar-

In the West the average rate

young people aged 15-24.

The situation is even worse

The report, published by

These developments under-

In Britain, which has re-

In eastern Germany trade

grand state celebrations.

time of Hitler.

ternative.

Labour Report.

four million.

Labour Day highlighted

the plight of the

In his column published yesterday, Shah A M S Kibria wrote on the plight of farmers in this country. In view of the importance of agriculture to our development, we return to the same field, this time, for the views of another of our guest columnist, S B Chaudhuri who, in his article here, deals with other issues relating to the same field.

ceptions. Besides, Bangladesh can indeed claim to have come a long way in achieving higher productivity in rice output when it is considered that in 1975, yield of paddy in the country came to only 1853 Kg/Ha.

The situation changes dra-

matically when we consider performance in overall agricultural production. Here, Bangladesh comes nearly at the bottom even in South Asia. During the decade ending in 1991, Bangladesh attained an average annual growth rate of just about 2 per cent in agricultural production as compared to 5.4 per cent in Pakistan, 4.2 per cent in India and Nepal, 2.7 per cent in Maldives. Only Bhutan and Shri Lanka in South Asia, each of who recorded an annual average growth rate of about 0.5 per cent, came behind Bangladesh. In contrast, the highest rate of growth in Asia, recorded by Malaysia, came to more than 7.1 per cent. Perhaps the only point for consolation for Bangladesh is that its growth rate compares favourably with an world average of 2.1 per cent. However, this can provide only a small measure of satisfaction since the average annual growth rate of Asia itself during this period

exceeded 4 per cent. The scenario looks even worse if we consider the 1991 general index (base: 1979-81=100) of per capita agricultural production. In South Asia, Bangladesh, at 90, bests only Bhutan whose number is 86. The index stands at 119, 113, 109, 95 and 91 for India, Nepal,

Pakistan, Maldives and Shri Lanka, respectively. The index for Malaysia, the leader in Asia here too, reads 133. The index for the world stands at 102 and for Asia at 119.

As noted earlier, it appears in the light of FAO statistics that the average annual growth rate of agricultural production in Bangladesh during the decade ending in 1991, works out at just about 2 per cent. However, some noted local experts see only about 1.6 per cent growth in agriculture during the decade of 1980s. They

years - from 222 tons in 1987-88 to 243 tons in 1991-92. This quantity of 243 tons of oilseeds would yield considerably less than 20 per cent of the country's annual needs for edible oil. Annual requirements of pulses in the country are said to be about 6.3 lakh tons whereas domestic output comes to just about 5.2 lakh tons. Over the five-year period of 1987-88 to 1991-92, yield of 'masur' - the most widely consumed variety of 'dal' - has actually declined in the country, from 1.59 lakh tons to 1.53 lakh tons. So has

## ALONG MY WAY

## S B Chaudhuri

feel that the growth over the next two decades needs to be more than doubled through crop diversification and other appropriate mechanism to ensure balanced diet for the popu-

Even a cursory look at the trend of production of some of the secondary, but essential, crops reinforces the feeling that the growth of output in the agricultural sector had not been quite in harmony with the consumption needs of the populace. Annual requirement of edible oils in the country is estimated roughly at 4.4 lakh tons. Output of rape seeds/mustard seeds in the country increased by a paltry 21 tons over a period of five

the yield of 'moong' - from 33,000 tons to 32,000 tons during this period. Output of 'khesari' - the other main 'dal' item - fell from 1.79 lakh tons in 1987-88 to 1.77 lakh tons in '90-91 (the figure for '91-92 is not readfly available at hand) so much for our ubiquitous 'dal'. Then again, annual reguirement of onion is taken to be about 2.6 lakh tons but production over the past five years stagnates around 1.4 lakh tons Chilli, once an exportable item, tells no better a tale.

Meanwhile, we keep on spending hundreds of crore of taka in foreign exchange in importing such items.

Given this background, renewed effort to achieve a more

balanced growth in the agricultural sector is indeed a welcome move. It is understood that the workshop, referred to earlier, secured a multi-disciplinary participation of experts from agriculture, farm machinery and irrigation equipment manufacturers, banking and flnancial institutions. Donors. NGOs and farmers also were represented at the workshop. In the case of the proposed FSR, seven research institutions in the country in agriculture and allied fields, as well as the Bangladesh Agricultural University, would coordinate their activities on research on High Yielding Variety (HYV) crops and economic use of land, with a view to evolving an integrated approach on crop diversification, zero-tillage cultivation and crop rotation, improved quality seeds and plants. The programme would cover both food and non-food

Crop diversification programmes should be environment-friendly and pay adequate attention to cost-benefit aspects. As it came out during deliberations at the workshop, farmers would continue to grow more of boro' paddy unless the cultivation of crops, such as pulses and oilseeds, were made comparatively more profitable. It was estimated that to make cultivation of pulses and oilseeds as profitable as 'boro' at the present level of yields. mustard would need a price rise of about 60 per cent and lentil about 100 per cent. Such a

In an open economy, with imported stuff freely available in the market, consumers just won't pay such high prices for the domestic produce, howsoever patriotic they may be. Efforts in this area should, therefore, concentrate on pushing up the level of yields and devising new ways to bring the unit cost of the produce down - may be through improved crop rotation practices or in some such appropriate and practical ways. We have good agricultural scientists and let us hope that they will come up with the right management and technology mix.

price hike is unthinkable.

WRITING in these colu-mns a couple of weeks back, I mentioned the need for expanding storage facility for agricultural produce. It is indeed encouraging to find that the Food Ministry has since sponsored a seminar which is said to have recommended implementation of a project called Shashya Gudam Rin Prakalpa'. The project, it is understood, will provide price support to the farmers by enabling them to store grains, instead of being obliged to sell off their produce immediately after harvesting. Apart from providing price incentive to the farmers, availability of proper storage facility helps agricultural production in other ways too. For instance, it is generally recognised that availability of cold storage facility has contributed significantly towards the growth of cultivation of potato and certain other vegetables in the country. Let us hope that the implementation of the project would be speeded up and that its coverage would be expanded - both area and product-wise.

## Weakened Unions Add to Worker's Woes

by Daya Kishan Thussu

The recession in the West has claimed 33 million jobs. In the developing countries, says the 1993 World Labour Report, unemployment is even worse. At the same time, the demise of socialism and the triumph of market forces have undermined the powers of the trade unions. With privatisation top of the global economic agenda, Gemini News Service reviews the position of the world's workers.

# Without work Percentage of unemployed Source: ILO

ing at an estimated 20 per cent. These statistics do not include all those not working. In Britain the actual number of those out of work is estimated at a million higher than official statistics.

South East and East Asia is proving an exception to this trend, the report points out. Countries like South Korea and Singapore are actually facing a severe labour shortage. This is being met by the flow of migrant workers from Pakistan, Bangladesh and the Philippines, which, with an unemployment rate of 15 per cent, is now one of the world's major sources of migrant

workers. The report also includes a survey of forced labour around the world. Slavery is a serious problem in countries like Mauritania and Sudan, it says. Militia groups have been raiding villages not only for cattle and goods but also for people - either to work for their captors or to sell as slaves. Sudan's civil war has forced destitute parents to sell their children for \$70 each.

According to the report, another form of slavery bonded labour - continues in many countries. In Pakistan.

for example, an estimated 20 million people work as bonded labourers, of whom more than seven million are children. In addition, an estimated half a million Afghan refugees, including children, have become debt-bonded to their employ-

In India an estimated five million adults and ten million children have to work on the land, in quarrying, carpet industries and households. Although in both countries bonded labour is illegal, the law is rarely enforced and the appalling poverty ensures the practice continues. There are few organisations which can fight for their rights.

In Brazil, 8,000 cases of escravidade bianca (white slavery) have come to light in recent years. Children are recruited under false pretences to work on large estates. If they try to leave they are recaptured by gunmen and beaten. Millions of other children are working "unseen" in households. In Hatti alone, the ILO estimates, more than 100,000 rural children have been sold as domestic slaves to rich families in the towns.

Since the 1980s, global economic trends of laissez faire and privatisation have further undermined the position of the workers, especially in the developing world.

Wholesale privatisation of state assets has spread from Europe and North America to the developing countries under the auspices of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund's structural ad justment programmes. As public sector assets are sold off. large-scale redundancies are taking place.

However, the result is far more devastating for workers in the Third World, where they have no system of social security to fall back on.

At a time when workers face a grim future they have few organisations to turn to. The ILO warns that the trade unions are being weakened by the onslaught of market forces. "The fundamental economic and political changes of recent years present major challenges to the world's trade unions," it points out.

High levels of unemployment have eroded union membership. With a ready pool of alternative labour, it is easy for employers to resist unionisation or engage in active "unionbusting". Women are particularly vulnerable and hard-won rights, for example, to maternity leave, are being under-

The IMF-imposed structural adjustment programmes have restricted trade union activities for Latin America's 40 million union members, around 20 per cent of the workforce High unemployment has discouraged workers in the private sector from protesting against poor salaries or working conditions, and many more workers have drifted into the informal sector - poor recruiting ground for trade unions.

In Africa, where trade unions played an important role in the process of multipartyism (one trade unionist, Frederick Chiluba, became President of Zambia) merely 10 per cent of workers have union affiliations. While trade union membership has increased in countries like Botswana and South Africa, most other countries have seen their membership decline since the late 1980s.

Keen to encourage foreign investment, many Asian governments are also discouraging trade union activities. Yet despite negative trends, coun-

bership. World trade has been expanding dramatically. But many of the working people who have contributed to this have not received the benefits. Attracted to countries where

tries such as Bangladesh.

South Korea and the

Philippines have witnessed an

increase in trade union mem-

labour is cheap, employers have imposed restrictions on the freedom of trade unions. The international trade union movement must address itself to the increasing globalisation of capital and finance. "The defence of worker's rights worldwide," says the report, "will demand that the

trade union movement think and organise internationally." DAYA KISHAN THUSSU IS Associate Editor of Gemint News Service.

## OPINION

## Split in CPB

about to divide the 45-year old tions. party practically vertically. In collapsed and the countries June 93. where communist parties still of CPB held in '91 last.

that it might accommodate the theoretical essence of the radical who generally accept debate. the ideas of socialism, but cessity of basin the organisa- be a big event in the demotion on such premises as the cratic politics of Bangladesh. detachment of the working the democratic and left polipeople and must accept tics are interested in the out-Marxism-Leninism as its ideol- come. Again, out of this intergave preference to national allies in case of a future diviformation of our society. Such complications in CPB. Actually, an approach was resented by a many exaggerated stories are section of the party which finding their ways in print. termed it as an attempt to The outcome of the liquidate the party and trans- congress is still uncertain. form the party to a ordinary Control commission of the liberal democratic party, party, which is also an elected Naturally passions raged high, body in the congress, enbut at the Congress, there was trusted with task of upholding a compromise. And there was the constitution of the party

no formal split. effectively counter the leader- vesting it on a trust. of Awami League in

The ideological battle that democratic politics led to is raging in the Communist some to opportunist positions. Party of Bangladesh (CPB) is But these were minor aberra-

A major point of debate as its long history, the party has outlined above raged all faced many crises, but the one through the period since fifth which has overtaken the party congress. At the moment facto-day is unique. It originates tions are poised face to face from the quest of adapting to a with the special congress world where the socialism has ahead on 15th and 16th of

As far as one can learn and hold power eg. China or guess those who are known to Vietnam are also changing fast. be transformationist have a lit-Actually this quest began ear- tleedge over those who term lier, before the fifth congress themselves as Marxists for regentration of Marxism amongst As a response to the neces- the delegates who would sity of change, the major opin- gather on the fateful day. In ion back in '91 was to bring the meantime, each is trying out the party out of the strait- to consolidate its position. jacket of strict Marxist Report such as CPB has an as-Leninist ideology and trans- set worth 18 crores etc are form the party in such a way being sponsored only to dilute

The outcome of the CPB without absolutising the ne- congress is definitely going to party has to be the advanced Naturally, other constituents of ogy etc. Naturally this opinion est, some are trying to fix their tasks of democratic trans- sion and this is causing further

and some members of the cen-However, the compromise tral committee have taken the did not lead to cohesion. Since initiative for maintaining unity the fifth congress, practically of the party on the basis of two centres have functioned. documents of the fifth The section which based its congress of CPB. They have position more on classical began the membership drive, point of view, were in a minor- and they claim that majority ity in the leadership and in an of the general members are effort to consolidate their po- against division and for adsition in the party, moved from justment. Moreover, on the a separate centre since the question of division of assets of very beginning. As a result, the the party between two facparty failed to respond to the tions, a strong opinion exists urgent national tasks. On the against any such step. If at all other hand, amongst these there is a division, the whole who were for transforming the thing should vest on a trust to party to one which generally be formed for carrying on soupholds the cause of socialism cial and academic activities. and though doesn't adhere to Incidentally, the group which Marxism-Leninism but does is for orthodox position are for not renounce Marx or Lenin. the right to own the property Again, there were efforts for and the other faction known evolution of a force which will as transformationists are for An Insider

### **PSC** and district quota

Sir. We are worried to know that the Public Service Commission has recommended for abolition of district quota system in government services. The recommendation, if accepted, will seriously affect the regional participation in government services. Say, for example, there are districts like Joypurhat, Lalmonirhat, Panchagarh, Nilphamari, Kurigram and many other upgraded districts which were lacking in better education facilities. Only rich people of the areas used to send their sons and daughters to the towns to avail of 'better education facilities'. Poor meritorious students continued their education in the old subdivi-

sional private colleges where

and laboratory facility. But now the government has already established govt colleges for male and female students in all new districts. Govt colleges

have also been established in some of the thana headquarters. Some other colleges have also been upgraded as university colleges. It is expected that poor students who are prosecuting studies will be able to show their merit as, hopefully, good and quality education will now be imparted. If district quota in govt services is abolished, the students from hitherto neglected and undeveloped areas will be deprived of the facility and the entire benefit of service will be shared only by the sons and daughters of the affluent peo-

Again the women are de-

there were no better teachers manding to raise their quota in services. If district quota is abolished, the women from the mufassil areas will not get any chance to get service. In order to encourage the meritorious students the merit quota may be raised, but district quota should be there till all areas are equally developed.

> Mahbubul Haque Chowdhury DGM, Sonali Bank, HO, Dhaka

Abolition of district quota will

only bring despair and frustra-

"The Spirit of 1971" Sir, A letter in your es-

teemed daily by Mr Akku-Chowdhury (Ist June) drew my attention. I would like to point out to

Mr Chowdhury that the chief of Awami League Mrs Hasina is

only following her father's footsteps. In 1972, David Frost did an interview of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. I was in London and

watched the programme and to my disappointment heard him say among other things, "My Awami League fought and brought about the independence of Bangladesh" ... If he a patriot and supposedly a seasoned politician and definitely the leader of the majority at that point - failed to recognize the simple fact that the people of the then East Pakistan fought and brought the independence and not his Awami League alone, how can one expect his heir to do so, be it twenty one years later ....

Swatee Majid Shegun Bagan, Dhaka