

# DOWN TO EARTH

## The Problems of Slums in City

By A S M Nurunnabi

In the urban milieu of a country, slums, more or less, are an ever-present phenomenon. They are the end product of a country's poverty. Even in the richest country, America, slums are said to exist. Because slums are so many pockets of concentrated poverty, they easily develop into dens of crime and a threat to urban health and sanitation.

Being in a developing country, the slum problems of its premier city Dhaka present no easy solution because of their ever-growing volume and complexities. In the city, slums of various descriptions such as semi slums, quarter slums, mini slums, etc. grow up on vacant public lands, along railway tracks, around bazars — in fact in every vacant space allowing undisturbed occupation for sometime. They proliferate by the day, because of the worsening of the poverty position of the rural and urban poor.

No survey seems to have been made of the city's slums. However, according to statistics presented at a recent seminar, about 50 per cent dwellers of Dhaka city live in slums. Thus the city's slums have taken on an unusually enlarged dimension. Slum dwellers are no tax payers, nor are they among voters. Therefore, politically they do not exist. But humanly and nationally they very much do exist, and they constitute a vital segment of the people. And accordingly, on altruistic and humanitarian grounds, the cause of their rehabilitation merits serious and urgent consideration.

How do the people end up living in slums? Most of them had their roots in the villages; some of them had lost their lands due to river erosion or were forced to float for economic reasons. When during off-season work in short supply in the villages, some of them move to the towns, hopeful of finding any job that may assure their survival. For their shelter they erect makeshift shacks which gradually grow into slums.

The temporary structures in the slums which they call home are mostly made from cardboard, bamboo, straw matting, pieces of plastic sheet or tin or anything which serves as part of roof or door. They are the breeding grounds of diseases and epidemics because of the extreme poverty and starvation and malnourishment of their dwellers. The minimum municipal facilities are denied to them. Nobody's sensibilities are affected by their continuing plight.

The economic rehabilitation of the slum dwellers under a balanced national policy should be among the administration's foremost priorities. But in view of the magnitude of the problem very little or nothing substantial appears to have been done. As a result slums in one form or another keep coming up which the elitist pockets of the city as well as the administration may not pretend to see. But none should take it into his head that bulldozing the slum dwellers out will itself solve the problem. It is reported that at least 27 drives

# A trend towards 2-party system

From Page 1 Col 4

have taught any lesson to the people and the political parties. Granting the provincial assembly election, being held tomorrow, will also produce similar results, there is no certainty that the provincial governments will be manned by the party which rules at the federal level. In such a case, the danger of precipitating another crisis will become real. If Punjab is ruled, as expected, by a Nawaz Sharif nominee and if he repeats the performance that Sharif himself had shown in 1988 when the Punjab Chief Minister (Sharif himself) would deliberately ignore the country's Prime Minister (Benazir), then it might lead towards another breakdown of authority encouraging the forces of authoritarianism.

However, political analysts take encouragement from a positive feature of the current elections. It is the expression of a clear trend towards the emergence of a two-party system. No third party is anywhere near the two major ones. The third largest number of seats have been won by Pakistan Muslim League Junejo group, six seats.

In fact, the largest block of seats is held by the independents — 15 including seven members from the federally-administered tribal areas where politics is non-existent and who are bound to swing to the party which is going to form the government. The PPP and PML (N) have already started wooing them (polls were not held in one FATA constituency). However the FATA members will not have an easy time to decide whom to align with because the name of the party which is going to form the government will not be known until after the NA members have decided on the leader of the House by secret ballot.

The two-party system will not of course come that soon. It will take at least another couple of elections for the trend to set in with the electorate. This may also encourage the presently-fragmented major parties to try and close ranks. Except for the PPP, almost all the other parties are split into two to six factions. If the electorate returns similar verdicts in the coming elections these fragmented parties may find it necessary as well as profitable to come together again.

The PML (N), led by the former prime minister Nawaz Sharif, though trailing behind PPP, has earned major gain in so far as its leader is concerned. For Mian Nawaz Sharif has emerged as a real national leader. His party's inroads into the urban areas of Sindh may be the result of the boycott of the polls by MQM. But Nawaz Sharif has been able to come out of the clutches of the Jamaat and another religious party which twisted his arms severely in the post-1990 situation. One hopes Nawaz Sharif will be able to sustain the image and act like a national leader even if he cannot make it to the prime minister's house.

The PPP, on the other hand, has doubled the number of seats it could secure in 1990. But to form a government it will need the support not only of its allies, the PML (Junejo group) which has six seats and Islami Jamhoori Mahaz (IJM)

which has four, but also of the independents.

One of the major problems of the new government will be the 8th amendment. Both the PPP and the PML (N) are committed to do something about it but both have subtly different ideas about what to do. The PPP wants the entire amendment to go although it helped it come back to power. Nawaz Sharif wants only the discretion of the president to dissolve the assemblies to be sheared. While people will watch with interest how the two parties tackle the hotly-debated issue, the parties will have to make up their minds before December when the presidential elections are due. No party will feel safe backing anyone a president with the sort of powers that he now enjoys by virtue of the 8th amendment, especially when he will have to be from a province other than that of the prime minister's own.

The MQM has finally seen the futility of boycotting the elections on the ground that the government has failed to stop political violence, a phenomenon for which the MQM itself is responsible more than anyone else.

The bluff has been called. The caretaker government did not do any of the things the MQM thought it would be able to extract. The government did not withdraw the cases pending against MQM leaders, including its chief Altaf Hussain now living in self-exile in London; it also did not postpone the elections, even in the constituencies which the MQM had won in 1988 and 1990, especially in Karachi and Hyderabad. The leadership has acted wisely by withdrawing the boycott for tomorrow's provincial assembly elections.

Yet another outcome of the elections is the poor performance by the religious parties. The Islami Jamhoori Mahaz of Maulana Fazlur Rahman, the PIF of Jamaat Islami and the Muttahida Deeni Mahaz have won only four, three and two seats respectively. Surprisingly, the PIF leader, Quazi Husain Ahmad, was not able to win his seat. A lesser cleric, Maulana Abdus Sattar Khan Niazi, who was a minister in the Nawaz Sharif government, too, bit the dust. He was the father of the idea of having to mention a citizen's religion on his or her national identity card. It seems the wisdom of letting the radicalised clergy into the mainstream politics has paid off.

The most distinguishing feature of the 1993 polls is its fairness, both perceived and real. No party has so far raised any question, even though results in some cases have been totally unexpected. Several teams of observers from the Commonwealth and SAARC countries are here to witness the elections. The caretaker government provided all possible facilities for them. The 1993 elections will have its own place in Pakistan's history just as the 1970 elections do.

Meanwhile it will be of interest to record a few tit-bits about the elections and the result it produced:

Over 40 per cent voters cast their votes in Punjab.

Turnout was low in Sindh

# Do-or-die battle

From Page 1 Col 5

situation a "crisis," and hinted that the authorities — a euphemism here for the army which will supervise the provincial elections — are hoping to find a way to push the two into a compromise.

Said Jahangir Badar, the Punjab president of Bhutto's PPP who lost his bid for a national seat: "Unless we get a majority in Punjab, power at the center will be meaningless. Past experience has shown that the government cannot implement its manifesto if it lacks hold on Punjab."

In an 11th hour dramatic move that drove into the heart of Bhutto's family stronghold in southern Sindh, a significant party announced electoral alliance with Sharif's PML.

The Karachi-based Mohajir Qaumi Movement (MQM) which boycotted national polls Wednesday, announced it was back in the running, and with Sharif.

In urban strongholds, PML voters had pledged to back MQM candidates, and in rural Sindh MQM would back PML, former Karachi Mayor Farooq Sattar said.

In Karachi, meanwhile, MQM leader Altaf Hussain called on 'the authorities' to 'invite' the two sides for talks on a coalition.

"It is a crisis situation which calls for the leaders of the two major parties to be invited for talks. Hussain said in a live satellite transmission to his Karachi followers from London.

He proposed that the two former premiers agree to a rotating premiership. The mass-circulation Jang newspaper quoted unnamed reliable sources in Islamabad as saying the 'authorities' were concerned about the survival of democracy in Pakistan, and considering offering three coalition options.

One was that Sharif accept Bhutto as premier, and in return consult him on the choice of President, another that both should withdraw as premier in favour of a third candidate, or that the two agree on a consensus candidate and a constitutional amendment be introduced to prevent a no-confidence motion for the next five years.

Interim premier Moeen Qureshi, 63, who introduced a spate of reforms in his brief three month tenure, has said he was not a candidate for any high office after the elections. But he said this week he would be ready to serve the country if called upon.

AP adds: Bhutto's party said Friday it had lined up almost all the partners needed for a coalition government that would return her to the prime minister's post she lost three years ago.

The Pakistan People's Party is in a comfortable position to form the government along with its allies," Ms. Bhutto said here.

Spokesman Bashir Riaz said the party had forged alliances with at least 20 victorious candidates from smaller parties and with independents, bringing the total to 106, only three short of the magic number.

# Call for hartal in Sylhet today

From Our Correspondent

SYLHET, Oct 8: The Sahaba Sainik Parishad, a religious organisation in Sylhet, has called for a half-day hartal here tomorrow demanding arrest of Taslima Nasrin.

The organisation held a meeting here today with Moulana Abdus Salam in the chair. It was addressed, among others, by Moulana Abdur Rahman, Moulana Abdus Sobhan, Moulana Abdul Aziz, and Hafez Suleman Ahmed.

# BIDS to help

From page 1 col 7

finalisation of the plan. They said this delay is hampering achievement of the targets.

In view of the continuing delay the government felt the need to involve the BIDS in the process, sources said.

The government felt that since the FFYP document bears significance both nationally and internationally, it should be of a high quality. And since the officials of the Planning Commission are engaged in their day-to-day duties, it would not be possible for them to put in the desired level of effort in the preparation of the document. The government also felt that the BIDS, which has efficient manpower, was perfectly equipped to do the job.

However, some Planning Commission officials said the final document would necessitate revision of the main document, which they feel the Planning Commission itself could do. They said the concerned divisions can revise the micro and sectoral documents and send them to the general economic division (GED). The GED then can edit those and add the macro perspective to complete the document.

The officials also said the involvement of the BIDS would entail unnecessary costs for the government.

# Bodos kill 10, torch villages in Assam

GUWAHATI, Oct 8: The Bodo tribal people killed ten non-Bodos and set fire to several villages forcing hundreds of people to desert their homes in one of the worst ethnic clashes in lower Assam since yesterday even after deployment of the army, according to official sources, reports PTI.

While six bodies including two of women were recovered from Milan Bazar area, one more was recovered from Bakol in Bonggaigaon district today. Both the local markets along with other markets in the twin districts of Bonggaigaon and Kokrajhar were also looted yesterday. Three more deaths have been reported from Jamunguri and Anketa areas today.

About 50 people were injured and over 16,000 people are taking shelter in different relief camps. The victims mostly belonged to the minority community whom the Bodo tribes were trying to evict from the proposed Bodoland autonomous district council area, the sources added.

Army had moved into the disturbed areas last night itself and additional police forces also rushed from all over the state, police prevented torching of more houses by the Bodos by opening fire at Thaikarguri also in Bonggaigaon district. Nobody was injured in police firing.

A high-level ministerial delegation is visiting the trouble areas tomorrow. The speakers Debesh Chakraborty would also lead another delegation of leaders of all political parties to the same area tomorrow. Top police and civil officials are camping in the area.

# Rich states blamed

From page 1 col 7

nalised soon.

In Washington, the Finance Minister was unanimously elected chairman of the Board of Governors of the two Bretton Woods Sister Institutions for the year 1993-94, thus becoming the only person from this region to hold this prestigious position after the Indian Finance Minister way back in 1948.

"It is an honour for the country and the region and also a credit to the people and the country for the successful implementation of the structural adjustment programmes during the last two years or so," Rahman remarked on his election as chairman of the 187-member World Bank (WB) and IMF board.

The Finance Minister was also elected chairman of the procedure committee and the directors' remuneration committee for a period of one year.

The message sent to the developed countries in the US capital, he said, was for them to implement structural adjustments to remove macro-economic imbalances in order to bring about a faster growth in the global economy.

The Western economies, he charged, were taking undue advantage of the economic liberalisation policies implemented by the developing countries while these nations are not being able to capitalise on it because of the poor growth in demand due to the persistent recession in the developed countries.

An economic model was put forward in a book entitled 'Miracle in East Asia', published at the meeting, on why the East Asian economies grew while the Western economies were limping during the past several years, Rahman noted.

The book outlined the common factors for economic success as: Outward-oriented economic policies, trade liberalisation, low rate of inflation and stable macro-economic balances.

In contrast, he said, the protectionist economic policies of the previous 40 years is the main reason for the Sub-Continent's backwardness. "We (Bangladesh, India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka) are also moving towards that direction now, but we should move faster."

The minister said that there should be a well-conceived social safety-network for the people likely to be affected by further macro-economic adjustments. More targeted programmes like the Food for Work and Food for Education programmes need to be developed instead of providing government handouts, he added.

"The poor should not be left behind in the development process, they should be protected while we carry out the reforms," he said. "Resource would be no problem."

He suggested that a credit programme may be started for the retrenched workers to help them start up micro-level industries based on local resources.

"Human resources development is a sine qua non for the overall development process" and that is why the BNP government has placed so much importance on primary and secondary education, Rahman pointed out.

However, he lamented that despite a Tk. 2800 crore allocation for the education sector, resource use is extremely slow and the sector lacks dynamism. "We need a lot of invigorating administrative action (in the education sector) and we have to move fast."

He also emphasised on the need to bring about administrative and legal reforms and a participatory democratic process at the local level to speed up the overall development process and added that transparency and accountability are important factors in a market-oriented economy.

On the investment scenario, he said: "I am not at all satisfied by the rate of investment growth and in a way the banks have let us down."

The banking sector is shying

# The Midnight File

AAMSU calls for 36-hour

"Assam bandh"

GUWAHATI, Oct 8: The All Assam Minorities Students Union (AAMSU) today called for a 36-hour "Assam bandh" beginning from 0500 hr on October 10 in protest against the "deletion of the names of genuine voters" from the voters list prepared in 1990. The AAMSU president Mustafa Kamal Passa alleged in a statement that the names of at least 40 lakh genuine voters were deleted from the draft voters list, all of whom belonged to linguistic, religious and ethnic minorities, reports PTI.

# Russia warns Gamsakhurdia of military action

MOSCOW, Oct 8: A Russian military official today warned former Georgian leader Zviad Gamsakhurdia of military action against his supporters as the country's current head of state said Georgia would join the CIS, reports AFP.

# 50 feared killed in Lankan landslide

RATNAPURA (Sri Lanka), Oct 8: A mountain side eroded by heavy rain crumbled into a village Friday, and dozens of people were feared killed, rescuers and police said, reports AP.

"We have unearthed 13 bodies so far. We feel the death toll would go up to 30," said R K H Ranchagoda, a rescue worker. Other rescuers said the number of dead may be as high as 50.

"More than nine houses and several huts were buried. It is very difficult for anyone there to be alive," said Captain P. Silva, an army officer at the site.

The Jatiya Party has also decided to observe Upazilla Demand Day on Oct 23.

# Milam

From Page 1 Col 8

crease of purchasing power of the rural people.

He said "I have witnessed that the people who did not have the buying capacity even for a square meal a few years back are now purchasing commodities like transistors, land and other goods". The government's policy in socio-economic sectors had certainly brought new dynamism in development process, he added.

Milam thanked the Prime Minister for her personal initiative and interest in the development of women and human resources of the country.

He also praised Begum Zia's government for its utmost sincerity to flourish the democratic process in the country.

# AL hartal

From Page 1 Col 5

inputs and assurance of just prices of essentials.

The AL has urged people to attend a rally at the Bangabandhu Avenue at 4 pm tomorrow.

AL Presidium members led a torch procession in the city yesterday campaigning for the hartal.

AL General Secretary Zillur Rahman while inaugurating the torch procession at the Bangabandhu Avenue yesterday evening expressed his concern over the growing destructive activities of the communal forces. He also criticised the government for the deteriorating law and order situation.

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There was unanimous demand from the Third World countries for starting a successor of the ESAF facility at the Washington meeting, he said, but the G-7 did not show much interest in funding it.

On the WB funding for the JSRP, the minister said: "The wage hike created a lot of problem and we had to convince the Bank that it still remains viable under the earlier plan (of the project)."

The bank agreed but insisted that the government bear the additional cost of the project due to the wage hike, he said. "We are very near to concluding the funding negotiations for JSRP with the Bank."

"On the Jamuna Multi-purpose Bridge Project, the Finance Minister said that negotiations are on track and 'almost everything' has been finalised.

The government is seeking a definitive commitment of 200 million US dollars each from the WB, Asian Development Bank and Overseas Economic Co-operation Fund (OECF) of Japan while Bangladesh would contribute 100 million dollar towards the total cost of the project.

A Japanese team is expected to arrive in the capital this week to make a final assessment on the project, he noted. "Substantial progress has already been made and I am confident that the project will proceed according to schedule."

The press conference was also attended by the ERD Secretary Lutfullah Majid, NBR Chairman, Dr. Akbar Ali Khan and Additional Secretary of the Finance Ministry Amir-ul-Mulk.

Two killed in Ctg

From Staff Correspondent

CHITTAGONG, Oct 8: Two persons were killed here today in separate incidents.

One Mohammad Ali, 35, was allegedly murdered this afternoon following a dispute over demarcation of house boundary at Dhalai village under Hathazari PS.

In another occurrence, one Abul Kalam died on the spot when a speeding bus dashed him from behind near Sholahar crossing here this morning.

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