

The Gap in Understanding of Agriculture

Professor Shah Mohammad Farouk, VC, Agriculture University, has emphasised the need for conducting multi-disciplinary research in the agricultural sciences. He was inaugurating a three-day workshop on "BAU Research Progress 1992-93" at the Shilpacharya Zainul auditorium, Mymensingh. Agriculture still is, in Bangladesh, the mainstay of man's ways about a meaningful civilised survival as it has been so for thousands of years. Agriculture alone saw the Bengal society through in the challenging days when the other means of social survival, namely, non-agricultural cottage productions of textile and metal-working, had been forced out of our economy by colonial interests. An exploding population has added tremendously to the load agriculture has been bearing since then.

A rush for a seat at the Agriculture University, the graduates from which are supposed to stand a much greater chance to land a job than scholars from any other institution, do not mean things have really changed for agriculture, its experts and its practitioners. It is a good thing that the BAU Research System and Committee for Advanced Studies and Research have organised such an important workshop. Then, it is a measure of society's total indifference to what the participants there do or talk that there wouldn't ever be any public appraisal of whatever transpired in the workshop. No paper offered there would be published in any popular journals and commented upon and debated about by interested people at large in the society. The physical sciences continue to be esoteric delving into mysteries inaccessible even to the highly educated among our citizens. One expected that such medievalism in the matter of physics or chemistry, mathematics or meteorology would not constrict agriculture which is quite another kind of science. No, that was not to be. This most participated amalgam of science and art continues to be a jealously guarded preserve of only experts — more because of the society's utter lack of interest in 'soily' matters than through any design of the scientists. Once in a while some sensation making piece would appear like the London University researcher Dr Khaleq's claim of hitting a revolutionary fertiliser. But that adds to neither education nor knowledge of the general run of people whose growing awareness of the strivings in agriculture is a prerequisite for a prosperous national practice of this discipline.

Professor Farouk has underscored the importance of multi-disciplinary research. In fact, research work in all areas of our national pursuit of knowledge has long been suffering from over-compartmentalisation, that awful aspect of specialisation. Most of the great achievements of science and even of philosophy and history etc materialised largely through a multi-discipline approach. A physicist Francis Crick helped biologist Jimmy Watson to decipher the double helical structure of DNA. The General Theory of Relativity would not take shape if Marcel Grossman were not to develop tensor calculus for Einstein to use it. The great popularisers of science, Hogben, Bernal, Bronowski, Blackett and the phenomenal Robert J Oppenheimer were all multi-discipline men. The unchallenged leadership of I B S Haldane in the biological sciences was built up, said IBS himself, mainly through his being a gate-crasher. For sciences like geography and agriculture a multi-discipline approach requiring command over related sciences is a must for striking quick and satisfactory solution to problems. The problems of agriculture are special in that these need to be responded through positions in the basic sciences such as say genetics or biochemistry and yet would wait for application-oriented packages to deliver social good.

Let our agricultural scientists give some of their cares to educating the educated over again in the basics of harnessing plant and animal organisms to the service of man — in the interest of improving our national agriculture.

Maintaining Quality of Food at Public Eateries

A report from Natore carried in this newspaper says that most of the hotels and restaurants of that town are found guilty of catering substandard foods for their customers. Both the method of preparation and pre-service care leave much to be desired. This is on top of the use of adulterated food-stuffs for preparation of the final items for consumption. The complaints against the eateries also include the use of unsafe water from different sources. Of the many harmful effects of the low quality foods, stomach ailments have been cited as prominent.

This report may have categorically accused Natore for not abiding by the hygienic rules in the hotel business, but to our knowledge this district town should not be the only defaulter. Perhaps there are even worse offenders around. Even in the capital city, not all eating places can claim to be strictly following the health rules in preparing and serving items for human consumption. It seems low quality foods and their ingredients have helped develop an unusual immunity in us all. The fact that the edible oil and spices left over from the overnight cooking are merrily used to add salivating quality to the next day's is common knowledge. More regrettable is the fact that this unhygienic practice can go unhindered because apparently there is none to look into the matter.

If Natore is any guide, we have reasons to be alarmed; for repeated appeals — so says the report — to the authorities concerned have fallen on deaf ears. Even complicity between the erring hotels and restaurants and a section of the municipality's officials is suspect for the continuation of unhygienic hotel and catering service. While the ordinary customers' complaints go unheard, their thin wallets force them to turn to these eating houses. Certainly at a high cost later on. But this is an avoidable evil and a motive for honest business combined with supervision by the authorities on a regular basis could certainly give a better account of our cuisine.

Experience says that the administration suddenly becomes active once reports of contaminated water and substandard foods being served are carried in newspapers but after a few days, everything goes into the blissful slumber. We cannot expect the US standard in maintaining the quality of foods that go through various checks to determine their cholesterol level, nutrition values etc before crossing the counter for consumption, but we can at least demand that the hotels and restaurants do not deliberately jeopardise the customers' health by using contaminated and adulterated food-stuffs in the preparations.

Administrative Transparency Needed for a Good Government

by Syed Naquib Muslim

IT is beyond doubt or question that a good government is the common concern of the administrators and the administered as both derive benefits out of it. The fact, however, remains that installation of a good government is not an easy task. Good government presupposes induction and practice of a cluster of values. Among the democratic values, accountability and transparency are dominant.

In other words, the degree of the "goodness" of government is linked to the degree of accountability and transparency achieved. A democratic government seeks to set these twin values whereas an autocratic government tends to avoid it.

An authoritarian government practices secrecy in a planned fashion. It advocates confidentiality and opacity in all government actions.

The present government stresses the need for a "transparent and accountable" administration. There are implications in the speeches of the Prime Minister and her Cabinet members that in order to make politics and bureaucracy truly democratic and corruption-free, it is necessary to establish accountability and transparency at all levels of the government.

Administrative transparency springs from people orientation; it demands responsiveness of the administrators to day-to-day needs of the citizens.

Transparency is a concept that implies relations between the citizenry and the administration. Citizens can see what the government is doing for them and the government in turn can perceive what the citizens expect of it. Transparency and democracy reinforce each other; only through establishment of a democratic administration, it is possible to establish transparency in the civil service. The core principle of administrative transparency is accessibility of the clientele to information data that are required to meet its legitimate interests.

In fact, degree of transparency varies from situation to situation. When the traditional Weberian model is in operation, the goal is to establish transparency and transparency here is the end; training intervention is needed to ameliorate the situation. But when a modern administration is existent, transparency is the process through which bureaucracy-beneficiary rapport of proximity can be achieved and which in turn helps in democratising the traditional administrative system in a country. The output of a democratised and transparent bureaucracy is the legitimacy and efficacy in the activities of the bureaucrats and the politicians.

As the electorate or the taxpayers, the right to know is the first privilege the people seek to enjoy. An anonymous bureaucracy keeps people in a state of darkness. Morally speaking, all people have a right to know who is doing what and for whom. If a member of the public is rewarded, it should be made clear why he is rewarded; if anybody is penalized, it should be clarified why he is penalized. This is one kind of transparency in bureaucracy.

The Weberian bureaucracy deemphasises self-expression. One pays a high price when one denies self-expression. The source of all energy, passion, motivation and an internally generated desire to do good work is one's own feeling about what one is doing. To deny people self-expression is to dampen or restrain their level of motivation and energy. Stating one's want is the essential act of taking responsibility and committing oneself to action. This is the way a person overcome his helplessness as administrator. Fog occurs when a person does not know what he wants; it occurs when he is caught up in irrelevance, superfluity or unnecessary details. Asking "what do we want out of our specific action?" Pierce through the fog.

Openness in the government is the demand of the day. It is a basic democratic value. Citizens cannot give "the consent of the governed" if they do not know what is going on in the government. It is not always necessary to keep all inside information inside. There should be institutional arrangements to facilitate the citizens to obtain information needed for their independent judgement or views on national policies or plans. There should of course, be a small body of information that should not be divulged on security or privacy ground, but the natural or the Weberian impulse to withhold information unnecessarily from the relevant people, has to be neutralised.

Quick availability of and access to information or data is, therefore, a basic ingredient of a transparent bureaucracy. Withholding information without valid reason is a kind of deception. If an organization is in trouble, employees should be informed why it is in trouble; if it is developing, the employees should share not only the knowledge but also the credit. Shielding reality from the employees is equal to treating them like aliens. We can afford to be opaque to the foreigners who cannot claim access to information.

Manipulation is the act of controlling people without their knowing it. Manipulation is closely linked to hypocrisy; it is like saying yes when we mean no. When this manipulation is in practice transparency automatically disappears. Manipulation breeds corruption whereas transparency shields it. An honest approach always favours a manipulative approach makes an easy solution complicated. If a specific problem cannot be solved, it is possible to convince why it cannot be done. Therefore, when transparency is in practice no climate of confusion or misunderstanding prevails in the organisation. There is also little prospect of friction or confrontation between the administrators and the administered.

For a committed bureaucracy, transparency is a moral issue. It is the issue of whether it is possible for the administrators to tell the truth about what

they see happening, to make only those promises that they can deliver on, to admit their mistakes, and to have the feeling that the authentic act is always the best both for the administrators and the administered. For a transparent bureaucracy, there is little scope for developing malice, suspicion, hostility and distrust on the part of the people. In a transparent administration, the rule of law prevails. Here all sorts of discrimination, arbitrariness and discretion abuse naturally disappear. In a transparent administration, the provision of accountability is built-in. It creates a climate of self-restraint and self-check and thus works as a natural deterrent to commission of irregularities and corruption. It never feels shaky to meet the questions from the public whereas a non-transparent administration not only resists questions but also discourages them.

Administrative transparency is possible to be installed if both politicians and administrators are first conceptually clear about it. Otherwise, it is not possible for them to go into action. After all, a ship cannot have a smooth sailing in a foggy weather.

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DRUGHT, desertification and civil war were the 'official' causes of the Somali famine. 'Operation Restore Hope' was the 'solution'. What are the origins of this crisis?

Somalia was a pastoral economy based on the 'exchange' between nomadic herders and small agriculturalists. Nomadic pastoralists accounted for 50 per cent of the population. In the 1970s, resettlement programmes led to the development of a sizeable sector of commercial pastoralism. Livestock contributed to 80 per cent of export earnings until 1983. Despite recurrent droughts, Somalia remained virtually self-sufficient in food until the 1970s.

The International Monetary Bank (IMF)-World Bank intervention in the early 1980s contributed to exacerbating the crisis of Somali agriculture. The economic reforms undermined the fragile exchange relationship between the 'nomadic economy' and the 'sedentary economy', that is, between pastoralists and small farmers characterised by money transactions as well as traditional barter.

A very tight austerity programme was imposed on the government largely to release the funds required to service Somalia's debt servicing obligations to the Paris Club. In fact, a large share of the external debt was held by the Washington-based financial institutions. According to an ILO mission report: The Fund alone among Somalia's major recipients of debt service payments, refuses to reschedule... De facto it is helping to finance an adjustment programme, one of whose major goals is to repay the IMF itself...

The structural adjustment programme reinforced Somalia's dependence on imported grain. From the mid-1970s to the mid-1980s, food aid increased 15-fold, at the rate of 31 per cent per annum. Combined with increased commercial imports, this influx of cheap surplus wheat and rice sold in the domestic market led to the displacement of domestic producers, as well as a major shift in food consumption patterns to the detriment of traditional crops (maize and sorghum).

The devaluation of the Somali Shilling imposed by the IMF in June 1981, was followed by periodic devaluations, lead-

ing to hikes in the prices of fuel, fertiliser and farm inputs. The impact on agriculturalists was immediate particularly in rain-fed agriculture but also in the areas of irrigated farming. Urban purchasing power declined dramatically, government extension programmes were curtailed, infrastructure collapsed, the deregulation of the grain market and the influx of 'food aid' led to the impoverishment of farming communities.

Also, during this period, much of the best agricultural land was appropriated by bureaucrats, army officers and merchants with connections to the government. Rather than promoting food production for the domestic market, the donors were encouraging the development of so-called 'high value added' fruits, vegetables, oilseeds and cotton for export on the best irrigated farmland.

As of the early 1980s, prices for imported livestock drugs increased as a result of the depreciation of the currency. The World Bank encouraged the exaction of user fees for veterinary services to the nomadic herders, including the vaccination of animals. A private market for veterinary drugs was promoted.

The functions performed by the Ministry of Livestock were phased out, the Veterinary Laboratory Services of the Ministry were to be fully financed on a cost recovery basis. According to the World Bank, 'veterinarian services are essential for livestock development in all areas, and they can be provided mainly by the private sector (...). Since few private veterinarians will choose to practise in the remote pastoral areas, improved livestock care will also depend on "para vets" paid from drug sales.'

The privatisation of animal health was combined with the absence of emergency animal feed during periods of drought, the commercialisation of water and the neglect of water and rangeland conservation. The results were predictable: the herds were decimated and so were the pastoralists who represent 50 per cent of the country's

To the Editor...

Upgradation of IPO/IRMS posts

Sir, It is known all that during the British period Inspectors of Post Office and Railway Mail Service used to get more salary than the Deputy Magistrates, but now-a-days that has been lowered by a lot. An Inspector of Post Office/RMS is to perform various types of work. He is to conduct enquiry of cases, attend could on behalf of the department. In charge of a subdivision he is to perform his duty as the departmental chief of the subdivision. He is the appointing authority of Class IV as well as Class III employees like Postman/Mailguard, but it is an irony that he is not a 1st Class or 2nd Class officer he is also a Class III officer only.

Therefore I like to draw the kind attention of the authority concerned to upgrade their post and declare them at least as Class II officers.

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educational institutions, including at the Jahangirnagar and Rajshahi Universities, is a red signal for the nation.

Mr Zillur Rahman Siddiqui's commentary in the column, Passing Clouds — "terrorism will remain as long as student organisations continue to be affiliate bodies of political parties." (Star Sept. 21), I think, is beyond question. The demand of Engineering University Teachers' Association (EUTA) to "ban student politics of terrorism" (Star Sept. 21) is also a befitting demand to cleanse the campus of terrorism.

I think, it's high time all political parties, including the ruling party, considered EUTA's demand and took effective steps, in the greater interest of the nation, to restore congenial atmosphere in the educational institutions.

Ali Azgor
Mymensingh

Foreign consultants for Railway recovery

Sir, It is learnt that with loan from Asian Development Bank, consultants from France are being appointed by the Government for implementation of the Railway Recovery Programme.

Debt and Structural Adjustment — the Real Causes of Somali Famine

by Michel Chossudovsky

Although drought, desertification and civil war have been cited as the 'official' cause of the Somali famine, the real causes are external debt and the structural adjustment programmes imposed by international financial institutions.

The 'hidden objective' of this programme was to eliminate the nomadic herders involved in the traditional exchange economy. According to the World Bank, 'adjustments' in the size of the herds are in any event beneficial because nomadic pastoralists in Sub-Saharan Africa are narrowly viewed as a cause of environmental degradation.

The collapse in veterinarian services also served indirectly the interests of the rich countries: in 1984, Somali cattle exports to Saudi Arabia and the Gulf countries plummeted as Saudi beef imports were redirected to suppliers from Australia and the European Community. The ban on Somali livestock imposed by Saudi Arabia was not, however, removed once the rinderpest disease epidemic has been eliminated.

The restructuring of government expenditure under the supervision of the Bretton Woods institutions also played a crucial role in destroying food agriculture. Agricultural infrastructure collapsed and recurrent expenditure in agriculture declined by about 85 per cent in relation to the mid-1970s. The Somali government was prevented by the IMF from mobilising domestic resources. Tight targets for the budget deficit were set.

Moreover, the donors increasingly provided 'aid' not in the form of imports of capital and equipment but in the form of 'food aid'. The latter would in turn be sold by the government on the local market and the proceeds of these sales (the so-called 'counterpart funds') would be used to cover the domestic costs of development projects. As of the early 1980s, 'the sale of food aid' became the principal source of revenue for

the State thereby enabling donors to take control of the entire budgetary process. The economic reforms were marked by the disintegration of health and educational programmes. By 1989, expenditure on health had declined by 78 per cent in relation to its 1975 level. According to World Bank figures, the level of recurrent expenditure on education in 1989 was about \$4 per annum per primary school student, down from about \$82 in 1982. From 1981 to 1989, school enrolment declined by 41 per cent (despite a sizeable increase in the population of school age), textbooks and school materials disappeared from the classrooms, school buildings deteriorated and nearly a quarter of the primary schools closed down. Teachers' salaries declined to abysmally low levels.

The IMF-World Bank programme has led the Somali economy into a vicious circle: the decimation of the herds pushed the nomadic pastoralists into starvation which in turn backlashed on grain producers who sold or bartered their grain for cattle. The entire social fabric of the pastoralist economy was undone. The collapse in foreign exchange earnings from declining cattle exports and remittances (from Somali workers in the Gulf countries) backlashed on the balance of payments and the State's public finances, leading to the breakdown of the government's economic and social programmes.

Small farmers were displaced as a result of the dumping of subsidised US grain on the domestic market combined with the hike in the price of farm inputs. The impoverishment of the urban population also led to a contraction of food consumption. In turn, State support in the irrigated areas was frozen

and production in the State farms declined. The latter were to be closed down or privatised under World Bank supervision.

According to World Bank estimates, real public sector wages in 1989 had declined by 90 per cent in relation to the mid-1970s. Average wages in the public sector had fallen to \$3 a month, leading to the inevitable disintegration of the civil administration.

A programme to rehabilitate civil service wages was proposed by the World Bank (in the context of a reform of the civil service), but this objective was to be achieved within the same budgetary envelope by dismissing some 40 per cent of public sector employees and eliminating salary supplements. Under this plan, the civil service would have been reduced to a mere 25,000 employees by 1995 (in a country of six million people). Several donors indicated keen interest in funding the cost associated with the retrenchment of civil servants.

In the face of impending disaster, no attempt was made by the international donor community to rehabilitate the country's economic and social infrastructure, to restore levels of purchasing power and to rebuild the civil service: the macro-economic adjustment measures proposed by the creditors in the year prior to the collapse of the government of

General Siyad Barre in January 1991 called for a further tightening over public spending, the restructuring of the Central Bank, the liberalisation of credit (which virtually thwarted the private sector) and the liquidation and divestiture of most of the State enterprises.

In 1989, debt servicing obligations represented 194.6 per cent of export earnings. The IMF's loan was cancelled because of Somalia's outstanding arrears, the World Bank had approved a structural adjustment loan for \$70 million in June 1989 which was frozen a few months later owing to Somalia's poor macro-economic performance. Arrears with creditors had to be settled before the granting of new loans and the negotiation of debt rescheduling. Somalia was tangled in the straightjacket of debt servicing and structural adjustment, the rest is recent history.

Somalia's experience shows how a country can be devastated by macro-economic policy: there are many Somalias in the developing world and the economic reform package implemented in Somalia is similar to that applied in more than 80 developing countries. But there is another significant dimension: Somalia is a nomadic pastoralist economy, and throughout Africa the nomadic livestock economy is being undermined by the IMF-World Bank programme in much the same way as the Somalia.

— Third World Network Features
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OPINION

Austerity

Suraiya Jahan

The Internal Resources Division of the Finance Ministry deserves many thanks for sponsoring a seminar on austerity. Really wastefulness in government expenditure in Bangladesh is as big a vice as corruption. It is hoped that this seminar would draw attention at least to the main items/areas of wastefulness. It is also a fact that if wastage can be minimised and resources mobilised in really productive channels, Bangladesh would definitely achieve a higher growth rate and may soon obviate the necessity for foreign grants and loans.

Poor maintenance of government property is an area of waste. The government has many residential colonies where its officers and staff reside. Every year the government spends a huge sum of money for maintaining these colonies. Even then due to inefficiency or callousness or, maybe, corruption these colonies are very poorly maintained. Thus these colonies are a channel of wasting government resources. Besides, these are sources of discrimination between government servants who get allotment of quarters and those who do not.

Government can end up these discriminations and also earn considerable amount of revenue, besides saving from wastage, if these colonies are sold to the public. Fund generated thereby may be profitably utilized in other urgent works like construction and maintenance of roads.

Maintenance of government transport is another leakage area. The government of this poor country has allowed full time car facility to the directors and officers of and above the rank of Joint Secretary. These cars are also naturally being used by their kith and kin. On the otherhand, the capital city of this country of 120 million people do not have a regular taxi service. Often some enjoy access to unreasonable facilities at state expenses and con-

spense women are very often forced to suffer. Here it may be mentioned that even in Pakistan Joint Secretaries are not allowed full time car facilities. In lieu they can take loan from government to purchase their own transport. Obviously, in such a system, personal transports are better maintained and thus there is a huge saving.

Most often Ministries, Directorates and Corporations purchase high cost equipment like intercom, computers, fax etc. In most cases these are either underutilised or ill-utilised and not carefully maintained allowing a sheer waste to occur. Surely underdeveloped Bangladesh cannot afford to waste resources on such items as not exactly essential without jeopardising the country's economy and future. This area also deserves full attention of the government.

Government expenditures have been increasing considerably, some say alarmingly. In 1972/73 the revenue expenditure was Taka 213 crore which increased manifold to Taka 8550 crore in 1992/93. Most of this increase points to increasing wastage which further depresses the exchange rate of Taka, adds to inflation and blocks urgent works. Every year a huge burden is added to the revenue bill through development projects where manpower is transferred to the revenue side irrespective of whether the projects were profitable and such transfers necessary. This development planing in this country appears not as an exercise in achieving growth, rather, in many cases, a burden which eats up scarce resources, creates further perennial burden and also increases the debt service liability. So when there is an observance of austerity week or a seminar held on austerity these areas of wastage and drainage draw one's attention. Will not the authorities be kindly drawn to physically check the wastage and thus be models to the public to learn from?

given by senior Railway officers whom he perhaps considered as useless fools. The Minister, a former Secretary was helpless.

The loss in 1984-85 and 1985-86 amounted to Tk 149 crore and 180 crore respectively. The Secretary attributed the loss to the increase in salary of the staff but he ignored the fact that fares and freights were increased by about 120 p c during 1984-85 to 1989-90.

The posting of the above Secretary to the World Bank as the representative of Bangladesh was cancelled by the Interim Government believably for his excesses during Ershad regime.

Those officers who inspite of innumerable problems could maintain the Railway as a profitable concern upto 1982 may still contribute to the Recovery of Railway from ruin. So instead of wasting money on foreign experts, the Government can entrust the task of Recovery to those dedicated Railway officials who recovered it in 1972 from ruins and rubbles. The finance for recovery should come from the scheduled banks of Bangladesh who have sufficient cash for investment, not from ADB whose main function seems to be imposing foreign consultants on its borrowers.

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