

Looking for a Realistic Approach to Development

The national development approach has had two inter-related parts: the ADPs with their year-wise allocational and physical growth targets and the longer-term rolling investment programmes designed to average a growth rate prescribed and projected in the Fourth Five Year Plan. The two are so intertwined that if the first gets cold, the second not only sneezes, it even gets upset like an apple-cake.

The FY 1992-95 programme received a setback because of an underutilised 92.93 ADP which closed with a growth rate of only 4.3 per cent. In the first five months of the current ADP, only 16 per cent of it could be implemented representing a two per cent downswing from even what was achieved in the same period of the bad year — 1992-93. The current year's ADP allocation stands slashed by as much as Tk 750 crore of the three-year rolling programme allocation.

Against this backdrop, we now hear of a 14 per cent increase in the sectoral allocations for the 94-96 rolling investment programme over the 93-95 one which has by no means left a savoury message anyhow. The allocation for the new three-year programme has been set at Tk 26,659 crore as against a total of Tk 23,208 crore for the previous programme. The increase has been necessitated by the projection that we must make it to a 6.2 per cent growth in the GDP by 1996 so as to average a 5 per cent growth rate over the Fourth Five-Year Plan period.

The Planning Ministry's line of thinking seems to be that if we do not aim at the sky we would even miss the tall tree. But it is quite clear that the ministry has preferred to be notional and subjective with the allocations made in their anxiety to break out of the continuing cycle of economic stagnation. As it is, we have had not just backlog projects from one ADP to the other, but also the cumulative burden from one long-term programme to another.

Taking the underperformance of the 1993-94 ADP as a test case, we have basically three messages to learn by. The latest brain-storming sessions on ADP utilization up to November have revealed that the poor outcome was chiefly caused by delay in negotiating foreign aid with the donors. The other reasons are known to be lower utilization of the Taka component and delay in awarding contracts and appointing advisors for various projects. These can be put down to lack of ministerial coordination and flawed work by the implementation machinery. The news of some ministries surrendering as much Tk 90 crore sounds pathetically anti-climactic when complaints about resource constraints are heard all around.

The real moral here for the planners is that the ADP should not have been formulated with an eye to probable availability of foreign aid as it must have been, by all accounts. And if this is the realisation about an ADP then it is easily imagined how much of an unsure ground we are treading when making an announcement of those higher allocations for the 1994-96 rolling development programme. There are many slips between a pledge and a commitment and between a commitment and the disbursement, so far as foreign aid goes. To add to these variables, let us not have our own variety of differences between allocation and actual investment — no matter how noble our intentions are to buoy up a certain flagging spirit. We cannot live in a make-believe world when it comes to the highly materialistic challenges of development. The realistic approach consists in first doing what lies in our power to do — namely, achieve better ministerial coordination and make the implementation machinery really efficient and well-oiled. Then, of course, we should impress upon the multilateral financing agencies in particular to eliminate the gap between commitment and disbursement.

Mexico: A Rude Shock

Mexico has come a long way since the days of conquistadors. But suddenly those days seem to have revisited the country through the eruption of long bottled-up feelings of the native Indians against the government of Carlos Salinas de Gortari. The relative calm in Mexico was shattered when armed Indian guerrillas on the New Year's Day captured Chapais, a poor and predominantly Mayan region, in a surprise attack. The government response was prompt and ruthless. Not only were the rebels driven out of the captured area, but also are being hunted down in the mountains where they fled. Reports of army excesses are already there and the government's decision to seal off the area to outsiders, particularly the human rights groups, raises fear about further army brutalities.

Although President Salinas has been quick to defend the army's action that includes both land and air offensives, human rights groups are very concerned about the execution-style killings of the rebel Indian peasants as evidenced in places like Ocosingo. The ruthless army offensive is likely to be too overpowering for the rebels who are only poorly equipped, but the poor, neglected and disgruntled Indians have registered their protest in a most telling way. Long deprived of the government attention, this region has suddenly come to international limelight. The Mexican government also seems to have grasped some of the meanings of this uprising.

No wonder, the rebels did not mince words while explaining their aim of the attack on the government. They have cried hoarse for a long time but only in vain and now they want to establish their rights through an armed struggle. Indeed, the Mexican government in recent years has had to its credit quite a number of achievements, economic performance outshining the others. But evidently the benefits have not reached the most deserving candidates at all. Awakened by the rude shock, the government has already airlifted a sizeable quantity of food, of different varieties, to win over the unhappy Indians. There are even promises of new programmes for building roads, schools and hospitals in the area.

All this, however, comes as too little too late. Disillusioned, the Indians are now determined to obtain whatever they can by force. Their desperation has led them to put their lives at stake. Against the backdrop of the observance of 1993 as the year of the world's indigenous people, the treatment meted out to the Mexican Indians can be described as most cruel and inhuman. Mexico's signing of the North American Free Trade Agreement with its world ranking but if it fails to set its house in order, the achievement may be a liability rather than a creditable performance. For, the brutal suppression of the Indian people's revolt may not be well received by the international community.

Talking of Reforms: Consensus Needed on Major Issues

by Kazi Alauddin Ahmed

OLD order changeth yielding place to new. Perhaps the theme of such a saying is as old as civilisation itself. So, its appeal is universal. Conceptually, however, reform and change are not entirely similar. When we talk of change we do not always imagine qualitative improvement over what we have at the moment. But in reform we visualise an improved situation, a qualitative advantage over what the present can give us. While not all the changes are reforms, all reforms are always expected to be changes for something better. But it happens only when they are pursued on the basis of reality and practicability.

In the wider perspective, and beyond the four walls of a home, the reform input in the economic and development activities of a country, at the hands of the policy makers, needs to be viewed against the ultimate successes such programmes can bring. And when success is the criterion, all our reform programme have got to be worked out keeping eye on the potential pitfalls ahead.

Reforms which cannot anticipate such pitfalls or even if they do, but have inadequacies in containing them, can be disastrous. And again, result-oriented reforms, if not pursued and followed up later with the same zeal and dedication can turn into a total waste. Let us take the example of our education system. In the name of reform we seem to have succeeded in deforming it beyond retrieval, as it appears. I solemnly vouch that I have no special affinity with the old order. But I would certainly be unhappy to see that a time-tested old order is subjected to reform for only reform's sake. Can any one tell us what was wrong with our old system of primary education? Shall anybody testify to the detriment of our system of secondary education which we, however, inherited as a legacy from the Britishers?

In our political bid to give something which would be an independent nation we had practically swindled ourselves with our emotions. If change for the better could be called a reform then wisdom demands proper application of our intellect in retaining the better part of the old order instead of scrapping the whole at the dictate of our unruly emotions.

India, our closest neighbour, did not do the mistake we did. They did not relegate the importance of learning

English — the world's most common international language. They may have given the aspect a reshape in accordance with their national needs but were not stupid enough to abandon it altogether. The language proficiency being attained by the Indian children and students above primary level is simply astounding. This could happen due to the far-sightedness of the Indian experts in the education sector and the political will of the leaders.

Conversely, in the name of reform, our leaders opted for radical changes. Driven apparently by emotions and by some unwieldy charismatic instincts they brought down the system which owed its existence to two centuries of experience, overnight. Such radicalism came as a boomerang and set in a legacy of total disaster.

The damage done initially could still be retrieved if the

Assuming that the old systems were not compatible with the ever changing needs of the present day world, it may be pertinent to observe that the replacements, even with great potentials, had been scarcely followed up.

We can cite the instance of the universal free primary education — that too, in some parts of the country. Initially, at the instance of the public representatives in the Jatiya Sangsad, the local Thana Education Officer was to gear up public enthusiasm in free primary education. Although the policy options chosen by the present government have been claimed to be its own, the truth is that the predecessors were the actual initiators of such programme.

Nevertheless, the drop-outs in the primary schools started increasing alarmingly.

It is heartening to observe that in the policy dispensation on financial matters, much of the gruelling conditionalities have been removed over the past few months. Such relaxation shall be a redeeming phenomenon and in tune with the global trends. Flexibility in framing policy options is of course important but when policies are reversed arbitrarily or when one flexible policy option is contradicted by another, any reform stance is bound to suffer set-back in the practical field.

The third lesson in reform has been to "gloss over institutional demands". Lack of trained personnel has been a perpetual deterrent to effective development in Bangladesh. It is true that the situation obtaining in early 1972 in the industrial management sector does not ob-

ineffective. It eventually demands domestic deregulation to be accompanied by external liberalisation, otherwise investment and output would respond slowly. The developments over the past few months in Bangladesh have been in line with such recommendations. Yet the expected results are not forthcoming due to two deterring factors known to the policy makers but not addressed. They are: (i) bureaucratic inaction and unresponsiveness to the much publicised 'one step' service to the foreign and local entrepreneurs; and (ii) political instability or investment insecurity.

The element of radicalism in the disinvestment policy of the government could be another deterrent to fresh investment even by local entrepreneurs, let alone the potential foreign investors. A look at the dismal picture of the

istic approach obliges the policymakers to correlate reforms with the expected results, or precisely, what the reforms would achieve. It also discourages them from making lofty promises. Realistic expectations about the benefits and costs of the changes are likely to augment the sustainability of the programme.

Most of the developing countries in the Third World are overtly dependent on the industrially developed countries. Those who could make a headway in mobilising local resources are gradually extricating themselves from such dependence. The economists would recommend that the right strategy for a developing country should be to: invest in people, including education, health and population control; help domestic markets to work well by fostering competition and investing in infrastructure building; liberalise trade and foreign investment; and avoid excessive fiscal deficit and high inflation.

Investment in people pre-supposes development of our human resources. With it is tagged the education, health and family planning problems. HRD has been the most ignored part of our socio-economic development. We can no longer call it a resource when the unemployed youths in millions have been a perpetual liability on the whole nation. Employment opportunities being scarce, our youths are thrown in a morass of frustration. And frustration can easily mislead one to social vices. That is what we see all around.

Our domestic markets are often found to be hostage to cartels and monopolies. No real state of competitiveness prevails here. In the name of market economy our markets are flooded with imported and also smuggled goods from across the border.

It seems that in all our reform activities the element of practicality is often lost sight of. Superficial conjectures very often guide our judgment. To get rid of such dangerous gamble with the lots of the people there must be a national consensus on major issues related to our economy. If such consensus does not come by at the earliest, the people of Bangladesh shall continue to witness wild games of doing and undoing by the predecessors and successor governments, respectively.

The writer is an industrial consultant.

In the wider perspective and beyond the four walls of a home, the reform input in the economic and development activities of a country, at the hands of the policy makers, needs to be viewed against the ultimate successes such programmes can bring.

political leadership allowed itself a little time to examine the so-called reforms. The only tangible effort was, however, the appointing of Dr Quadrat-e-Khuda to head an education commission which was later popularly known as Quadrat-e-Khuda Commission. The report of the Commission was under the process of implementation when the country passed through the outrageous change in August, 1975.

The new leadership would not bother about the report which was compiled at the behest of its political adversaries. None of the new quasi-military regimes seemed to turn a page of the report even in a cursory manner. But the knowledgeable persons still believe that the Quadrat-e-Khuda Commission report could bring in real reform in our education sector.

However, many in the post-August, 1975 period persistently shuffled their tongues with the self-same rhetoric that "our educational system will have to be reshaped and reorganised to suit the needs and genius of our people." Thus started the process of rather de-shaping and disorganising the whole system with an ever-increasing input of "session jam", infernal chaos, sabre-rattling, blasts of bombs and bullets, extortion of money, addiction to drugs and many other unspecified crimes.

Individual family heads and guardians had to be persuaded again and again to send their wards to the school. The success being thin the government was desperately looking for a possible alternative to contain the situation.

'Food for education' like 'Food for work' programme came up as the very best bait to hook the guardians. The success of this alternate offensive it yet to be measured. It is likely to gain some ground because it is a sort of intellectual as an inducement aimed at the poverty-ridden part of the population. This is designed to attain a twin purpose. One, to alleviate poverty and two, to impart education. Its success will again depend upon how vigorously the follow-up programme is pursued.

Generally speaking, programmes undertaken on external financing not because of conviction about their benefits, often are forgotten for lack of firm commitment to carry them through. Of necessity, therefore, the programmes to be viewed as our own, the people's participation in designing and developing them becomes essential. It must eventually lead to an internal consensus-based programme. In a latest report compiled by the World Bank such lack of ownership has been made responsible for 'under-cutting' the reform programmes.

tain now but there has not been much qualitative improvement. Nevertheless, the development of institutional capacity has to be given priority right from the beginning so that any deregulating policy can be implemented by a set of trained people ensuring the true spirit of reform enjoined in the policy.

Special attention to macro-economic instability has been identified as the fourth fundamental lesson to be taken care of. It has been proved beyond doubt that the ultimate success of any trade and financial liberalisation programme depends on how much we can contain fiscal imbalances. It will eventually call for structural reforms, which include, *inter alia*, privatising loss-making state enterprises and improving tax administration. The privatising option though being stressed upon very vigorously over the past one year it is yet to breed the expected results.

Cutbacks in public spending as a part of reform can affect adversely the vulnerable groups in the society. So the fifth lesson stresses upon the necessity of keeping special programme of assistance for the poor who are affected during reform.

The sixth lesson insists upon taking complementary actions to make reform programmes effective. It categorically discourages partial attempts which are bound to be

Bangladesh Textile Mills Corporation will substantiate our contention. At least 22 of the 27 mills disinvested by two preceding governments have been laid off for an indefinite period.

Theoretically, however, the World Bank prescription may be viable for other developing countries where the population boom is not a threat, where the rate of literacy is high, and on the top of everything, where sense of patriotism, honesty and moral integrity is impeccable, where political commitment to poverty alleviation cannot turn out to be only on paper, where there is a consensus between the party in power and that in the opposition on the most fundamental issues related to people's welfare.

Unfortunately, such ideal, but highly desirable, situation continues to remain a matter of wishful imagination.

The seventh and the last lesson stresses on realistic approach by the policymakers. This has been considered essential, particularly in the matter of financing plans to support reform programmes. Such plans may, at times, entail re-allocation of funds from low priority areas to high priority areas like building infrastructures, education, health and family planning and other social programmes.

By implication, such a real-

Pakistan: Images of 1993

by Ayaz Amir

he had shown some patience he might have had his way and installed his own man in the presidency. But his rashness proved to be his undoing and while he can claim the satisfaction of putting an end to Ishaq Khan's political career, can he look kindly on his follies which paved the way for Benazir Bhutto's ascent to the prime ministership? The late Pir of Mohra Sharif near Murree was a common pir to both Nawaz Sharif and Benazir Bhutto. What insights into the future did he give his eminent acolytes?

This much, however, should be said for Nawaz Sharif that from the rubble of his government's collapse he has managed to raise the emblem of his personal popularity. The jibe that without the establishment's support he would amount to nothing can no longer be applied to him. He is now very much his own man, as much of a popular figure as Benazir Bhutto. Which does not say much for the choices before the Pakistani people who instead of having one mediocre leader with a cult following to contend with now have two. During the decade or so in which both have been in politics it is difficult to credit either of them with a single original thought. Yellow cake schemes and confused social contracts; the people of Pakistan are being punished for sins they have not committed.

The intellectual ascendancy over the political process which

Mr Moeen Qureshi came to acquire during his brief tenure as caretaker prime minister was less a tribute to his own qualities as to the dimness and greyness of the Pakistani political scene. Outshining the Bhuttos, the Nawaz Sharifs and the other champions of the domestic political order is not a difficult undertaking.

Reduce Moeen Qureshi's achievements to their bare essentials and they would not amount to anything much. But Moeen Qureshi with his gift of the gab and the art of selling himself succeeded in looking imposing as compared to his predecessors. What is more, his government gave the impression of momentum: that it knew its business and was doing things, this is in stark contrast to the performance of the present government which seems to have made a virtue of not doing anything at all. Pakistan's current prime minister is taking an inordinate time in completing her cabinet. In Punjab matters have not been settled between the chief minister, Manzoor Wattoo, and his chief adviser, Faisal Saleh Hayat. The government has been unable to spell out its programme or delineate its agenda. In other words there is no such thing as vision about what it intends to do. Just a couple of task forces with no sense of direction. Mr Moeen Qureshi's government for all its hype and glibness looks a Bismarckian interlude

by comparison.

Still, I cannot help saying that Pakistan's moral and intellectual climate is peculiarly suited for the higher charlatan to flourish in. Take the case of Dr Mahbub-ul-Haq who has never felt shy of serving military dictators but who, once he is not in power, immediately transforms himself into a revolutionary ideologue. In some of his recent Press articles he has been speaking of an agenda for change. If he gets the right kind of job his anguished outpourings would come to an abrupt end. Which makes you wonder for what small change clever people sell their souls. Dr Haq is a first in economics from Cambridge University, a distinction not given to everyone to achieve. But talk to him and you get the impression of a flaky person, a circumstance which suggests that the fates play strange tricks on humans. Some gifts they bestow on them in abundance while withholding others, the result being a tragic

and contending mish-mash of opposing tendencies.

Benazir Bhutto's reaching the prime ministership for the second time does not prove that she is any exception to the prevailing maladroitness of Pakistani politics. She would still have been planning long marches and assuring the army of her loyalty if it had not been for the mutual death-wish which came to settle on Ghulam Ishaq Khan and Mian Nawaz Sharif. Benazir did not remove them from power. Their follies led to that outcome. That Benazir emerged the victor in the subsequent elections is testimony, of course, to that of her party. Even so, there is truth in describing her as a Daughter of Destiny. Meeting her no one would think she had any extraordinary qualities about her. Yet she has set a record by staging a comeback to power, the only Pakistani politician to have ever done so.

But consider, if you please, another example of statesmanship. The phenomenon of

General Aslam Beg, never ceases to amaze. It takes an effort now to recall the kind of influence he exercised as army chief; meddling in politics and making life difficult for civilian governments. But out of uniform he has dwindled to the diminutive figure that he probably truly is with nothing about him today even remotely seeming to justify his former pre-eminence.

This is enough to set one thinking about the destiny of this country, that its affairs should so often be in the mercy of individuals who may have a heroic aspect as long as they have the trappings of power about them but whose stature diminishes once they are out in the wilderness. From Governor-General Ghulam Muhammad onwards this observation applies to every Pakistani ruler except Zulfikar Ali Bhutto who retained his dignity and stature even in adversity. But then if we examine Bhutto's personality, it too was such a compound of opposing tendencies, with the elements of greatness and pettiness constantly at war with each other, that one feels like giving up on Pakistani leaders altogether.

Courtesy: The Dawn, Karachi 29 December, 1993.

OPINION

The Underprivileged

I am an avid reader of The Daily Star. I like its news presentation, the illuminating articles on subjects which are so well-chosen, current and of real importance in our lives. It is really heartening to see that you are devoting pages to political news, business, sports, environment, education, living, women, children etc. In addition to special articles on contemporary issues. Above all I like your objectivity and boldness.

But I regret to say that you have, like all other newspapers, left out the largest and most important section of our people — the underprivileged — who probably constitute not less than 80% of our population. I do not have to tell you that they are the landless, marginal farmers, share croppers, beggars, rickshawpullers, slum dwellers, labourers, porters, rag-pickers, brick breakers, private servants and members of innumerable other petty professions. Don't you have any responsibility towards these unfortunate people? I think it is your duty to educate and inform the so called literate elite about the plight of these people. Why are they poor? How and when they become poor? When and how they lost their lands? Who took away their lands and how? What are they getting from the big and absentee landlords? Why are they running to

the cities? Why are we running after export oriented industries — for whom? When the majority of the people are hungry and half-fed, export earned money is filling the coffers of the rich and is being used to buy luxury goods. Should we not feed our people first? Should they not be self sufficient and self reliant so that they can produce their own food from their own lands? But how? We have had so many land reforms. But have the landless got his land back? What about the farm inputs? Who have grabbed them? Certainly not the poor farmers.

Why are they illiterate? Why are they dying of illnesses which can be prevented? Why malnutrition is playing such a havoc among them?

The cities are thriving with big business, high-rise buildings, five star hotels, beautiful fountains, thousands of newly imported cars. But at whose expense? We see thousands of beggars begging in the streets. Are they not asking us to give back the wealth we robbed from them?

Why millions of people are living in slums which do not belong to them? What happened to their real homes and their livelihood? Why they do not have housing, water, basic sanitation, drainage and even rudimentary health services? Why are they refugees in their own

country? We read a lot about the macro economic planning. What about the micro scenario? Real human development can never take place unless the common people — the poor and underprivileged — participate in the planning and development themselves. They have a great deal of wisdom, creativity, dignity and strength. They know if they do not have food, they will fall sick. If they fall sick they cannot work. If they do not work, they cannot earn an income. If they have no income, their families and children will go hungry. This is a vicious cycle.

I feel you have a responsibility of bringing all these issues out in the open. Let your journalists and reporters go to the remotest villages, the dirty slums, factories, streets, to find out the truth about these people. Let there be stories of individuals, families and communities. Let there be articles by social scientists on various aspects of the problem. I think this way you can help find solutions to the age-old problem of poverty and deprivation — not by elite oriented top down plans on poverty alleviation.

I therefore fervently request you to start a page on 'The Underprivileged & The Poor'.
Shahjahan Haft
DOHS, Mohakhali, Dhaka

To the Editor

Security at ZIA

Sir, One smart guy identified as Uzzal Roy of Jessore is reported to have boarded a London-bound Biman DC-10 plane without any travel documents on 1st January 1994 (what a beginning!) at Zia International Airport (ZIA), Dhaka.

We wonder how the trespasser could enter into the security area of ZIA and then board the aircraft without being spotted by any of the hundreds of security personnel? We feel ashamed of the negligence of duty and lack of security as well as the poor and inefficient administration at ZIA.

We, however, congratulate the Biman steward who found and traced out the intruder on board the aircraft. We recommend that the said Biman steward should be given a reward for his presence of mind and alertness and simultaneously all the security personnel on duty at ZIA on that day be adequately warned and cen-

sured and appropriately charged for negligence of duty.

O I Kabir
Dhaka

II

Sir, Going through a report in your daily on January 3 under the caption 'Stowaway delays Biman flight', I was enormously bewildered that what a callousness prevailed with our airport authorities and personnel while they were on duty! Every one has raised his eyebrows as to how an unauthorized passenger can enter inside the airport and also board an airliner about to take off. Don't we have any fool-proof arrangement to protect our vulnerable vehicles from the hands of miscreants?

It haunts me, what an insecure society we are in! There might have happened a disastrous incident on that day. Thanks to Almighty Allah, no hijacker took a chance! Thanks also to the captain of the said flight for not flying without proper check of the aircraft.

I would urge our authorities concerned to tighten the security of airport area in the interest of safety of our national leaders as well as that of our valued foreign guests.

Mamun Ibne A Ghafur
Jahangirnagar University

Great value

Sir, Recently, in the USA, a United Airlines Boeing made an emergency landing to save a dog and a cat stored by mistake in an unheated cargo bay. The flight which was heading for Spokane from Chicago made the landing at Madison, Wisconsin and was delayed for two hours.

What a great value! As said by Coleridge — 'He prayeth well, who loveth well/ Both men and bird and beast.'

But very unfortunately, drivers of both heavy and light vehicles on our roads and highways do not at all care to save the lives of humans.

M Zahidul Haque
Asstt Prof, BAU, Dhaka