

Financial Sector Reform

The World Bank seems to be in an in-season monitoring mood...

Having said that, our instant reactions to WB's certain observations about the slow pace...

Where does the reform of the financial system actually stand? The formidability of the overall task lay in three crucial factors...

While redressing the regulatory aspects within the government are a matter essentially linked to the overall context of re-writing the rules of business...

We would be greatly surprised if default culture and lending by bank 'insiders' which should be regarded as matters of the past...

But materially what must be confronted are that we have on the one hand lowered rates of interest for deposits; but on the other, high notches of interest charged on loans...

Serbs must Comply

The Sunday midnight GMT deadline for withdrawal of all heavy weapons by the Serbs has passed without any incident...

This is for the first time that the Serbs have gone by the demand made on them. Clearly they had difficulty in moving their heavy weapons away in heavy snow...

That the imposed truce is working is an improvement by itself in the Bosnian situation. It has proved one fundamental point which is that the Serbs can only understand the language of weapon and force...

The Bosnians Muslims constituting 44 per cent of the population have at present been left with just 10 per cent of the territory...

No single event in his story has contributed so much as the Ekushey has done in shaping the Bangalee ethos...

As a most rewarding morning, Ekushey has few parallels in human history. But reaping of the best harvests most of the time also requires the removing of weeds...

The signs are already worrisome. On the face of it, 42 years ago it was a struggle for establishing Bangla as a state language...

So through the recognition of their mother tongue the Bangalees proved, not so much to others as to themselves, their worth...

On the first count, success came rather early — albeit at a

A Monumental Failure Awaiting Redemption

by Nilratan Halder

But that is how history makes demands and on prompt and proper responses to them historical moments are created...

In the furor perhaps the object that ignited conflagration got drowned and today after four tumultuous decades, Bangla has failed to take the elevated position originally set for it to do...

The naivety and dichotomy are only too obvious. While the elite send their wards to English-medium schools or abroad for higher studies, the primary schools are subjected to utter neglect...

Each February platitudes and rhetorics abound but the language remains where it was. Had it not been for some committed people, who abhor media gaze and cheap publicity, Bangla would be in greater trouble by this time...

out the buffoons in them. But the scholars could indeed make a change in the whole situation if only their unheralded devotion to the cause of the mother tongue were duly recognised and further patronised...

Till today about 80 per cent of the population have been left out of the pale of education. Literacy alone does nothing by way of shaping one's own destiny...

with a huge army of illiterate people runs counter to the aim of the 1952 Language Movement!

That the medium of instruction and teaching still remains to be a cocktail thanks to the obduracy and lack of vision of the half-baked politicians and bureaucrats, shows why all the efforts to make Bangla luminesce in its full glory go wasted...

wise and language-wise — leaves much to be desired. Worse still is the teachers' quality. The mechanism to judge their qualifications as teachers has ever remained suspect...

Admittedly, there is no short-cut in education. It is a continuous process that has to be kept alive through a constant stream of information and knowledge...

fers most. And no government can do adopt policies, in its right senses, that proves counter-productive. Here exactly lies the crux of the problem...

Decidedly, unless the dual problem of making the language a vehicle of our thought process and educating cent per cent of our population is addressed in right earnest, getting overthrust over the ritualistic observance — better still celebration — will take us nowhere...

Events Leading to Our Language Movement

by G A Momin

WITHIN a month after emergence of Pakistan as an independent state, founder of Pakistan, Mohammad Ali Jinnah said in the first session of National assembly...

In my belief this realisation coupled with a sense of apprehension inspired by Lord Mountbatten's warning and doubt about the viability of East Pakistan must have hardened Jinnah's stand about a unification of Pakistan which particularly lacked any strong unifying bond between eastern and western parts separated by nearly twelve hundred miles of Indian territory...

fessed neutrality between religions betrayed the falsity in the so-called philosophy of two nations which saw him as the head of a new state, curved out of the Indian sub-continent purely on religious basis.

Among all the provinces of former Pakistan, East Pakistan was certainly the richest in matters of language, literature and cultural heritage. Initially Karachi's and subsequently Islamabad's anxieties over Bengali language and literature were accentuated by the fact that for centuries the literary and cultural capital of undivided Bengal was Calcutta which was incidentally the provincial capital of Bengal.

and tradition which are in common with those of the Bangalees of West Bengal.

These situations contributed very greatly to follow by Pakistan Central leadership a dogged anti-Indianism as a fulcrum of Pakistan's foreign policy. This policy of anti-Indianism was all the more pronounced with matters relating to East Pakistan. The Central administration of Pakistan was always suspicious and apprehensive of East Pakistan being wooed over by India...

Among all the provinces of former Pakistan, East Pakistan was certainly the richest in matters of language, literature and cultural heritage.

Initially Karachi's and subsequently Islamabad's anxieties over Bengali language and literature were accentuated by the fact that for centuries the literary and cultural capital of undivided Bengal was Calcutta which was incidentally the provincial capital of Bengal.

Thus from the very beginning pursuits and cultivation of Bengali language and literature were viewed by establishment of Pakistan as pro-India initiatives.

Things took a clearly confrontational turn after the people of Bangladesh (then East Pakistan) rejected outright Jinnah's plan to instal Urdu as the only state language of Pakistan.

I was sitting only a few yards away from the rostrum upon which Jinnah stood during his first and only visit to East Pakistan in mid 1948, to announce that Urdu and Urdu alone shall be the state language of Pakistan. The entire audience went dead still in silent protest. Within myself I felt all my enthusiasm about Jinnah's visit to Dhaka instantly evaporated. The following day when at an assembly of Dhaka's elites Jinnah repeated his plea in favour of Urdu, it incited an uproarious protest with only one word 'No No No'. This was the start of the saga which in course of next two decades proved to be at once painful and triumphant. The language not only triumphed but also prepared the land for the final assault.

Building a Literate Nation-II

Quality and Management of Primary Education

by Mahmood Aminul Islam

Simultaneously, there is need to modernise the curriculum to prepare the children for the 21st century, and bring about a qualitative change in their character, as pointed out by Mr Carriere. Dr Kamal Hossain emphasised the need of improving the teaching-learning process through the use of educational technology like radio and TV and other innovative methods that are being used in many countries.

In Bangladesh, the contact hours in a school year of about 200 days averages 500 hours. Worldwide, the contact hours for primary grades I-VI average 880 hours in an academic year with lot of variation between countries. But even this reduced contact hours are not fully utilised, leaving aside poor daily pupil attendance. By changing the present January-December academic year to April-March (corresponding to Bengali calendar year) it is possible to take advantage, weather-wise, of the best part of the year — November to February — for uninterrupted study at the school. The question of curtailing the number of holidays (raised by Ms Watanabe) may be examined, specially in view of occasional forced closures of schools due to inclement weather and natural calamities, so common in Bangladesh.

Mr Carriere raised an interesting point of enhancing the educability of children by improving their nutritional status. He said that if it is not possible to replicate the 'Food For Education' (FFE) scheme countrywide, the very least that could be done is to provide children with nutrient supplements while attending school to make up for iron and iodine deficiencies in the food. Here, I would suggest that as an alternative to FFE scheme, it would be worthwhile to try

out school lunch programme in some selected schools where the school managing committee would be willing to use the wheat for preparing some food for the children.

Primary education in Bangladesh suffers from poor physical facilities and high teacher-student ratio. For a long time since the British days the teacher-student ratio was 1:40 and it worked quite well. This should be restored. Opening of hundreds of feeder schools for grades I and II students and introduction of two shifts for students of grades III, IV and V (as suggested in Part I of the article) would ease the problem of classroom accommodation in primary schools. But still, additional classrooms may have to be added in many schools. There cannot be any compromise in providing the minimum required physical facilities and number of teachers to ensure that children acquire acceptable level of learning competencies.

Pre-school education has relevance for children in their transition from home to school environment and in preventing drop-outs which mostly occur in grades I and II. But can we afford this luxury as pointed out by Mr Abed? As an alternative, curriculum may be modified to accommodate learning content of pre-school and grades I and II during a span of two years to be spent in BRAC type feeder schools.

In the roundtable, management was discussed as the key issue for carrying out whatever reforms are needed to universalise primary education. Dr Kamaluddin Siddiqui said that the 'whole thing boils down to management.' Mr Kazi Fazlur Rahman said that it is not only the question of resources but also the question of good man-

agement. But all were unanimous on the necessity of a decentralised community based, community supported, community responsible primary education system which includes both formal and non-formal education system, as so forcefully put forward by Dr Siddiqui. Traditionally, Bangladesh had a decentralised system of primary administration in the district school boards. This was disturbed and the process of centralisation started in 1950s culminating in the wholesale nationalisation of primary schools in 1973-74. An attempt was made to reverse the process by an Act passed in April 1981 to set up local education authority in each sub-division (now district). This was never implemented with the change in government in 1982.

In the centralised system of primary administration the teaching community as a whole (numbering about 160,000) has been kept out. They do not have any role to play in the planning and management of primary education. But I feel, their participation would strengthen primary education. For example, in Thailand where primary education is administered centrally, teachers are represented in the national, provincial and district committees ensuring their involvement in the management and development of primary education at each level of administration. Such a system of participatory management, if introduced in Bangladesh, would make the teachers behave more responsibly in implementing the UPE programme.

Presently, the Local Government Bill is before the Parliament and it is the right time to strive for a consensus

among the political parties about the power and functions of the local bodies at the district, thana and union levels along with the role of the central government for effective decentralised planning and management of primary education. The Bill should also bring up the question of what would be the structure and functions of the existing school managing committees to allow effective local participation in school management. In Japan, every year, a new school managing committee is elected by the parents/guardians in each school. It functions in several sub-committees to look into all aspects of management. This deserves close examination for adoption in Bangladesh.

As pointed by Dr Kamal Hossain, decentralisation of management and administration of primary education would entail some radical thinking as to what powers and functions are to be transferred from the central government to the local bodies. Also, what financial support they would need from the centre for proper functioning subject to audits and monitoring. He suggests, that block grants to the local bodies should be performance based for the purpose of accountability.

Investment and Resource Mobilization

The combined revenue and development budget for 1993-94 allocated about Tk 13018 million to primary education which works out to be Tk 941.28 (about US\$23.5) divided among 13.83 million students (mid year total primary enrolment in 1993 according to Primary Directorate). Clearly much more investment is needed to improve physical facilities, employ more teachers and run thou-

sands of feeder school required to create greater access to education. Moreover, use of educational technology in schools would require substantial initial investment and recurring expenditure.

The additional resources may have to be mobilized by imposing education levy. I am told that in Pakistan a nominal surcharge is realised on all imports to generate fund for education. This can be done in Bangladesh. Jamuna bridge surcharge is an example. Every Union Parishad realises a small education cess. A matching grant-in-aid (depending upon what portion of total cess has been realised) can be given by the central government to each union as subsidy to meet the cost of the proposed feeder schools. Additionally, a Prime Minister's Fund for primary education can be created. There are many public spirited and wealthy people who would like to contribute to the fund generously.

Fund raising efforts would yield best result, if the public could be kept informed about the progress of implementation of the UPE programme according to certain key indicators as pointed out by Mr Carriere and Ms Watanabe. Both the print and electronic media can play a significant role in this. In all national dailies a page is earmarked to publish district news. Once a week this page could be entirely devoted to reporting activities on primary education.

The roundtable meeting has ventilated the problems and prospects of primary education in Bangladesh as seen by the distinguished participants. It is now necessary to develop their thinking as highlighted in this article in formulating policies and programmes for overhauling primary education. The lead has to come from the Prime Minister who is also in charge of primary and mass education. There is no time to lose as this is linked to our survival as a self respecting nation.

(Concluded)

To the Editor

BTV quiz programme

Sir, Bangladesh football team's disgrace in the SAF games was a disappointing experience for the viewers. In the same week, BTV was showing the SAARC quiz programme. This competition commenced earlier in Colombo with the participation of young people from the SAARC countries. Any citizen, who has some self-esteem has been offended by the poor performance of the Bangladeshi pair. More disappointed were those who could recall that in earlier participations, Bangladesh did very well. Actually, two participants from Bangladesh topped the earlier competitions, held in Delhi and Islamabad respectively.

In the past, I used to take part in these programmes en-

thusiastically and had some limited successes. I still retain some of that interest. So I know very well that was not the true representation of our youths' state of knowledge. Once, BTV used to arrange some very high standard general knowledge programmes like 'Gyan Jigasa'. BTV now seems to have lost interest in these programmes, but often I get the opportunity to see programmes of the like arranged by other organizations and come about quite a few conscious, bright, smart young people. I do not seem to have seen any of that pair in those programmes. So question arises, who sent these two and on what merit?

So far do I know, there was a hurried selection where a limited number of students from Dhaka University and

some privileged institutions participated. Had the TV authority or the selectors been serious, they would have called for an open participation countrywide and phased out this selection process into tiers to filter out the very best in the country. However sporting event this might be, the participants represented all the young people of this country and country's honour was involved.

After the disaster in the SAARC football, lynching mob has chased the football officials and the players. Millions of people in this region have viewed this SAARC quiz programme and the humiliation of this country. The selectors and the authorities in this event should be held responsible as well.

While we used to view the

quiz shows on BTV in the past, we used to enjoy the excitement of competition and got the inspiration for consciousness. Surprisingly, BTV has not a single such programme for the juveniles in these days. I think it is essential to re-introduce programmes like 'Gyan Jigasa' and extend them down to school level. We view those fast, easy going quiz programmes on the Zee TV or Doordarshan and are amazed and suffer from inferiority complex seeing the expansion of knowledge and consciousness of these youngsters. Our young people are no less bright. Give them the chance, inside and outside the TV; the way Indian young people get the chance to show their talent in 'Limka' or 'Tata quiz' or 'Spectrum'. We sure do not want to see our boys and girls

being embarrassed before the world.

Aminul Haque Mithu Motijheel, Dhaka

Teesta Barrage

Sir, Teesta Barrage is a big irrigation project with an estimated cost of some fifteen hundred crore Taka. It is supposed to bring under irrigation lakhs of acres of land in greater Rangpur, Dinajpur and Bogra areas in winter season and thus increasing agricultural production in northern part of the country.

The idea is no doubt lofty. But a visit to the site will show that it is a highly ilconceived project. Bulk of the money has already been spent and the barrage has been completed but there is hardly any water in the river in dry season and so

what will irrigate the land? Most of the feeder canals are yet to be constructed; but big question is, what the proposed canals will carry?

Some say, that this project is a testimony on how effectively human ingenuity can misuse public fund for private gains! It is alleged that major beneficiaries of the project are dealing engineers and officials, not the general public. If so, it is high time that the whole project is reviewed by experts who do not have any vested interest in the project. May I therefore request our parliamentary committee on Ministry of Irrigation to go into the matter dispassionately and decide whether there is any need for further investment on the project.

Saleh Ahmed Chowdhury Dhaka Cantt, Dhaka