

Bangladesh's Economic Standing

It is not much of a consolation that Bangladesh has been placed above 25 countries from the bottom in a recently released UNDP Human Development Index of 1993. Her position is 147th among 173 countries. We may have gone a few notches up in the world development rankings but basically we are stuck with the LDC status. The LDCs in the bottom section also include landlocked, war-torn and chronically famine-prone countries. We are in the upper half of the LDCs.

In the major parameters of growth Bangladesh has not even inched ahead. This will be crystal clear from the fact that gross investment fell by four per cent from the previous average of 15 per cent as proportion of GDP during the last decade. The short-fall in ADP utilisation since 1992-93 has been regressive. The increase in population at 2.4 per cent reduces the 4 per cent economic growth rate to 1.6 per cent in real terms.

The UNDP study states that in 1980s there had been some improvement in the poverty situation in Bangladesh as the "proportion below the poverty line fell from 57 per cent to 48 per cent in rural areas and from 66 per cent to 44 per cent in the urban areas. The political transition in the first year of the 90s had a natural extension of an economic transition with the double transition syndrome upsetting the normal rhythm of the economy.

It is claimed by government leaders that we are now poised for development from a position of macro-economic strength. In part the macro-economic success remains a myth. This is because most of the required laws are not in place — the modified versions of the outdated acts, that is. There has been a modest success in recovering outstanding loans and recapitalising the NCBs, but the assault on default culture had the side effect of emphasising the government's regulatory character to the potential investors. Gradually the misgiving on this count is being removed by the Finance Minister with his constant directives to the banks to resume their lending operations in earnest. But here again, the interest rates charged are said to be on the high side.

The UNDP survey of our economic development, based on inputs supplied by other UN agencies, NGOs and individual experts, underscores the tremendous impact of infrastructure on poverty alleviation. The link between growth in irrigation, electrification and transport and decline in poverty has been statistically illustrated. For instance, where there was no irrigation, the extreme poor numbered 32 per cent of the population as compared with 16 per cent in areas covered by irrigation. Rural electrification had almost a similar benign effect — 31 per cent as against 14 per cent. Good transport reduced the proportion of extreme poor from 30 to 21 per cent. The benefits of good infrastructure, in a greater proportion, went to the non-farming households. As for the farming households, the growers basically needed to get a good price for their produce which hardly came their way. The service sector holds life-line to many landless and destitute people specially by way of expanding the informal sector. Rural electrification, and construction works in the urban and semi-urban areas, can give the missing fillip to the stagnating economy. The Finance Minister seems to recognise these facts but unless investment are arranged in heavy doses and loans are provided at reduced interest rates and transaction costs, we do not see how infrastructure-building will pick up.

Greening the Ruined Forests

The government has decided to involve the private sector in a business very crucial to the physical survival of the nation. Namely, afforestation. No, it is not that government is making over some of its vandalised and ruined forestlands to private businesses for the trees to live and breathe again under perpetual private care. It is going to be more like the roads or works authority engaging contractors to do state jobs for which the state does not have the necessary paraphernalia or the right manpower or doesn't feel it to be economically worthwhile to marshal those means to get done some particular jobs.

This is very significant that the government is owning up its inadequacy to manage the forestlands which like the rivers were always commonly owned and administered by the whole people, the state that is. Now while we should congratulate the government for its candid admission of incapacity to do negate it and for seeking outside help to see that the merciful life-giving green cover doesn't die a daily death, we should like to know the nature of the government's inadequacy. It has been said that the government doesn't have enough manpower to green again the vandalised forest lands. Is it the whole truth?

The government is, as it is, carrying out quite a massive afforestation programme at a certain rate perhaps not quite the right one to recover the pre-partition green cover of this land at 25 per cent of the total area. But that is an insignificant part of the problem which could be taken care of by implementation of social forestry etc. The real bother is the government's failure to cope with the evergrowing encroachment on the forestlands and largescale defoliation undertaken to put land thus grabbed to housing and agricultural uses. The government doesn't indeed have not only manpower but also other means and capacities to arrest this damperous spurt in crimes against the forests.

The government has found a way out of this problem which may or may not prove a good enough answer. Passing the buck to private business for not only planting and nurturing trees over wide swaths of ruined forestlands would not in the first place empower the private parties to keep the encroaching forces out. Secondly, when government is already proving quite ineffective in the job of removing encroachers, where is the guarantee that government would get its piece of rejuvenated forestland back from the contractor without much of a *jhamela*? And when luckily the greened patches would indeed be back to governmental care after some lease is over, who will ensure that a repeat process of vandalism, poaching and encroachment would not take over?

We welcome the experimental step but with crossed fingers. The root problem is ineffectual governance and an answer to that doesn't lie even in a thousand ad hoc shifts of responsibility every here and there.

Partnership between Donors and Beneficiaries

by Prof. Muhammad Yunus

WHEN we think of "beneficiaries" of international assistance, we think of some faceless people in some far away countries. Similarly when we think of donors we usually think of donor bureaucracies in various shapes and sizes.

The relationship between donors and beneficiaries are managed by a class of people known as consultants, who themselves don't have much opportunity to shake hands with flesh and blood beneficiaries. Their knowledge comes from printed materials generated by academics, and the experience and wisdom they accumulate in the process of discharging their professional responsibilities. This process hardly allows for meaningful partnerships between donor organisations and poor people in developing countries.

Who are the Beneficiaries?

When we use the word "beneficiary" in the context of the international aid business, who are we really talking about? In a study undertaken in Bangladesh it was found that of the billions of dollars Bangladesh received in foreign aid since independence in 1971, 75 per cent of that amount went back to the donor countries as payment for the services of their consultants, advisors, commodities, equipment, etc. Shouldn't we consider the people and enterprises who received the 75 per cent of aid money as its beneficiaries? Out of the remaining 25 per cent of the aid, most of went to local consultants, local advisors, local contractors, local bureaucrats and engineers. They are beneficiaries too.

This aid money was spent in building roads, bridges, powerplants, research institu-

tions, and buying equipment for large manufacturing enterprises. The expectation was that this investment will benefit a large number of people. Most often this expectation is never realised. It appears that the people who were involved in the preparation and implementation of the "aid projects" themselves became the very beneficiaries of those programmes. This could have been ignored if the poor people in whose name the aid was justified had also benefited from these projects.

But, unfortunately, the bottom half of the population of the recipient countries, particularly women among them, hardly see any benefit coming to them. Often they are actually harmed by these projects.

Solidarity with the Bottom Fifty Per Cent

Aid bureaucracies around the world consider themselves to be agencies promoting "development" in Third World countries. Development, in most cases, is interpreted as short term economic growth. Aid methodologies are usually designed by the so-called experts of growth-promotion. These experts may do a good job of infrastructure building, but they certainly show no skill in building up the productive capacity of poor people.

If we look at the multilateral development finance institutions, both global and regional, we cannot miss their focus on infrastructure building and on methodologies which allow them to work only with the national governments, not with non-governmental organizations, civic groups, or people's organisations.

I don't think that people in the donor countries should be aiming at partnership with the

beneficiaries. Beneficiaries are the people who have already been reached by successful projects. I see more sense in building bridges with the people who are ought to be reached, rather than who have been reached. Instead the donor should make a political commitment to build solidarity with the bottom fifty per cent of the population in the recipient countries, with particular emphasis on the women among them. Tax-payers in the

agencies need to be reformed to reflect this new commitment in very clear terms.

Poverty: Denial of All Human Rights

The world as a whole must recognise that poverty is the denial of all human rights. People can be freed from poverty, thereby ensuring their human rights, by uniting them from the chains and barriers created by our societies and institutions. We must recog-



Grameen Bank managing director Prof. Muhammad Yunus was recently invited by Queen Fabiola to participate in a conference at Brussels. He is being received by Queen Paola at the palace while Queen Fabiola looks on.

nise that human beings, irrespective of the economic circumstances they are in, are endowed with unlimited creative and productive potential. Poor women are excellent managers of scarce resources and endowed with tremendous zeal to move out of poverty as fast as possible. It should be the task of the world community at large to create enabling environment in which even the poorest persons can fully

explore and reach their potential.

World can be Made Free from Poverty

Credit is a powerful entry point for reduction of poverty. Credit helps the poor to fight poverty with their own efforts. Poor women show exceptional agility and skill to build better lives for themselves and their families once they have found access to credit. Grameen Bank in Bangladesh, and over a hundred Grameen programmes in forty different countries around the world, have demonstrated this beyond any doubt. Today, Grameen Bank in Bangladesh serves nearly two million borrowers, 94 per cent of whom are women. Grameen works in 34,000 villages of Bangladesh, a country which has a total of 68,000 villages. During 1993 over US\$300 million were disbursed in income generating loans and housing loans. Repayment has remained over 98 per cent. All research done on Grameen borrowers show that the are steadily moving out of poverty. Grameen Bank has been always known as the bank of the poor. Now we are approaching a date beyond which the same Grameen Bank will be described as the bank of the formerly poor.

Failure of Aid Machinery to Reach the Poor

The strange thing is that while Grameen is admired for pioneering a method for the poor to get a chance to move out of poverty, international development finance institutions find it impossible, or extremely difficult, to support the Grameen replication programmes around the world. Their rules, procedures, methodologies, and concepts get in the way.

Increasing threats to the marine environment through human activities have put an even greater emphasis on the need for extensive, rapid and accurate ocean data to be made available to governments and the public.

Chemical Composition

The present world-wide concern about climate has its roots in the changing chemical composition of the atmosphere. These changes are occurring quite rapidly under the impact of human activities, with consequent environmental problems of acid rain, airborne toxic chemicals, severe ozone layer depletion and greenhouse gas induced global warming. These are the danger signals that mankind is seriously contaminating the atmosphere and is thus threatening some life forms, human health, water supplies and food production. Measurements of the changes taking place are essential to diagnose these trends, their likely impacts and the sources of the polluting substances, and to reduce the human burden on the atmosphere.

The basic world-wide network for these observations is the Global Atmosphere Watch of WMO, initiated in 1989 to coordinate two long-standing measurement programmes: the Global Ozone Observing System (GOOS) and the Background Air Pollution Monitoring Network (BAPMON). These activities are providing vital information on the chemical and physical constituents and properties of the global atmosphere including their dispersion, transport, chemical transformation and deposition of atmospheric pollutants over land and sea, among other things. Complementary data on air pollution within cities are coordinated through the World Health Organization (WHO) and UNEP.

From all the foregoing, it is clear that, as providers of meteorological, hydrological, oceanographic and other environmental data and services, national Meteorological and Hydrological Services are the indisputable pillars in the world-wide efforts to monitor, understand and predict weather and climate and towards the planning and implementation of reliable sustainable development programmes.

PROFESSOR GODWIN O P OBASI is the Secretary-General of World Meteorological Organisation. The above are excerpts from his message on world Meteorological Day '94.

OBSERVING WEATHER AND CLIMATE

Meteorological and Hydrometeorological Services Play a Key Role in Sustainable Development

by Godwin O P Obasi

ON 23 March of each year, the World Meteorological Day has been celebrated, since 1961, to commemorate the entry into force of the World Meteorological Convention on that day in 1950. The International Meteorological Organization which had existed since 1873 was accordingly transformed into the intergovernmental World Meteorological Organization (WMO).

Each year, the WMO Executive Council selects a specific theme to provide a focus for the celebration. For 1994, the theme is "Observing the Weather and Climate". This was partly motivated by the emphasis placed by world leaders at the UN Conference on Environment and Development, Rio de Janeiro, June 1992, on the need for a reliable national and global observing system for monitoring, understanding and predicting the behaviour of the global environment. The theme also provides an opportunity to highlight the key role of national Meteorological and Hydrometeorological Services in sustainable development.

Today, there are some 9,000 observing stations on land and 7,000 voluntary observing ships which make observations over the world's oceans. Most of these provide basic weather measurements every three hours. About one in ten of the land stations and a few of the ships make upper-air soundings once or twice a day to obtain data on pressure, temperature, humidity and winds up to heights of 30 km. These are complemented by observations from commercial aircrafts currently producing some 10,000 reports per day, some 350 automated or partially automated land-based weather stations, 300 moored buoys or fixed platforms serving as automatic marine stations and some 600 buoys drifting with the ocean currents.

Organized international collaboration in meteorology began in 1853 when at a meeting of seafaring nations, a programme for obtaining weather observations over the oceans was developed, to increase the safety of life at sea.

At about this time, countries also began to establish national Meteorological Services. With observations available both over land and sea, there was need for a more formal collaboration for their collection on a wider scale. This led to the creation of the International Meteorological Organization in 1873.

As a result of these institutional developments and the progress made in various scientific fields, meteorology advanced rapidly. Improved methods of observing the atmosphere evolved, numerous networks of observing stations on land appeared and merchant ships made more regular

observations from the sea. The upper atmosphere was explored by balloons and kites and later by aeroplanes, radiosondes and rockets. Arrangements were made for the inter-service exchange of observational data, which became quicker and more reliable as telecommunication technology improved.

Thus in 1963, these activities, upper-air soundings and systematic global satellite measurements do not provide all the required information to investigate the mechanisms that are at the root of past natural climate variations, much less to predict them in the future.

The dynamics of climate involve a vast range of interactive processes, from the formation of clouds and their effect on radiative transfer to oceanic circulations that respond to minute changes in surface air-sea fluxes. For these reasons a scientifically adequate climate observation programme calling for numerous additions to the basic operational Global Observing System of the WWW is required to understand, in quantitative terms, the interplay between the global atmospheric circulation, water and energy transfers, the world ocean circulation and sea-ice, the land surface moisture, vegetation and hydrology.

However, surface observa-

tions, upper-air soundings and systematic global satellite measurements do not provide all the required information to investigate the mechanisms that are at the root of past natural climate variations, much less to predict them in the future.

Much innovative research is thus being undertaken to address these critical issues about the climate. It is essential to know if the climate is undergoing change, what are the consequences of climate change, and what is the role of human activities in affecting this change. In 1984, WMO established a Climate Monitoring System project to provide synthesized information on the state of the climate system and diagnostic insights into climate events of regional and global consequence such

as those associated with El Nino periods. Through the massive array of special oceanographic and atmospheric measurements under the Tropical Oceans Global Atmosphere (TOGA) project, scientists have recently had some success in predicting El Nino/Southern Oscillation (ENSO) events and the related climate anomalies such as droughts and floods in tropical regions around the globe. For such phenomena, observations of selected parameters will be required on a more permanent basis once the TOGA research project is over in 1995.

The World Ocean Circulation Experiment (WOCE), like the TOGA, required for the understanding of the long-term responses of the couple atmosphere-ocean system and others are all components of the World Climate Research Programme (WCRP), a global research undertaking jointly implemented by WMO with other agencies. WCRP is itself one of the components of the World Climate Programme (WCP) created in 1979 to address the full gamut of climate and climate change issues. WCP is the major international programme supporting the work of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee for a Framework Convention on Climate Change (INC/FCCC) and that on Desertification (INC-D), and other activities undertaken by Members in the context of UNCED and its Agenda 21.

In order to meet such long-term observational requirements for a more enhanced description of the earth climate system, as envisaged under Agenda 21, WMO and three other international organizations established the Global Climate Observing System (GCOS) in 1992.

Currently in its early planning phase, GCOS is taking a comprehensive view toward these requirements, and will of necessity include observations from the ocean, in concert with the Global Ocean Observing System (GOOS) and the Global Terrestrial Observing System (GTOS) in addition to the current observational programme on the atmosphere.

but Russian spacecraft off to 14-month stay is not.

The target span will be a record and is long enough to make a baby in space on this expedition (with a female doctor-cosmonaut aboard); at least, Russian Space Baby will be proud of AIDS-free birth.

Not only for the quest of greater glory but also for better generations to come can such endeavours be supported over serious adversities.

Although the ambitious Space City may not be the final frontier for the progressing extraterrestrial adventures, which will take a while to be stationed, since the components have yet to be off the pad, different other purposes will still be up for continuing star trek in the next century.

Also, the humans will be looking up to the Space masters for taste of Space life meant for their greater good.

M. Rahman
Zila School Road,
Mymensingh

Russia's pioneering space research programme, established with Mir space laboratory sharing the outer space with American sky lab, fell short on Moon race followed by duplicate space shuttle.