

Participatory Planning

The government's venture into participatory planning deserves commendation. The Prime Minister herself initiated the move recently by inaugurating the first workshop of the new exercise at bottom-up planning in Thakurgaon near the north-western corner of the country. Devolution of planning to the grass-roots level will not only involve communities more in the process but could also make people willing partners in development.

The programme is to cover all the sixty-four districts in the coming months by holding similar consultative meetings, even at village levels. A cross-section of the population, including teachers, doctors, engineers, lawyers, traders, farmers, women representatives and concerned officials would be invited to these meetings. Ideas and suggestions gathered this way would be fully reflected in national level planning. The framework of the next five-year plan would be designed in the light of the communities' views.

To be sure, national level planning by government does not play much of a comprehensive role in an open economy. The impulse to growth comes mainly from private sector initiatives. However, our economy is still in a transitional stage. Public investment will be required to contribute significantly in the medium term to the economy. Accelerating sustainable growth for poverty alleviation calls for the economy to grow at a rate of seven per cent annually from less than five per cent as at present. To attain this level of growth, public investment would have to come up to nine per cent of the GDP from less than six per cent as of now. The way the government formulates its plans and implements its investment programme will continue to matter in the years ahead.

Remoulding the planning process to dovetail local perspectives might turn out to be a daunting task. Needs of communities will differ. Local priorities may not conform to larger national development strategies. Ecological and environmental concerns would vary from region to region in the country. Will the planners be able to synchronise emerging divergent views and assimilate these into the national plan merely through arranging meetings and seminars? Intensive and continuous dialogue with the often competing interest groups will be necessary to strike even a broad consensus on the issues involved. The planners should perhaps give a second look at the institutional arrangements set in place for carrying out consultations at community level.

Participation in the planning process will raise expectations among the people consulted that the specific needs of the community would be met through future development work in the region. Then again, a project may benefit the community at large but hurt some of its members. People so affected would expect adequate compensation. Therefore, it is all the more important to associate the community as a whole, actively and effectively, in the execution of development projects. Participatory planning could otherwise yield bitterness for segments of the population. Adequate institutional arrangements for obtaining active involvement of the concerned community in project implementation should, therefore, be put in place on a priority basis. Such a step could even upgrade the current generally dismal record of project realization.

Making peoples participation a central part of planning strategy is a laudable objective. Indeed, we welcome the move. Our fear is that unless adequate safeguard measures are put in place in time, the exercise would bring only disillusionment to the people.

That Sacred Mango Grove

The Mujibnagar Day on April 17 is one of the seed days of our national existence and is unique in many ways even among our national days. The provisional Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, mother of all successive governments to date, took office on this day in 1971 after due administration of oath. In the mango grove at Baidyanatholia in Meherpur, not far from the Plassey mango grove where native power was defeated crucially by Clive's horde of colonial depredators, there was an impressive assemblage of men — and some quarter dozen women — in the morning. How many among the present had the confidence in them to know for sure that the first nation-state of the ancient and great Bengalee people was materialising before them and that before the year would be out all of the eastern wing of Pakistan will form the territory of the state then taking birth? Not many. Of the few that had full faith in that impossible dream none was a better visionary of the morrow and none better committed to his vision than Prime Minister Tajuddin Ahmed who made it his business to lead his government to victory and to Dhaka.

We salute him on this day of days. We also express gratitude to our neighbour India and her leader Indira Gandhi but for their help April 17 and the turning of Baidyanatholia into Mujibnagar wouldn't have been possible. We shall be failing in our patriotic duty if we forget the total commitment to the cause of independence displayed that day by Major Abu Osman Chowdhury, senior police officer Mahbuddin Ahmed and civil servant Towfiq Elahi Chowdhury — the three that, rebelling against Pakistan, led the guards of honour to Acting President Nazrul Islam.

The battle has been joined by the victims of the heinous Pakistani genocide full 22 days before this historic event. Now the sporadic resistance fights and acts of sacrifice and heroism got something by way of a centrality — a leadership, a direction, a cause. To pull together a dispersed and demoralised Awami League leadership by even hunting them out from border areas and to get Indira Gandhi to accept the consequences of what for her was at best a dangerous gamble, was the singlehanded feat of Tajuddin. What helped him in this was his unflinching faith in the people of his country who he knew would not give in to tyranny. While the architect of the Bangladesh state is Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the architect of the victory in the Liberation War as indubitably Prime Minister Tajuddin Ahmed. The Mujibnagar Day belongs to our whole nation, beginning with Shaheed Tajuddin.

CONTRIBUTION of the mining and quarrying sector to the national economy is minuscule now. The sector's output at the moment is confined to only four products — limestone, white clay, boulder and sands. According to official statistics, the share of mining and quarrying sector in Gross Domestic Product (GDP) never exceeded 0.02 per cent at constant prices and 0.01 per cent at current prices, during the past decades. The sectoral contribution of mining and quarrying is, in fact, the lowest in the GDP matrix. Well, the scenario will change with the commissioning of the projects for extracting hardrock at Madhyapara and coal mining at Barapukuria in the country's north-western region.

The contract for extracting the hardrock reserves at Madhyapara was signed last month. The mine will produce 5000-6000 tons of hardrock a day, bringing a total yield of 1.5-1.8 million tons annually. The reserves are expected to last 30 years. Hardrock from the mines will be used in constructing bridges, flood control dams and embankments, river training and controlling, roads and highways. The rock will serve as a building material in the housing sector and railways also would use it. The upcoming Jamuna Multi-purpose Bridge too will draw on the hardrock extracted from the Madhyapara mines during the last phase of its construction.

Our current annual import requirement of construction materials like stones and boulders, is placed at around 1.8 million tons. Working at full capacity, Madhyapara mines will make us self-sufficient in the area. Besides, the mines would

yield granite for which there is a good export market. The contract for the Barapukuria coal mining project also was signed this year. In February, the coal reserve is estimated at about 300 million tonnes. Out of the total deposit of coal, about 102 million tonnes are said to be recoverable. Around one million tonnes of coal will be extracted from the mine every year. According to preliminary estimates, this level of extraction can be sustained for a period exceeding 64 years, depending upon the method of mining.

The country now depends entirely on import for meeting its requirements of coal. However, the volume of imports shows a remarkably uneven pattern, ranging between about 50,000 tonnes and half a million tonnes, a year. Depending on availability, consumption of coal varies likewise, from about 25,000 tonnes to exceeding half a million tonnes annually. The Barapukuria mining projects is due for completion within five years of commencing the work. However, partial extraction of coal from the mine will start in three years. The erratic pattern of import and consumption suggests that more coal will be used in the country if supplies are abundant. Nonetheless, it is within reasons to expect that Barapukuria will enable the country to attain self-sufficiency in coal.

Geologists say that coal deposits of an estimated 400 million tonnes are also available at Khalashpur in Rangpur district where economic mining is feasible. Then there is the country's largest coal deposits of about 1050 million tonnes at Jamalganj in Jaipurhat district. Some ex-

perts, while agreeing that coal mining from the Jamalganj deposit is technically feasible, nevertheless tend to dispute the economic feasibility of the proposition. The coal seams lie at a considerable depth, they say. However, they consider extraction of methane gas from the coal seams, an economically viable option. It is said that the extraction of methane gas entrapped in the Jamalganj coal deposit could yield the equivalent of a medium size gasfield.

The economy will derive

business opportunities for trade and industry connected with supplies of goods, distribution of the output and the working of the mines. The environmental impact also needs to be taken into account. Increased and predictable availability of coal will bring in benign consequences for the country's forest resources. There will be less need to fell trees to burn bricks. On the other hand, extensive use of coal as a fuel for power generation and in industry, would increase the risk

of pollution through higher level of carbon emissions. It is not known yet if the projects would displace people from homes and lands. Such possibilities should be taken into consideration at the project implementation stage to minimise the disruption caused to the people affected so. It is reported that the authorities are now busy updating the mining rules. Provisions for ensuring the welfare and security of people working in the mines are being made in the new rules. It is said new clauses would be written into the rules, designed to protect forests and environment from the ravage of mining activities. Hopefully, the new regulations would address the issue of environmental impact in its totality.

Both the hardrock and coal mining projects are being put up in the public sector. They are heavily dependent on suppliers credit for financing. In the case of the 697 crore taka hardrock project, some 523 crore taka will come from suppliers credit. The Barapukuria coal mines will take 887 crore taka to set up. About 775 crore of it will be financed through suppliers credit. However, it is reported that the government is on way to granting coal exploration and mining concessions to the private sector as well — to be funded through foreign direct investment. The new concessions, it is said, would cover areas in the north-western region of the country where coal deposits have not been located already. It is not clear if these arrangements will be on production-sharing or royalty basis. In any case, the mining and quarrying sector appears to be coming up pretty fast — hopefully, to score sizable contributions to the GDP in the years ahead.

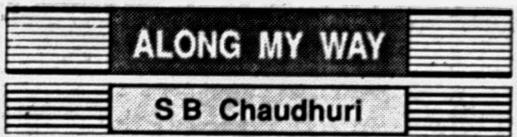
In these countries will mainly be met by a higher usage of coal for power generation, says IEA. Higher demand for electricity in the developing countries will lead inexorably to an increase in coal input to power generation. It adds.

The planned usage of coal extracted from the Barapukuria mines, seems to confirm the IEA findings. About 83 per cent of the coal mined will be utilised for power generation and the remaining 17 per cent only will be used at brickfields and for domestic purposes.

The country's demand for electricity will rise to 4000 megawatts (MWs) in the year 2000 as against the present peak-hour need of 180 MWs.

As it is, not even 15 per cent of the population has access to electricity now. Among the countries in South Asia, population access to electricity exceeds 37 per cent in Pakistan and more than 29 per cent in Sri Lanka. In India, 80 per cent of villages have been electrified. In our case, hardly 20 per cent of the villages have been electrified yet. No doubt, power generation in the country needs to be expanded substantially.

Except for the fortunate few who live in priority zones, users seldom enjoy the bliss of an uninterrupted 24-hour spell of electricity in their homes and workplaces. Some of them could even suffer the indignity of lighting a candle to read their electricity bills! Access to the coal mine at Barapukuria will at least ease availability of fuel for additional power generation. Nonetheless, the lot of the users is unlikely to improve much until the genie of system loss is drummed out of the electricity network.



tangible and substantial benefits from the hardrock extraction and coal mining projects. The two new ventures would enable the country to utilise hitherto untapped mineral (albeit, nonrenewable) resources. In all likelihood, the cost to the users will be less than the import price. There would be a significant saving in foreign exchange resources which would outstrip the outlay in building the projects. Then, there is the employment effect. It is estimated that the two projects would directly create several thousand new jobs. Some put the number at nearly ten thousand. Later, when the mines turn into running concerns, several thousand skilled and semi-skilled workers would find regular employment there. The mines will also create job opportunities for thousands more indirectly. Another spin-off would come by way of new

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ENCOURAGING and hopeful signals are coming from the trouble torn East African country, Somalia against the backdrop of the withdrawal of US forces at the end of their most controversial 15-month mission there.

The prospects for peace have further been brightened by the reported agreement between the two major faction leaders ("warlords," in the western media nomenclature) Gen Mohammed Farrah Aided and Ali Mahdi Mohammed at the UN-sponsored peace talks held in Nairobi, Kenya, to stop fighting and set up a civilian government. Thirteen other factional leaders come under to pale. So, the next couple of months will be extremely crucial for Somalia putting its leaders through an acid test of sincerity and commitment towards their country.

At this critical moment of Somalia's history, several questions puzzle those who watched the tragic events there during the last eighteen months or so, which have ruined the country economically, socially and politically. Was the country so prone to such a tragedy? No doubt, Somalia is a Third World developing country. But certainly it is not as poor and as helpless a country as it has been depicted to be — during the last 15 months since international humanitarian aid started pouring in. What were the conditions like prior to the present situation there? Who was responsible for bringing about the tragic situation?

We need a bit of analysis. It is recognised by all that Somalia has the potential to feed its eight million people and offer them a decent standard of living if its resources were properly harnessed. What went wrong then? It has had a thirty-year long lamentable history of a full-scale man-made tragedy. When Somalia gained independence in July 1960, no one could think that 30 years thenceforward this resourceful country would plunge into such a catastrophe. For the first eight years or so, Somalia was ruled by democratically elected governments. In fact, during this brief period, it was on the right track

SOMALIA

Is there Light at Tunnel's End? Why Bush Jumped in the Black Hole?

by AMM Shahabuddin

A US peace-keeping operation had never met with such a humiliation before. But this was the direct result of the eleventh-hour gamble played by Bush to boost his sagging image. But it totally misfired, bringing in bad name for himself, humiliation for his nation and an unnecessary headache for the new President Bill Clinton. As the saying goes, higher you go, harder is the fall.

leading to development and prosperity with the people enjoying basic democratic rights as well.

Then the country became somehow or the other the victim of the fall-out of the raging cold war syndrome. As it often happens in a Third World country, some ambitious army generals waited in the aisles for the opportune moment to seize power on some plea or the other. And the ominous moment came in October 1969, when the army marched in and overthrew the democratically elected government on charges of corruption and misuse. The constitution was abrogated and the new rulers promised to eradicate hunger, disease and corruption. Then began the autocratic rule of Mohammed Siad Barre, lasting for long 20 years. For the first eight years of his rule, Siad Barre had a smooth honeymoon with the Soviet Union which had made early inroads into the country. The USA was left behind, so they were looking for an opportunity to gain foothold there. They succeeded in maneuvering this in 1974, when the pro-western government of Haile Salasse of Ethiopia was replaced by a pro-Moscow government. The Americans immediately made their move in Somalia and fell in to support the Siad Barre regime till his fall. It was like a game of chess and the whole of Africa was like a chess-board on which the two camps were playing around with other.

Siad Barre had the free hand to rule the country in whichever manner he liked with the patronage of the USA. No question of misuse of power or abuse of human rights was ever raised by the champions of human rights. Exploiting the advantage in his favour, Siad Barre went all-out to perpetuate or prolong his rule. He encouraged and fanned factionalism and division among his people along clan and sub-clan lines. All this was his brain-child to consolidate his power. Subsequently, he had to quit the scene but he had left the poisonous and deadly diseases in the nation's body-politic. With the fall of Siad Barre, the fighting between the clans and sub-clans intensified to such an extent that the whole country became fragmented into new killing fields, with anarchy and chaos prevailing everywhere.

The results were starvation, death and destruction. At this stage, the USA, with the blessings of the UN, stepped in to restore order and ensure unhampered supply of humanitarian aid, under the codename "Operation Restore Hope". But the operation led to a disastrous situation not only for the Americans but for all those involved there. But how or why it happened, is another story.

The US had a much deeper interest in Somalia than the mere humanitarian angle. And that is why George Bush jumped into the black hole in that African country. The US was interested in Somalia not only for strategic reasons — there being the Soviet-built air-field at the Red Sea port of Berbera — but also for its potential oil resources. In this connection, the Los Angeles Times published a bomb-shell story in January 1993, exploding the myth about the US humanitarian operation in Somalia. According to documents, claimed to have been received by the LA Times, "nearly two thirds of Somalia were allocated to the four American oil giants — Conoco, Amoco, Chevron and Phillips — in the final years before President Siad Barre was overthrown." The report further said: "The (oil) companies are hoping that the decision to send the US troops to safeguard aid shipments to Somalia will also help protect their multi-million dollar investments."

Bush Administration, however, insisted that the US military mission was "strictly humanitarian". Subsequent events and the activities of the US force belied the US claim though. As they say, the elephant has two sets of teeth — one for chewing and the other for showing. George Bush, himself a former Texan oilman is well-known for his penchant for oil business since he had emerged as the hero out of the Operation Desert Storm. Incidentally, it was the same Bush who opposed, tooth and nail, any US involvement in Bosnia-Herzegovina, perhaps for the simple reason that Bosnia had no oil to offer.

Some aid experts, veteran East African analysts and several prominent Somalis, are reported to have alleged that "George Bush" was moved to act in Somalia, at least in part, by the US corporate oil stake",

although such allegations were dismissed by the US oil industry officials as "absurd and nonsense". But the fact of the matter is, adds the LA Times report, that the largest of the four US oil companies — Conoco Inc. — "has been directly involved in the US government's role in the UN-sponsored humanitarian military effort". Hence, "many liken the Somalia operation to a miniature version of the Operation Desert Storm, the US led military effort in January 1991, to drive Iraq out of Kuwait and, more broadly, safeguard the world's largest oil resources", concludes the LA Times report.

This shocking revelation by a prominent US newspaper speaks more than what appears on the surface. It bares the shinning teeth of Bush. When with much fanfare and dramatisation, the US marines landed on the shores of Somalia, the people expected much more than what actually followed. With the passage of time, the US forces gradually started showing their teeth, assuming a more aggressive posture against the people. A recent report on the US operation in Somalia to the Security Council dubs it as "over-aggressive". But earlier, the Security Council, under US influence, adopted a resolution offering \$25,000.00 on the head of Farrah Aided, captured dead or alive. But, alas, nobody came forward to receive this generous offer for Aided's head. On the other hand, heads of 18 US soldiers rolled in a day when the US

copters stormed Aided's HQ to capture him. And what a tragic scene it was to see on the TV screen the 'lynching' of the dead body of a US soldier on the streets of Mogadishu. However, the US acknowledged its big mistake, too late and at too heavy a cost. The earlier resolution on Aided's head was withdrawn, opening the door for negotiations. President Clinton announced that the entire US force would be withdrawn by 31 March, 1994, and that promise has been fulfilled on the date.

A US peace-keeping operation had never met with such a humiliation before. But this was the direct result of the eleventh-hour gamble played by Bush to boost his sagging image. But it totally misfired, bringing in bad name for himself, humiliation for his nation and an unnecessary headache for the new President Bill Clinton. As the saying goes, higher you go, harder is the fall.

With the healthy signals now coming from Somalia, the nightmare for the people of Somalia seems to be over. The world now can see light at the end of the tunnel. Gen Aided, who has emerged from this turmoil as a national leader, recently alleged that the US force instead of doing humanitarian work, posed more as an "occupation force." So he has demanded withdrawal of all foreign forces from Somalia, leaving a minimal number needed to help carry on peace keeping and humanitarian operations. This is undoubtedly a signal to the UN from a national leader of a sovereign state. The UN peace-keeping forces work under a certain mandate given by the Security Council. It has limits beyond which it is not expected to operate. The UN operation must have the consent of the host government and it must not be used in any way to favour one party against another in the internal strife. The UN knows its limits, and Somalia's expectations from such peace-keeping forces. So let there be a meeting-point for a happy ending — both for the world body and a sovereign member-state. The writer is a retired UN official.

To the Editor

Letters for publication in these columns should be addressed to the Editor and legibly written or typed with double space. For reasons of space, short letters are preferred, and all are subject to editing and cuts. Pseudonyms are accepted. However, all communications must bear the writer's real name, signature and address.

**Canada**  
Sir, I wish to take exception to your use of the phrase "some Canadian icy waste" as in your editorial of April 17 on "BTV Going Abroad, Why Not?" The reference was to "a very, very homesick Bengalee sitting marooned... or encapsulated in some Canadian icy waste." I hasten to inform you that no Bengalees are marooned or encapsulated anywhere in Canada, icy wastes or not.  
My concern is with your quite unfair description of my country, "the true north strong and free" as an icy waste. This is of course a "shocking stereotype. It may be that much of the country is covered by snow

and ice for most of the year. It may be that large areas are thinly populated. It may be that many large centres this winter recorded temperatures well below -30c, or in some unfortunate cases, lower than -40c. But it is quite another matter to describe this great land as an icy waste. Indeed, as a result of our weather challenge — a naturally occurring shortage of heat — Canadians have established world leadership in a wide variety of activities concerning ice and snow — from the invention of ice hockey to the snowmobile.  
Our technological progress is such that even in an icefishing shack in the Yukon, not even a lonesome Bengalee

need fear encapsulation from lack of access to TV. Alas, it is everywhere.  
High Commissioner for Canada Dhaka

**Per capita income**  
Sir, "Have work have food, no work no food" — is the sorrowful life of our 'jugal' the daily wages labour.  
Everyday early hours in the morning we find hundreds of 'jugal's sitting, waiting, looking and bargaining for a day's work at different places of our capital city Dhaka for earning their livelihood.  
The income of a 'jugal' is about Taka 70.00 per day.  
The per capita income of Bangladesh is US\$ 220.00/ Taka 8,800.00 i.e. Taka 24.00 per day.  
Does a 'jugal' get work daily? Does he earn Taka 70x365 that is Taka 25,550.00 in a year? No, a 'jugal' hardly gets work for 30-40 days in a year. If he earns Taka 70.00 per day for 30-40 days his income varies from Taka

2100.00 to 2800.00 annually. If we divide the amount into 365 days the income of a 'jugal' comes to Taka 5.00 to Taka 7.00 per day.  
Not to speak about his dependants and family members, in addition to his own food he has also to spend money for his clothing and accommodation. Is it humanly possible these days to have a living with a pittance income of Taka 5.00 to 7.00 per day?  
Over 85 per cent people of our country are living below poverty line. How and when would we be able to alleviate poverty from our country?  
Of course there are many persons in our country who earn more than Taka 1000.00 per day.  
We would like to request our ministers, members of the parliament both in the ruling and opposition parties, public leaders, bureaucrats, land lords and industrialists to kindly let us know as to what amount of money they spend per person per day for them-

selves and for each of their family members?  
We demand equitable distribution of our national wealth, all round economic development, complete stoppage of wanton expenditure of public money and full implementation of our much publicised 'dal-bhat' (rice and lentil) programme for all.  
O H Kabir  
Dhaka-1203  
**Shame!**  
Sir, Hats off to the Daily Star for scoring its point in the case of the stone-averse baton-bashing of Mr Abdus Samad Azad. It is perhaps fortunate that the Star had an eloquent photograph to back up its report. Else the AL would have tried to make out the Star as a biased news source. Their chief whip Mr Nasim even went so far as to claim that he had seen Mr Azad being hit by a police baton. He did not mince his words, which will make it all the harder for him to swallow them now.

Shame for trying to capitalize on an unfortunate happening. The tug of war over deceased Aminur Rasul Paran also reflects this 'all's fair' attitude of our politicians. When will these people learn to rise above dirty politics?  
Syeda Qudus Barua  
Surma Res. Area, Sylhet  
**Jamuna Bridge**  
Sir, Minister Begum Khaleida Zia has laid down the foundation stone of Jamuna Multipurpose Bridge (JMB) on Sunday, the 10th of April, 1994. This bridge when completed will contribute a lot to the socio-economic development of Bangladesh.  
The laying of the JMB foundation stone is a great achievement. Our heartiest congratulations to Prime Minister Begum Zia and her government. We sincerely hope that the government of Begum Zia will continue to undertake such welfare-oriented projects in the future.  
Zahid, Dhaka