

The Literacy Utopia

Education Minister Jamiruddin Sircar has said on Saturday in Rajshahi that government was firm to eradicate illiteracy from the nation by the year 2000. How, we do not know. We do not know because we are pretty sure the government as well is equally ignorant about how to work this miracle. In a celebrated short story by Manik Bandyopadhyay the protagonist promises a miracle — that he would die, a hail and hearty jolly good fellow, at a certain moment on a certain day. As the promised hour approached how the fellow started praying for and putting all his mind to the impossible task of dying sheerly by wishing to die — and on schedule — something that the mythical Bhishma could not. However, his hyper-celebration helped him keep his appointment with death. We do not wish Mr Sircar to commit himself so much to working his own miracle. It is very unlikely that he would continue to be our education minister till 2000 AD and would be available for explanations as to why his promise was not kept, or to believe in a contrary scenario, to celebrate him as a national hero. How many times the government, mostly through their ministers, have expressed their firm resolve to attain universal health care and literacy etc. etc. — all by the haloed year 2000? This they do as going through a picked piece of slogan very unwisely set into circulation by this or that UN agency. The ministers should have gone about those with ultimate achievements as the men of the world's way as they very much are. They should have asked themselves before harping endlessly on this 'by 2000' tune so very unmeaningfully were they indeed very badly expected by their constituency to go to such absurd levels of promise making.

The funny side of the question lies in the fact that affirmations of firm government resolve to build a paradise by 2000 are still being made when the government as a whole has already woken up sufficiently to the unachievability of the target. All technically competent people — there are myriads in the government of such — know that as things are moving — relating to the population as well as the literacy figure — this nation would not need six — the time left for reaching 2000 — and not even sixty, but at least three hundred and sixty years to have a universally literate society. When education is Mr Sircar's supreme care at the moment he had no business whatever to talk so irresponsibly about literacy.

Is the outlook so very bleak indeed? Not at all, outside the pale of government's absolutely non-monitored brick-and-mortar-and-wages primary education exertions, the BRAC schools are doing meaningful work on a very great scale and the GSS schools are fast picking up on them — and in some areas of quality and social acceptability factors, the latter is making remarkable strides. Universal literacy in Bangladesh must of necessity be very largely non-formal and participatory of the society and of the nature of social work. The political parties with their reach extending to grassroots were best qualified to work the literacy miracle. But they have yet to show any interest in the matter. The NGOs are bearing the burden that was theirs. And the NGOs are doing something more, something of the utmost importance to the society. They are initiating as best as they can the rural masses into the end-products of literacy and education, namely, confidence and innovativeness and self-reliance.

By the way, how is the government helping the NGOs to wider their literacy net? There is no news yet from the interior of how government is handling burning of BRAC schools. If government mean to spread literacy real fast they should give up their present coolness towards the NGOs and in fact go to them and learn more than a thing or two.

Despicable Choice for Girls

The world's oldest trade was never quite healthy anywhere. But it has become particularly pitiable in countries like Bangladesh in recent times. According to Manabdhikar Sangstha, the number of prostitutes in the country is about one lakh — 29,000 of them below the age of 16. The total number is ten times more than the government figure. The problem has become all the more complex due to the rise in the number of floating prostitutes in cities and towns. About 21,000 such women and girls are peddling sex in areas not meant for the purpose and thus vitiating the social environment.

That the flesh trade continues unabated shows how sick our society is. But it also reveals the defects in our system. The nature of defect has taken a very serious turn in recent times simply because women and under-aged girls in an increasing number are forced into the oldest of professions. That it has become a profession taken no more by choice makes it clear how much clandestine and organised exercise goes into the process of humiliation of women. The research survey conducted by Manabdhikar Sangstha found that 48 per cent of the under-aged and young girls have been subject to inhuman oppression and cruelty before they submitted themselves to the degradation.

Another important point is that 93 per cent of these young girls have come from villages. This points to two things: first, there are professional pimps who maintain liaison with the brothels for procuring such girls mostly offering baits of lucrative service; second, the girls can be easily swayed to swallow the baits, taking the advantage of their wretched economic and social status. Sometimes the parents sell their daughters. Broken marriages and betrayal by lovers also prove to be a deciding factor for the girls to opt for the worst of professions. They are driven to such desperation that they find no other alternative than selling their bodies.

Now one thing that often escapes our attention is that there are demands for such girls and their male clients account for several times the number of girls and women in the trade. As long as the male dominated society is so preoccupied with sex, women will be made their unwilling and unfortunate victims. In a male-biased society it is bound to happen. So what is the way out? The solution perhaps lies in educating women and making them economically strong. This means that they must be gainfully employed for averting the undue exploitation. A tall order no doubt, but it has to be done. The fundamentalists are trying to oppose such empowerment of women for their own reasons. The government has to be strict in dealing with this heinous attempt.

Budget '94-'95

Need to Emphasize Supportive Government

by Dr Mozammel Huq

WITH his 1994/95 Budget Mr Saifur Rahman has presented his sixth budget, as he mentions, in his ministerial capacity for about eight and a half years in the two BNP governments and, I am sure, there are many people who would like to congratulate the Finance Minister for this personal triumph of his. I feel that Mr Saifur Rahman also deserves to be credited for a number of other achievements. The tax-GDP ratio has taken a healthy upturn, as is the allocation of expenditure on the education sector. It also appears that he is genuine in his declaration of gradually raising the domestic contribution in the development budget (35.8% of ADP in 1993/94) and, given that since 1990/91 the domestic component of ADP financing has increased four and a half times, the achievement is indeed praiseworthy.

The Budget conveys a strong desire on the part of the Finance Minister to take the country out of the vicious circle of poverty or, as he has recently put it elsewhere, 'to make a dent on the poverty.' This he wants to achieve by raising the growth rate of GDP to 6%—7% in the nearer term while aiming at a double-digit growth before the turn of the century. However, there are many people who have already started questioning the pragmatism of the Finance Minister's claim. Does he really hope to obtain an extra 2% growth rate from an increase of investment of only 1.5% i.e. from 14.5% to 16.0%?

Assuming that the ICOR (incremental capital-output ratio) remains at the present level of 3.2, he will be lucky if he gets even a full 5% growth in GDP during 1994/95. (The exact figure is 4.97%) If he really wants to achieve a growth rate of, say 6.5% what he needs is an investment of 21% of GDP, which is definitely unrealistic, given the prospect of growth of domestic savings and the objective.

Borrowing a terminology from the computer people, he

as categorically stated by the Finance Minister, of self-reliance where the domestic efforts will feature 38% of the ADP in 1994/95. By the same token, his aim to achieve 'a double-digit growth rate before the turn of the century' implies an investment rate of 32% of GDP which, to some, is a wishful thinking especially as it will necessitate more than doubling the investment-GDP ratio in a matter of less than six years. We would, of course, like him to succeed, but can he?

It is true that a drastic improvement in the efficiency of investment can help the nation to achieve a double-digit GDP growth rate with less than the investment figure of 32% of GDP. An important requirement, what the Finance Minister prefers to call, is 'good governance' which he admits is 'synonymous with a sound development administration'. He defines it as 'a lean, efficient and effective administration that delivers policies and commitments'.

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world".

Many people are also sceptical about Mr Saifur Rahman's full trust in the liberalisation strategy for sustained economic development. If the emphasis on the market mechanism is rooted to his thinking that 'bad market' is better than 'bad government', there are many people, who will agree with him. This point needs to be emphasised. It is apparent that, with democracy, the time has come to put the things very clearly to the public. It needs to be told that the type of government role which we have seen in many other developing countries including Bangladesh has led to the enrichment of a few at the cost of the many, thanks largely to government patronage. In the case of Bangladesh, Mr Saifur Rahman is very vocal:

'The ordinary millions of our countrymen who are unheard, unnoticed and unsung; yet, they are the ones whose tax payments fund the good life of the privileged few.' He is, however, hesitant to put it categorically that this is 'bad government'.

One obviously does not leave

the things completely on the

doorsteps of the 'bad market'

and I believe that Mr Saifur Rahman is also aware of the

deficiencies of the market mechanism. Indeed, in his 1993/94 Budget speech he was much more categorical as, when explaining the government's industrial policy, he stated that it was aimed at transforming the 'restrictive and anti-export biased trading system to a transparent and open one that would promote efficient industries, both export-oriented and import substituting' (emphasis added). Unfortunately, in his 1994/95 Budget Speech it appears that there is a shift in his commitment. Of course, it is not clear whether he wants to mean that liberal trade policies alone are adequate to achieve economic development or, for that matter, industrialisation.

The blatant liberalisation standpoint, as advocated by the World Bank and the IMF, fails to emphasise (or, according to some, even to recognise) market failures in developing countries. The imperfections in the market system (including trade-relationship with the developed world) experienced by the developing countries like Bangladesh

have, for long, been strongly advocated by economists such as prebisch, seers and singer and, I suppose it is natural expectation that a powerful

document such as the Annual Budget of a country like Bangladesh needs to be formulated in that light. This is particularly imperative as all countries which have done well (not only the late industrialisers such as South Korea but also the early industrialisers like Britain, Germany, France and the USA) have clearly recognised the role of the state, I mean a supportive role, as distinguished from an obstructionist role, of the state. Mr Saifur Rahman will indeed get our heartiest congratulations when he comes forward with that viewpoint, clearly stated.

With his long years of experience and his strong commitment to national development, I believe that Mr Saifur Rahman is one of the right persons to mould the public opinion in the right direction, with a very clear message. As to many, including the present author, that clear message is missing in the 1994/95 Budget, so for the time being I am afraid our congratulations to the Finance Minister are going to be qualified.

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giving them education and jobs in the civil service. The Belgian support for Tutsis has apparently continued: the RPF has an office in Brussels.

The Hutu population languished as subsistence farmers. The Hutu rose up against the Tutsi when Belgians gave up power in 1959, massacring thousands and driving up to 500,000 from the country. Most fled into Uganda.

A rebel movement was fostered by Tutsi exiles in Uganda in the 1980s. Guerrilla leader Yoweri Museveni, then head of the National Resistance Army, recruited Tutsi refugees to fight against Milton Obote's dictatorship in Uganda.

After Museveni took power in 1986, he supported the Tutsi in their fight to regain their homeland. A US-trained commander Paul Kagame brought together a force of 12,000 men, women and boys.

The invasions from Uganda into Rwanda by Tutsi refugees fuelled the anti-Tutsi 'movement' inside Rwanda. In the new wave of carnage, soldiers from Burundi's Tutsi-dominated army marched into Rwanda to protect fellow tribe people from attack by Hutu-dominated army and militia.

Tanzania mediated in the lengthy negotiations for a way out of the ethnic impasse. Tanzania, whose army helped root out the notorious Idi Amin from Uganda, is however reluctant to send its troops into Rwanda.

Meanwhile, the UN continues to write reports about the ongoing carnage: "... a new body, a woman killed in the fighting a couple of nights ago, has replaced it as the main sight along the road from UNAMIR Headquarters (in Kigali) to the airport. Her body is still fairly whole, but the decay is advancing."

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Behind the Killing Fields of Rwanda

Francis Mwanza writes from Rusumo, Tanzania

Rwanda has seen some of the worst violence in recent years. Within two weeks in April an estimated half a million people are believed to have died. Many more have been displaced. Thousands are living in refugee camps in neighbouring countries. As the international community dithers, the people are still fleeing. Gemini News Service examines the carnage.

Fleeing genocide



ers is: where is the rest of the

capital's population?

And what relief officials

hardly talk about is the plight

of foreigners still trapped in

side Kigali. While Western

countries were quick to eva-

cuate their nationals including

pete, some 15,000 people

from Uganda, Zaire and India

(simply referred to as 'third

country nationals') were aban-

doned.

The tragedy has spilled over

into neighbouring states as

thousands of Rwandans flee

the blades and guns of their at-

tackers. Nearly 500,000 have

fled to seek safe havens in

Tanzania, Uganda, Burundi and

Zaire.

Images of horror and agony

should not try to make a non-

issue into an issue, because

they will have to face similar

situations when they are voted

to power.

In this connection the state-

ment of Dr Kamal Hossain

appeared in the dailies on

25.6.94 seems timely, correct

and sensible.

As a member of the neutral

public, we are only interested

to see healthy growth of a

sound democratic practice on

which the image of the country

and economic progress are

largely depended.

M E Hoque

Zakir Hossain Road

Chittagong.

Caretaker Govt issue

Sir, The present demand

for holding next general elec-

tions under the supervision of

a caretaker government has

obliged the learned citizens to

pass their opinions on the is-

sue through the print media.

But my question is — who

will be benefited if the election

is held under a caretaker gov-

ernment? Would the members

of the general public receive

any benefit if a new govern-

ment comes to power after

winning elections under a

caretaker government? I am

really doubtful about this.

As a common citizen, I

would sincerely suggest those

arguing for election under a

caretaker government to make

commitments pertaining to

their future activities for en-

suring welfare of the common

people as well as of the coun-

try. For instance, what sort of

budget would they present to