

World Development Report 1994

Infrastructure for Economic Development and Bangladesh

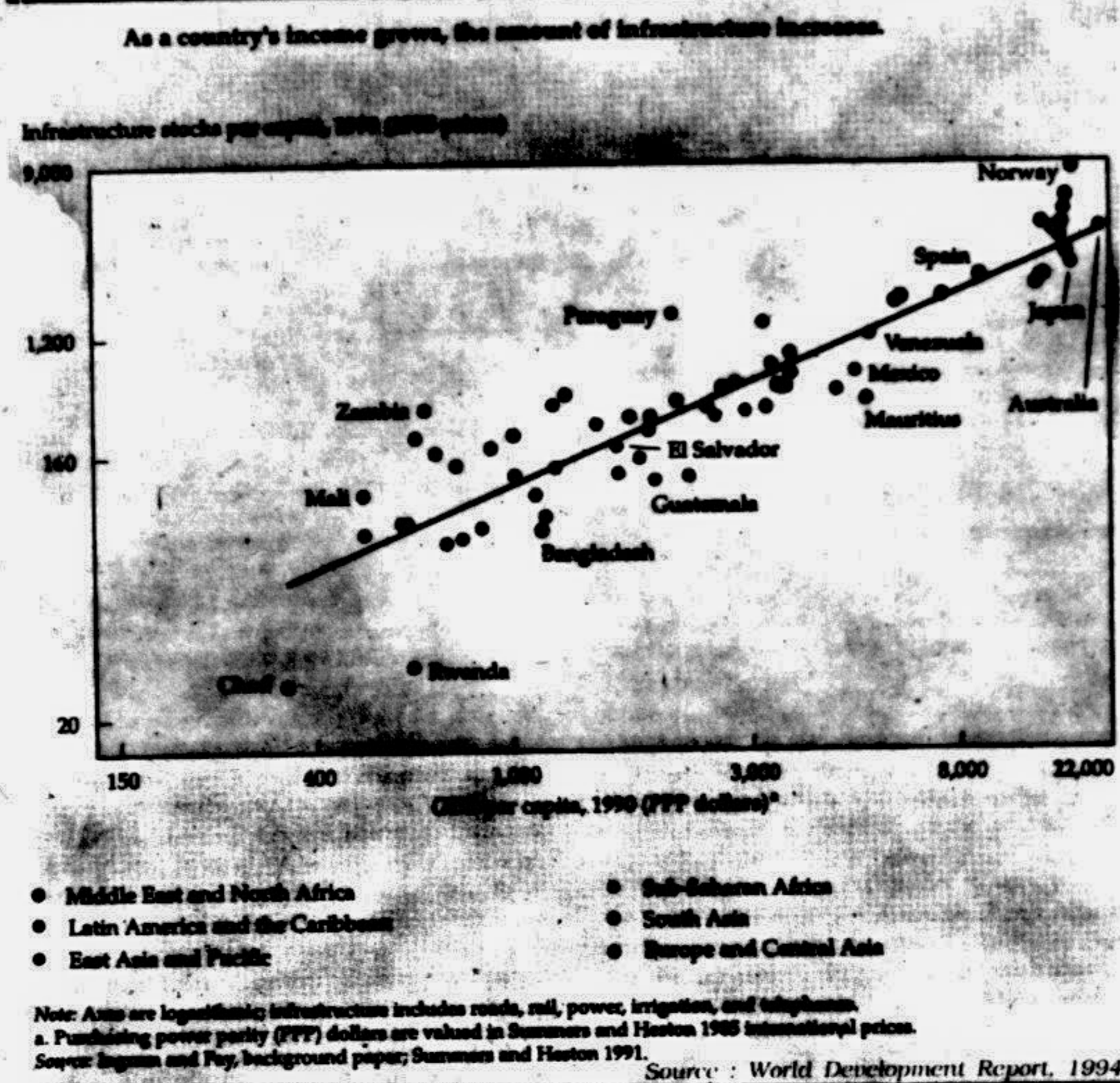
by Munim Kumar Barai

WITHIN a span of few months three most known international financial and developmental agencies, viz. the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank and the UNDP, an organ of the UN, have come out with three important Reports for the year 1994. Correspondingly these are — the World Development Report 1994, the Asian Development Outlook 1994 and the Human Development Report 1994. As is evident from their namings — these Reports deal with different developmental aspects of world communities segregated by international boundaries. All of them are full of data and indicators from which a conservant can easily find out the ratings or standings of the listed countries in different areas of development. The components or elements which directly or indirectly play roles for development in economic and social arenas are so many to count. But for their universality, some of them are taken as basic for growth and development process of a country. The World Bank in a special effort in the World Development Report (WDR) 1994 has tried to show the indispensability of infrastructure for the economic development of any country. The findings of the WDR 1994 are many, so are the suggestions to different nations of different development plans on what to do and what not. Although all round development of a country also depends on the formation of human capital, a subject elaborately dealt by the UNDP in its Human Development Report 1994 [in which our HDI standing is a poor 146th, the present article would be devoted to highlight the role of infrastructure for economic development and the conditions of infrastructure in Bangladesh in the light of the WDR 1994.

What is Infrastructure?

For us first know what comes under the purview of infrastructure. Practically, infrastructure is a broad set of different systems, sectors and sub-sectoral facilities that together contribute much towards economic growth, poverty alleviation and environmental sustainability. These happen when infrastructural services meet effective demand for them sufficiently and efficiently. This wide meaning of infrastructure is inclusive in nature and perceived to be an umbrella term for many activities referred to as "social overhead capital" by development economists.

The WDR 1994 is an attempt to focus basically on economic infrastructure which includes services from power, telecommunication, piped water supply, sanitation and sewerage, solid waste collection and disposal, and piped gas (all are public utilities); roads and major dam and canal works for irrigation and drainage (all public works); and, urban and interurban railways, urban transport, ports and waterways



and airports (transport sector). As has been pointed out that the WDR 1994 has actually focused on economic infrastructure, so the list does not incorporate the facilities for human resource development, i.e., the social infrastructure encompassing institutions for imparting formal and informal education, hospitals and other facilities that are required for human skill development and better health management. They are indispensable for a nation's progress.

Infrastructure's Role for Economic Development

The precise linkages between infrastructure and economic growth and poverty reduction are subject to debate. It is also to be established whether infrastructure investment causes growth or growth induces infrastructure investment. But substantial evidence is available that there is a positive and significant correlation between the two. The WDR 1994 points out that infrastructure capacities grow step for step with economic output — a one per cent increase in infrastructure is associated with a one per cent increase in gross domestic production (GDP) across all the countries. Malaysia, Thailand alongwith the newly industrialised countries (NICs) of Asia experienced an infrastructure boom side by side with their rapid economic progress in the '80s and the

phenomena is still continuing. China's ongoing staggering economic growth is simultaneous with its massive construction of roads, railways, powerhouses, telecommunication networks etc. The WDR 1994 reveals that the economic costs of not having adequate transport infrastructure in China during the past several years amount to one per cent of China's GNP.

Growth and expansion of an economy generally occurs through broadening and diversifying of production, export and import bases. This means a surge of economic activities that is bound to have an extra pressure on the whole set up of infrastructure. If infrastructure facilities cannot cope up with the demand for infrastructure services, only a slow down in the economic activities could be expected. The result of this slow down anybody can guess. In fact, availability of adequate infrastructure would raise productivity and lower production cost by way of facilitating in time delivery of inputs and outputs, minimising transportation and storage costs and so on.

The impact of good infrastructure is more evident in rural area than urban area. Access to infrastructure facilities, particularly to transport and irrigation, leave the rural people better off in terms of agriculture production, incomes and labour demand and health. As a whole, infrastructure is a necessary, although

not sufficient, precondition for growth — other resources must have to be present as well. It is also imperative to mention that presence or absence of adequate infrastructure could distinctly determine the success or failure of a country's march towards economic growth and development.

The Case of Bangladesh

Bangladesh, with and the inhabitants of more than 12 crore, is the most densely populated country in the world. To provide minimum services to this huge infantry of population, there can be little doubt that Bangladesh should have vast infrastructural facilities. But being poor, she could not manage to have so. Like most of other developing nations, Bangladesh has an insufficient and inefficient economic infrastructure. Also the government has to bear most of the burden of infrastructure expenditure, although international development agencies are more generous to provide her with financial assistance. Private sector is still timid and mostly shy off in any infrastructure venture.

The WDR 1994 does not have any good picture to offer when it gives data related to infrastructure of Bangladesh. Since 1970, population of Bangladesh doubled but expansion of paved roads, railway tracks or water transport vehicles did not match the population growth. It means the per

capita access to these systems has virtually declined. In 1990, total length of paved roads crossing the countries was 6,617 kms from 3,610 kms of 1970. The railway tracks remained nearly static and had a total length of 2,892 kms in 1990. To be more precise, in that year the rail traffic per million \$ GDP was only 41 kms. For Pakistan and India it was 168 kms and 593 kms respectively in the corresponding year. The power sector is lagging extremely behind and only 15 per cent of the households at present are connected with electric lines while Pakistan and India provided electric cover to 31 and 54 per cent of their households in 1990. Only a few African countries can match Bangladesh in the system losses in power sector which stood a whopping 30 per cent of the total output.

So the scheme of total rural electrification by 2000 AD seems to be an over ambitious project. Only 2 persons out of 1000 have telephone lines. Bangladesh has, thanks to the NGOs also, done a remarkable progress in providing drinking water to her people — 78 per cent of the total population did have access to safe water in 1990. Whereas only 12 per cent had access to sanitation in the same year. Irrigation is yet to make a headway in Bangladesh, through proper water management could have played a far better role.

Conclusions

So the message of the WDR 1994 for Bangladesh is clear — a lot needs to be done for the infrastructure development in Bangladesh. This is required to foster her economic growth as well as to provide her population with the minimum infrastructure services. Private investments in the infrastructure would be welcomed provided they do not become all powerful to play with the lot of the people as the private transporters now are doing with the passengers in Bangladesh. Indications are there that Bangladesh has achieved a sort of economic stability. Now the rate and pace of growth need to be fattened and quickened to provide better standard of life to her people. Provisions for adequate infrastructure would no doubt provide an added impetus to the whole growth process in Bangladesh. The writer is presently carrying out his doctoral studies at Delhi School of Economics, Delhi.

Bee-Keeping: An Unexplored Prospect

by Rashedun Nabi and Dipak Mukherjee

MANY of the potential areas of rural natural resources still remain outside the consideration even of the people who claim themselves as experts on natural resource management. Apiculture is one such area which still does not receive any institutional support. Its contribution to economy and human nutrition has not been included in the national accounting either. A few people are aware that apiculture a honey bee-keeping can multiply the contribution of agriculture and horticulture through cross pollination. Proshika Manabik Udayan Kendra — a non-governmental development organisation has introduced a scientific method of honey bee-keeping as an employment and income generating venture at the rural level.

Traditionally, a considerable quantity of honey and wax is being collected from wild bees in the forest areas. But Proshika intended to domesticate the wild scatteredness. It underscores the importance of exploring local resource potential and combine the effort with its poverty alleviation actions. Initially bee-keeping was considered as subsidiary beneficiary groups of Proshika. Since 1989, Proshika's coverage of honey bee-keeping included 210 village in 24 thanas. About 1,000 beneficiary farmers (including 382 female) now have been nurturing 1586 beehives. Bee-keeping requires a very little knowledge regarding

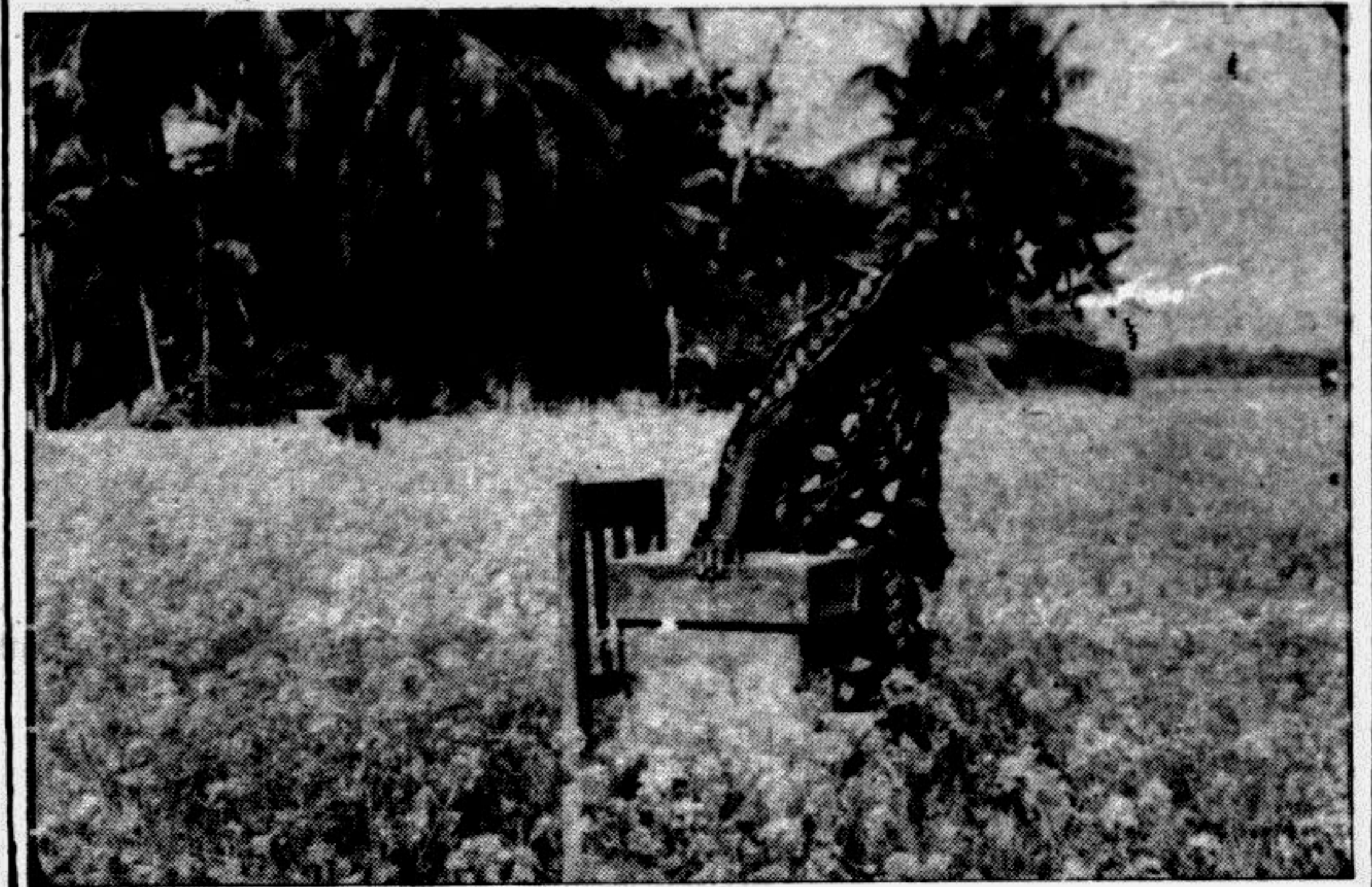
farious effect on the ecosystem and nutrition status. It simplifies delicious fresh honey, produces wax as its by-product, and provides valuable service for crops. Floral crops, for example, mustard and other oil seed crops, pulses, and fruits witness a higher yield as a result of cross-pollinating activities.

More significantly, incentives from honey and wax production motivates people to promote horticulture and plantation thereby influencing agro-ecological balance. A farmer keeping 2 hives can produce on an average 18-20 kg honey a year which is worth of 2000-2400 taka. A farmer needs to spare only a hour a week for nurturing two hives which can easily be maintained without disrupting his/her daily routine. A full time skilled worker with adequate professional training on apiculture assist the farmers in the programme villages.

Honey production bears seasonal variation containing different amount of water. Water is added by the 'worker bees' and use it as food and during hot period. Farmers extract honey measuring water level by refractometer. These facilitates of identifying sources of pollen, for example, mustard or any other fruit trees etc. have ensured the freshness and deliciousness of honey. In the last five years Proshika beneficiaries produced 28,157 kg honey from 1587 colonies worth of Taka 3,660,410 [at the rate of 130 taka per kg]. Proshika deter-

mines the grade of honey and then distributes it to market. This is rare in honey marketing in Bangladesh. Apiculture Research Proshika initiated a collaborative on-farm research with Crop Diversification Programme (CDP) for working on combination of crop diversification and keeping honeybee.

In the context of poverty ridden Bangladesh, need for exploring this type of production and income generation sources can hardly be exaggerated. The micro level anti-poverty actions should be more attentive to look into the possibilities and optimum utilisation of rural natural resources. Bee-keeping is a boon for such venture as it does not involve any imperative of landholding and the investment is under-



Keeping beehive in a mustard field

photo: Proshika

good location of the bee colonies and habits of bees. Proshika provides its group members with some preliminary training on the bee-keeping techniques and a moderate amount of loan (Taka 1000-1300) for inputs such as, beehives, queen gate, gloves, net and hat (musk) etc. to begin with the cultivation. Keeping beehive has multi-

plies the grade of honey and then distributes it to market. This is rare in honey marketing in Bangladesh.

Apiculture Research

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Surprisingly, in spite of its immense scope of involving women who are deprived of employment opportunities, Proshika has not yet been successful to increase the women participation in this activities. Diversion of attention may bring about progressive growth of this programme. The writers are associated with Proshika, a national NGO.

Integrating the Disabled in Development

by Monsur Ahmed Chowdhury

SOCIO-economic integration of the disabled people in the society has to be achieved primarily through political and social actions which are virtually absent in the developing countries. In most cases, the issue of welfare of the disabled people is totally absent in the politico-economic and social programmes of the party in power or in opposition. Thus political commitment for the welfare of the disabled segment in institutions like Parliament or in such other forums is not made. And this on the substantial measure are taken at being lower levels to improve the situation of the disabled people.

In majority of the developing and least developed countries like Bangladesh, the annual development plans are being prepared depending on the commitment made by donors to provide assistance. So, in these development programmes food supply, agriculture, education, health and family planning, industry and development of the infrastructure are usually given the top most consideration. Social welfare in general and promotion of services for the disabled people in particular is generally slashed from the priority list of the national socio-economic development plan. If we look at 1993-94 development budget of Bangladesh Government, it is clearly evident.

In developing countries disabled people who constitute about 350 million of the estimated 500 million world's dis-

abled population, belong to the poorer section of the society. Though we do not have any authentic statistics of the disabled population in Bangladesh, it is generally estimated that about 10 per cent of the population are disabled, according to the various sample surveys and studies. This plight of misery is the result of the negative social attitude towards the disabled people. This is one of the major barriers in socio-economic integration. Integration of the disabled people in the society directly commensurates with the educational and rehabilitation services available in the country. Such services are yet to reach this large segment of the disabled people lingering in rural areas of Bangladesh. In a few cases, even if the services are there, for those are inadequate the vast disabled populace. They are confronted with physical, social and psychological barriers, which are again the result of adverse attitude of the society. The special and specific needs of the disabled people are not generally recognized by the planners, administrators and the society as a whole.

Socio-economic integration of the disabled people is a two-way track in any society. The general mass has to be aware of the problems and needs of the disabled persons as well as the members of the public should be educated to accept the disabled persons as partners in the family, in work place and in the socio-economic development process. On the other hand, the dis-

abled people themselves should feel the necessity of coming out from the social stigma.

Population explosion in Bangladesh may be singularly identified as a major socio-economic problem not only increase the number of disabled people both in absolute and relative term but also it taxes on the resource allocation for welfare services. This is how population boom is hindering the process of integration.

Special attention of population control, mother and child health care, neo-natal and post-natal care can not only reduce the incidence of the disability but also leave a positive indicator on the socio-economic integration of the disabled people in the long run.

The demand of the time is, therefore, to activate the political forces, the elite and pressure groups in our country leading to a political consensus for improve the quality of life of the disabled population. This would be the pre-condition for socio-economic integration of the disabled people. On the other hand, public awareness has to be created to overcome the superstitions and social stigma about the disabled people.

Creating such a positive attitude would be a stepping stone towards the integration of the disabled people in the socio-economic development.

The writer is director, Impact Foundation, Bangladesh.

THE catastrophe in Rwanda has diverted attention from the threat of famine in other parts of East Africa. And that's good, say food-aid critics in the United States.

As human-made disasters multiply in sub-Saharan Africa, more US politicians and commentators are advocating that African governments must be made to fend for themselves.

Although some individuals have responded generously to appeals for donations to Rwandan refugees, the US public is not in a charitable mood in regard to Africa's overall plight.

A number of US-based non-governmental organisations involved in African relief efforts report a reduction in contributions in recent years. Officials

Televised Starvation Reinforces Food Aid Critics

Kevin J. Kelley writes from Washington

say that the drop results from "donor fatigue" as increasing numbers of Americans become inured to the regularly televised spectacle of starving African children.

No-one is suggesting that masses of Rwandans should be allowed to die. But there appears to be growing acceptance of the contention that Western food aid should be provided only in the most dire situations — such as Rwanda's.

A few critics of traditional development programmes have been putting forward that

view for some time. And while it remains a minority opinion rejected by top policymakers, opponents of famine relief are winning more media attention. In publications such as the New York Times they argue that Western food donations to the Third World hurt local farmers by driving down crop prices. This acts as a disincentive for farmers, which translates into reduced output. The spiral, critics argue, virtually ensures that food emergencies will recur whenever a vulnerable area is stricken by drought.

In the case of a comparatively better-off country such as Kenya, "food aid should not be provided," says US author and agriculture specialist James Bovard. "Kenya should be cut off completely," agrees Michael Maren, a New York-based writer and former relief worker in East Africa.

Despite the current drought in East Africa, most countries there have the potential to feed themselves, Maren maintains. In some instances, he says, available crops are being exported "for the personal profit" of politically influential individuals. Large parcels of arable land are meanwhile being given over to cultivation of export commodities such as coffee or tea because these crops also enrich an elite, Maren adds.

Corruption plays a major part in exacerbating food shortages, the critics charge; agricultural mismanagement in many African countries is partly attributable to self-aggrandisement by government officials. A certain proportion of emergency food shipments from the West will always be diverted into the hands of the rich and powerful, add Maren and Bovard.

"I don't think you should let people starve to death just to save a few jobs," Maren says. "That's especially true for calamities like Rwanda's. The dilemma, though, is that the politicians will keep behaving the same way if you continue to bail them out."

Leading US politicians do not share Maren's analysis.

Hunger and glut



Even if some privately acknowledge the logic of his argument, they do not publicly diverge from the position that requests for food aid must be met in timely and generous fashion.

Ostensibly well-intentioned responses are especially characteristic of Democratic administrations. President Bill Clinton, for example, has pledged on several recent occasions to devote more attention and resources to development initiatives in sub-Saharan Africa.

His expressions of concern are prompted partly by political pressure exerted by African-American politicians and activists, whose influence is much greater with Democratic than with Republican administrations.

J. Brian Atwood, head of the US Agency for International Development (USAID), has said repeatedly that Washington must do more both to eliminate the causes of famine and to prevent hunger-related deaths whenever emergencies do develop. USAID's stance is determined as much by self-interest as economic motives as by altruism, according to Bovard. His argument is that agency bureaucrats have a personal stake in pressing for larger budget expenditures for food relief.

Charitable agencies such as World Vision and governmental organisations like USAID have also introduced reforms in their programmes. Natsios says, so that relief shipments no longer have the effect of discouraging local grain production. Donors can thus be assured, he says, that their contributions will be put to effective long-term use.

The writer is a freelance American writer and a former Editor of the International Affairs Journal Toward Freedom.