Dimensions of Human Development in Bangladesh

by M K Mujeri

IN Bangladesh, policies designed to expand the availability of basic social services and improve the quality of life are important cornerstones of the poverty reduction strategy. One can mention atleast two immediate concerns for this. First, investments in human resources of the poor have substantial pay offs. Second, with appropriate targeting, the poor can be made to benefit directly from investments in basic services (eg primary schools, primary health care services etc).

The above observations may be rationalized by observing the differences in the employment pattern and other characteristics of the poor that are instrumental in understanding the poverty and human development linkages. The occupational profile of the poor, though varies with location, is dominated by industrial workers, day labourers, transport workers and those engaged in petty trade, services, and other activities in the informal sector. The specific occupational pattern, that a poor can avail of, is largely determined by his skill levels and education. It has been pointed out that intrafirm mobility of the poor is often characterized by skill upgrading from helper to semi-skilled labour and then to skilled labour which sometimes lead to setting up of his own enterprise. As such, for the poor in both formal and informal sectors, education and skill development occupy a critical position in occupational and vertical mobility. It has been observed that male-female wage differentials tend to decrease with education and skill levels indicating a direct relationship between educational status and skill levels of the poor on the one hand and increase in earnings on the other, particularly for vulnerable groups like women. The above suggests that human development in Bangladesh needs to be characterized as an integrated process with a clear focus and direction in three major areas: employment and manpower development, science and technology, and quality of life.

Employment and Manpower Development

Employment situation in the agrarian sector and the market for unskilled workers are particularly serious in Bangladesh. There is also an additional problem in matching labour demand and supply in particular skills. These are specific problems in addition to the overall employment situation which is grossly inadequate to absorb the existing and potential labour supply. While the pursuit of labour-absorbing policies and acceleration of growth is the long-run solution, these have to be supplemented by policies with emphasis on flexibility and the creation of a broad based productive capacity rather than promoting narrowly skilled manpower. This is necessary for the growth of new entrepreneurial skills to take advantage of emerging economic opportunities in a global context.

Finding the way of life. — *Photo A K M Mohsin*

Science and Technology

The implications of recent scientific and technological progress particularly in the fields of information, biotechnology, electronics, material sciences, energy technologies etc indicate the need to adapt human resources to these realities to take advantage of the development potential of science and technology. In this respect, the two-way causality between science and technology capabilities and human resource profile of Bangladesh is important: generation of manpower for promotion of science and technology to serve the country's development needs and utilization of science and technology to upgrade available human resources.

Quality of Life

The success in realizing equitable and accelerated growth in Bangladesh is critically dependent upon the use of the potentials of the underutilized human resources. A necessary condition to raise their productive capacities is to improve their capabilities through their level of participation in the society. This requires coordinated efforts in a number of key sectors e.g. education, health, nutrition, and the environment.

For effective coordination and integration of various elements of human development efforts, polices must encompass both the supply and the demand sides. The supply-side requires the generation of the means for human development while the demand side is concerned with the utilization of these means. In Bangladesh, existing policies largely concentrate on supply-side issues. This has contributed to ineffectiveness of the polices suggesting the need for more demand-oriented strategies. The effective polices must take into account the institutional and structural constraints to the participation of the poor in human development efforts.

The institutional context itself must become an explicit focus of human development policy. Similarly, in view of the widespread existence of poverty in the country, it is imperative to identify the impact of economic reform and structural adjustment (SA) policies on different household groups, particularly the poor. The critical policy issue for Bangladesh is to protect and assist the poor without distorting the economy. The correction of distortions are important since, if they persist, not only will economic recovery and growth be undermined but also the attainment of social goals. In the context of human development, another aspect of SA polices also needs to be emphasized which may be termed as 'directive' structural adjustments. The emphasis in this case is on anticipation of future trends and restructure the economy to respond flexibly and rapidly to such changes. For example, within the external context, this involves anticipation of the pattern and pace of dynamic external competitiveness of Bangladesh, identify their sectoral implications and promote activities likely to become important for retaining export competitiveness. For human development, this would imply the promotion of appropriate adjustment process to generate technological innovations and build up endowments of human skills through manpower,planning, education and training. (To be concluded next week)

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Asian Renaissance : Re-establishing the Cradle of Civilisation

by S Y Bakht

ASIA, already a region of tremendous dynamism, should work for the return of history and re-establish itself as the 'cradle of civilization', observed a top Malaysian scholar recently.

Fuelled by the economic growth of Asia, he said, Eastern culture is challenging the dominance of Western culture for the first time in modern history.

Dr Noordin Sopiee, Director General of Malaysia's Institute of Strategic and International Studies and the country's eminent person to The Asia Pacific Economic Caucus (APEC), advocated for a rise of 'Asian Renaissance' based on a "non-confrontational, non-zenophobic approach and driven by the finest values and by the people's aspirations."

Dr Sopiee was speaking as the keynote speaker at the opening dinner of the Tenth Young Professionals Conference organised by the Asia Foundation's Centre for Asian Pacific Affairs in Penang, Malaysia between August 21 and 26 last.

Nearly 34 participants representing some 23 countries from the Asia and Pacific region, ranging from Pakistan to the United States and Russia, attended the conference.

Speaking on the theme "The Rise of Asia: Where we are coming from, where we must go," Dr Sopiee, while noting the rich cultural heritage of Asia, identified five core areas needed to bring about an Asian Renaissance: A peaceful atmosphere in the region; Economic dynamism; Psychological transformation — "to change many of our ideology"; Finding ways for a productive and sustainable democracy; and Instituting comprehensive human rights in the region.

Peace, economic dynamism, psychological transformation and democracy are already apparent in some parts of Asia, particularly East Asia, he said. "There is a tremendous outbreak of peace and it is sustainable. The major task now is that we have to spread it to other parts of Asia — Sri Lanka, India and Pakistan."

He pointed out to the tremendous growth of the East Asian economies while noting that a World Bank report in 1954 doubted if Japan could make it and singled out the Republic of Korea as a country with 'absolutely' no future.

Dr Sopiee predicted that India, China and Vietnam would succeed in the next phase of Asia's growth dynamism. "And keep your eyes on Bangladesh, it is going to get up and run."

A London School of Economics trained economist, he, however, opined against wide-scale economic liberalization. "The big-bang approach of market-system liberalization is not the right approach. None of the East Asian countries did it that way."

Economic growth has also led to a psychological transformation in the region, which earlier had no self-respect and considered their own culture as second-rate, he said. "Asia has begun to rediscover Asia. There is a renewed confidence in what we are and what we can achieve."

Referring to the need for establishing a productive and sustainable system of democracy, Dr Sopiee called for 'inventing' different types of democracies by prioritizing the needs of individual countries. "Democracy is a terrible system: it is cumbersome and frustrating. But Churchill was right in pointing out that it is the best system man has developed."

On the human rights front, he said, it is important to get the politics of human rights out of the way to deal with the actual situation.

Saying that there is a consensus on the 28 fundamental dimensions of human rights, including those in the UN Charter on Human Rights, he, however, observed that the exact priorities should depend on different societies. "We in Asia should decide to be better than we have been."

Dr Sopiee also made a distinction between democracy and human rights. 'Many democracies have not been able to provide jobs, which is a basic human right."

Economic protectionism was the biggest security threat to Asia, he said, and he is not worried about any military threat to the security either from India or China and despite problems in the Korean peninsula and over the Spartly Islands in the South China Sea.

Dr Sopiee also envisioned a big role for the United States in the Asian Renaissance in political, economic, social and cultural fields.

Although the Asian societies still can learn a lot from the West, he pointed out, the Western culture, for the first time, is facing a challenge from Eastern culture. "What worries me is that there is going to be a conflict of civilizations."

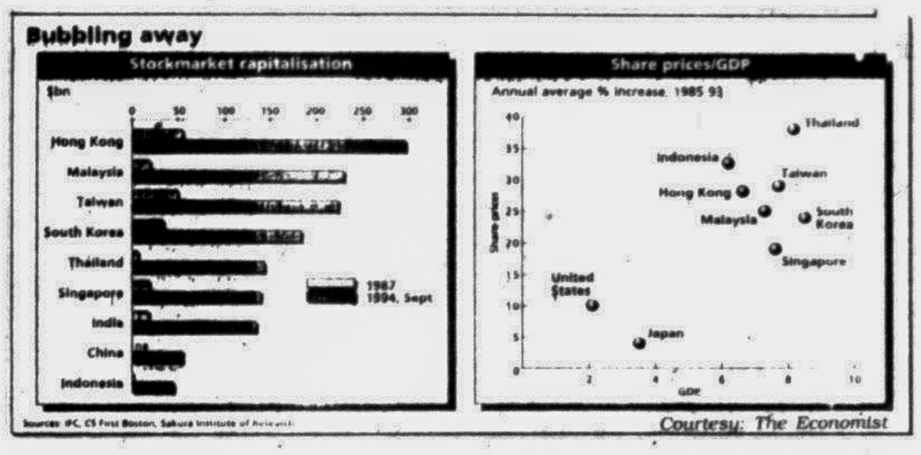
Throughout the six-day Tenth Young Professionals Conference the participants also expressed their optimism about the Rise of Asia, but also voiced their concern over possible areas of conflict.

At the conference entitled "The rise of Asia: managing economic growth and international responsibility," the participants, all bright minds from the region, presented papers on 13 designated issues divided under four broad categories: A new era of governance: challenges and change; Foreign policy: domestic interest vsponsibility; Managing economic growth; and Regional powers: their roles and relations.

The assigned presentation of this correspondent was on the "Role of India as a regional power" on the final day of the conference. The presentation looked into the present military strength of India and its role in the region. It also probed into the existing relationship between India and other neighbouring countries, particularly Bangladesh, while pointing out the fact that India had bilateral problems with virtually every country in the region.

However, the presentation pointed out to the huge economic potentials of this region. With increased cooperation, specially on India's part, the South Asian sub-region consisting of the Northeastern Indian states, Nepal, Bhutan and Bangladesh could make enormous economic gains and prosper together. This correspondent argued that the region has the potential to become a tremendous economic growth region rivaling the economic growth triangles of Southeast Asia.

On the final day of the conference there was also a presentation by the US Ambassador to Malaysia on "The role of The United States in the Asia Pacific region," in which he stated that the US, as a pacific nation, has vital interest in the region on security, trade, economics and other global issues.



Courtesy: *The Economist*

Food and Essential Components of Food Safety Programme

by Dr Abdur Rahim

BANGLADESH has for long been an extremely food-deficit country. People here have practised to eat and drink a large number of items that contain many toxic substances that are harmful to health. These injurious materials are not simply toxins, goiterogenic principles or flatulence factors that are inherent in foods or the microbial toxins that find easy access to foods and reduce or destroy their values. They are also chemical fertilizers and pesticides whose untimely or excess application during pre-and post-harvest period cause immediate harm to un-related biological species including fish, prawn, frogs, fauna and the livestock. Sometimes these substances remain unmetabolized at dose levels that are harmful and cause a host of diseases and metabolic disorders in man. In addition to these toxic substances a large number of food contaminants, along with many non-permissible food flavours and colouring matters, have started to find their entry into the food.

Liquid oils contain unsaturated fatty acids. Generally they have CIS-configuration and low melting point. They are easily metabolised in the body. In contrast, solid fats having trans-configuration and high melting point mostly contain saturated fatty acids and are difficult to be metabolized. Extremely high melting point solid fats form lumps in the blood vessel if, somehow or other, they could be administered into the blood stream.

Beef oil, beef tallow or cooking fat have high melting points. A portion of them accumulate in the body throughout life and store in them many fat soluble poisons. Man finds it difficult to metabolize these materials. Occasionally free radicals are generated from these substances and these radicals cause irreparable damages to liver, heart, brain and almost all other body organs. Other saturated fats include Banaspati, semi-solid palm oil and artificially-made butter oil that have high melting points. Allowable melting point limit for most of these products is 37 2 C. The materials available in Bangladesh market hage melting point as high as 48 C. They have good grains and are easy to use in making breads, biscuits, pastries, cakes, sweetmeats, toffees, lozenges, chocolate products and the like.

Fat treated foods are attractive. Their look deceive the eyes and the taste please the tongue, but they contain or help produce cholesterol and free radicals. These are principally responsible for causing cancer and heart and liver ailments.

Bangladesh Agricultural Research Council (BARC) has been giving operational funding supports to the various agriculture-based research institutes to develop and introduce technologies that help increase food production and upgrade nutritional standards of the people of Bangladesh. A strategy plan, based on a per caput per day calorie intake of 2600 from 1172g food, is now being finalized (Table 1).

With the execution of BARC's proposed strategy plan poverty alleviation at grassroot level would substantially be met through peoples participation in increased agricultural production and development of agro-based industry that would increase export, reduce import and afford import substitution and, in addition, augment food consumption and improve nutritional status of the people. Based on BARC's previous strategy plan the work has already begun and impact in regard to improving the food security has started to be felt.

As the country is marching towards food self-sufficiency, it is necessary that the people should now start to know the various components of food safety. In this context a point must, of necessary, be emphasised that certain high yielding varieties of crops such as rice undergo digestion and absorption at a very fast or very slow rate. The first category of food may lead to loading of blood with an amount of sugar at much excess a level than what the insulin produced in the body can accommodate. This results in induced diabetes. The second category of foods, due to their prolonged presence in the intestine awaiting breakdown by gut microflora, helps multiply a host of microorganisms that produce gas, the upward thrust of which has got a deleterious effect on patients having heart diseases.

Food safety has, therefore, to be done by making standards specifications. These are the basic and essential components of any Food Safety Programme. Their mandate extends across the horizon to end users who ordinarily care for a guaranteed label declaration that includes principal characteristics of the product. The parametres could include a large number of characteristics. Some of them, which are essential in terms of scope and dimension for any food safety programme, are moisture, colour, taste, flavour, acid value, periodxide value, iodine value, saponification value, sand, dirt, acid insoluble ash, food toxins, microbial toxins, and heavy metals.

In a buyers' market the label declaration has to be 100 per cent correct. In a sellers' market this, however, is not always true. A consumer is often cheated. He, therefore, needs protection. A responsive Government undertakers to give the intended protection through an institutional arrangement, the quality testing facilities of which are available at or near his door-step, if necessary, through collaborative participation of a number of government and non-governmental bodies, sample collectors' house, inspectorates and laboratories. This is the second line activity of the food safety programme, as no rule or standard to afford safety of food is enforceable ordinarily without recognised external supervision.

In regard to products in whose case an elaborative procedure requiring large-scale sampling and testing is needed for quality certification, process simplification and mass production techniques are applied. Allotment of batch or code number to a material produced at a particular moment in time is important here. A system of quality certification marking by the manufacture, under license from the authority, undertaking to produce his goods conforming to set standards specifications is the key factor in this case. This provides for confidence building in a buyers' market, as the consumers easily get satisfied with the label declaration containing the embossed standard mark. This is a self-imposed mechanism for the control of quality and is worldwide accepted.

National and regional standards institutions which deal with the standardisation work of the materials produced in their particular country or region tend to safeguard their interest most. If they happen to be the producers of primary goods they do not generally like to accept rigorous quality control provisions for their products from the international standardisation organisations which look after the interest of multi-national buyers.

Formulation of food rules or standards specifications for items of food necessitates voluntary participation of producers, consumers, technologists, testing authorities, trade, commerce and industry. Enforcement procedure is, however, not perfect enough. All sellers do not fully know what they sell and most of the consumers have essentially no idea as to what is good or what is bad. The dominant factor in the market is the price. Bad traders use this as a pretext to sell adulterated goods giving them arbitrary identification numbers such as No. 1, No. 2 and No. 3. Glaring examples of this are No. 1 soybean oil and No. 1 mustard oil (which probably is methyl isothiocyanate poison added oil). There are other products such as ice-cream and condensed milk which do not at all contain any milk fat.

High quality has naturally a high price. There should be an acceptable mechanism to attain this. Probably this is the most essential part of all the essential components of a food safety programme. It is heartening to know that the Government proposes to come up with legislation to safeguard consumer interest as regards, among others, to the quality and the price.

The ultimate job of a food safety programme is technical, and a technically qualified and experienced pilot may alone understand what the society requires of him and, under a situation of resources constraint, how much collaborative involvement of all concerned he is able to organise to do the job best. A team of supportive elders or scientists emeritus may often yield better results.

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Table 1 : Projected Demand of Food Items up to 2030.

Year			1990	2000	2010	2020	2030
Projected Population (million)			108.3	131.1	153.3	172.1	189.9
Food items	RDA cap/ day in g	Calorie					
1. Plant Origin					Food Demand in Million ton		
Cereals	467	1616	18.46	22.35	26.13	29.34	32.38
Roots/Tubers	135	132	5.34	6.44	756	8.48	9.36
Sugar/Gut	35	135	1.38	1.68	1.96	2.20	2.43
Pulses/Legumes	75	265	2.97	3.59	4.20	4.71	5.20
Vegetables	215	82	8.50	10.29	12.03	13.51	14.90
Fruits	65	31	2.57	3.11	3.64	4.08	4.51
Vegetable oils	17	150	0.67	0.81	0.95	1.08	1.18
2. Animal Origin							
Milk	99		3.92	4.74	5.54	6.22	6.86
Meat	24	189	0.95	1.15	1.34	1.51	1.66
Fish/Egg	40		1.58	1.91	2.24	2.51	2.77

Bombing the Bomb

The name of the US 'weapons game' these days is counterproliferation, but as peace and conflict specialist ***Mark Sommer*** *writes in this exclusive Inter Press Service column, other nations will cease trying to gain access to weapons of mass destruction only if the great powers reduce their arms stockpile.*

Inter Press Service

WHEN North Korea refused to let UN personnel inspect its clandestine nuclear installations, it threw into crisis the system of non-military constraints on the development of nuclear weapons that for half a century has enforced the nuclear powers' monopoly on mass destruction.

The US government has decided that these constraints — secrecy, export controls, and the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty — may no longer be adequate to meet what it views as unprecedented threats to American security.

In response, it has promulgated a new doctrine of "counterproliferation".

Last December, then-Secretary of Defense Les Aspin announced a 'Defense Counterproliferation Initiative' to add "protection" to the "preventive" political measures of the existing nonproliferation regime. Aspin proposed "a drive to develop new military capabilities" to shield against and, if necessary, to attack perceived threats from unnamed nations and groups in the Third World.

Such military capabilities would include a wide range of weapons systems, from theater missile defenses to precision-guided non-nuclear munitions capable of destroying hardened underground installations.

Officials at the State Department are reportedly cool to the idea, concerned that unilateral military strategies could undermine the multilateral political regime so laboriously constructed over the past few decades. And NATO allies were wary when asked to endorse the concept at their January summit.

In response to this growing concern, Ashton Carter, Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Policy and the Clinton Administration's leading advocate of counterproliferation, downplays the military option, arguing that it is just one dimension of the issue and is merely intended to reinforce traditional multilateral diplomacy.

But many kinds of clandestine arms productions are impossible to target and the economic and political costs of pursuing an aggressive military option could easily outweigh the dangers posed by a nation possessing one or two rudimentary nuclear devices.

Financial costs alone could easily run into tens of billions of dollars. This is a point not lost on the still-powerful Star Wars lobby within the Pentagon, the arms industry, and Congress, where counterproliferation technologies have been embraced as the best hope for securing new funding since the Strategic Defense Initiative Organization was disbanded last year.

Deploying a sophisticated theater missile defense system in Japan to defend against a putative threat from even a primitive North Korean bomb could cost at least US$8 billion. Meanwhile, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), the world community's principal organisation for monitoring clandestine nuclear programmes thoroughout the world, continues to be suffering from a chronic lack of funds. It has a budget of only US$60 million a year, and have even been forced to cancel inspections.

Many specialists in nonproliferation both in the United States and the rest of the world criticise the demilitary counter-proliferation attack.

Some predict that the first effect of promoting a new doctrine of unilateral military offensive action against potential proliferators might be to scuttle next year's Nonproliferation Treaty Review Conference and thus undermine the entire nonproliferation regime.

Others say counterproliferation would needlessly antagonise both the smaller nuclear powers and many non-nuclear nations and produce a political and perhaps military backlash. Still others believe that such criticisms are overblown, maintaining that the principal thrust of US counterproliferation efforts is not to attack would-be proliferators but simply to prepare US forces to fight effectively in environments where proliferation has already occurred.

However these questions are answered, once assertive military options are introduced into the mix of politics and diplomacy that has effectively restrained proliferation up to now, they could all too easily take on a momentum of their own, generating yet another self-perpetuating cycle of threat and counter-threat.

With the inexorable spread of technological capabilities to new nations and the rising risk that essential expertise and materials will leak to rogue states and terrorist groups out the desperate chaos resulting from the breakup of the Soviet Union, the possibility of further proliferation is all to real.

Only when the great powers themselves decisively reduce their still-vast stockpiles of nuclear arms and other weapons of mass destruction will other nations cease trying to gain access to these totems of ultimate power.