

Subha Nababarsha

The dawning of Pahela Baishakh heralds, following the seasonal course, the prevailing of nature's regenerative force over its destructive power.

As a nation too we also made our first few uncertain steps in the foot-prints of the Bisva Kabi, which over the years turned into a cultural wave to put our national politics in its right perspective.

Amidst a growing list of failures topped by our politics, a most notable progress has been made in the area of women's participation in the task of nation-building.

Does this mean that we must feel resigned to despondency? In fact, this is all the more reason why we must build on the few attainments already recorded by us.

Private Company in Power Sector

If everything goes according to plan, the country will be producing soon, in the private sector, a substantial portion of the electricity it needs.

Although the government has done its part of the initial job by signing the memorandums of understanding (MOU), this does not bring any immediate relief for us — the consumers.

Admittedly, we have taken a long time to make our first move in inviting foreign companies to the power sector. Our neighbouring countries have all been miles ahead: specially Pakistan.

The question is: why should we accept the mismanagement, theft and inefficiency in the power sector, which have stigmatised the PDB, until before the private companies go into electricity generation?

Births and Deaths

A report from Cox's Bazar points to the gross negligence of all concerned in entering cases of death and birth into record books.

Maybe, the original idea behind involving health workers was to double-check on birth. But since this has been a dual duty, neither the parents nor the health workers do their job and hence births go mostly unreported.

The implications of this can hardly be overemphasised. What happens as a consequence is that people coming up with fictitious dates of birth render the population records suspect.

There is therefore an urgent need for strengthening the system of registration of deaths and births.

RESEARCH reports on military matters seldom find or say what actually happens. 'Brasstacks and Beyond', a research report on the exercises the Indian armed forces conducted in December 1986 and January 1987, is no better.

Yet the story they have been able to reconstruct gives an uninterrupted account. And since they have been able to talk in India to the people who planned and executed the exercises and in Pakistan who took counter measures, the reports has a ring of authenticity.

The report brings out how soon after his appointment as chief of army staff, General K Sundarji conceived the exercises code-named brasstacks. The first three phases were on paper, new formations and the mechanisation process evolved.

It was the fourth phase of the exercise which caused "deep apprehensions." The sheer scale, said to be have involved two lakh troops, and the location, 60 to 80 kilometres from the border, alarmed Pakistan.

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A Military Exercise that Misfired

The Pakistanis perceived that India might attack under the umbrella of an exercise. The vulnerable point was considered Sind. India's belief was that Pakistan's stationing of troops in the Ravi-Chenab corridor was a threat to its troubled areas of Punjab and Kashmir.

troops carried live ammunition, not done ordinarily in military exercises.

Islamabad's suspicions heightened when the information given by New Delhi — as promised by Rajiv Gandhi to then Pakistan prime minister Mohammed Khan Junejo at the Bangalore SAARC summit — was found sketchy and "inaccurate."

Washington, too, did not treat the exercise as anything other than routine until December. But, subsequently, there was a panic lest India should advance across the international border.

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bases at full working peak. That was not considered adequate.

It was in January 1987 that Pakistani forces crossed the Lothran border over the Sutlej near Bhawalpur, heading for their peacetime location in Multan. But they did not stop at Multan, however, and continued marching until they occupied positions opposite to Bhatinda and Ferozepur.

This positioning worried

state for foreign affairs Zia Noorani and told in no uncertain terms that Pakistan blamed India for escalating tension.

According to the report, Pakistan's military officials tend to justify their defensive move as the direct product of threat generated by the massive movements associated with brasstacks and "the non-cooperative attitude" of Indian military officials.

BETWEEN THE LINES

Kuidip Nayar writes from New Delhi

New Delhi. The report quotes a senior Indian official as saying that Pakistan could now strike at two points simultaneously — not only in Kashmir area directly but also cutting off Amritsar and Ferozepur.

On January 23 itself, Natwar Singh, then minister of state for external affairs, summoned Humayun Khan, then Pakistan ambassador in New Delhi, to convey a deadline for pulling back Pakistani troops.

The figures show poverty-allocation/GDP ratio of around 6 per cent which is more than

of Pakistani moves and accompanying justification of troop movements towards Kashmir and Punjab. Being suspicious of each other, both saw the other's moves as offensively oriented.

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Humayun Khan quickly sent the message. In Islamabad, Indian ambassador S K Singh was summoned to the foreign office by Pakistani minister of

brasstacks made it easier for Pakistan to obtain advanced weapons from America. It became more difficult for India to get technology items cleared from Washington.

The report's weakest side is the political input. The research scholars have not been able to find out what went behind the scenes at the top level at least in New Delhi; because all moves, whether military or political, stopped in Pakistan at Zia. But much could have been known in India.

For example, in India there are still leading politicians who tell you how Sundarji exceeded his brief and nearly went into the Pakistan territory. Rajiv Gandhi reportedly came to know about it at the nick of the time and ordered him to stop. The allegation that Sundarji and Arun Singh, then minister of state for defence, were wanting to stage a coup has not yet been scotched fully.

The Intelligence Bureau (IB) is said to have warned Rajiv Gandhi about it. Whether he believed the story or not is not known. But the fact remains that he ousted Arun Singh from the government and curbed Sundarji during the small period he was left with of his tenure.

The report probably purposely avoided treading the risky path because it would have meant delving deep into the secrets of the establishment on both sides and it might have annoyed some at the top. My experience is that such reports go up to a point and not beyond, although this report says that it has gone beyond. After all, the research scholars are too close to the establishment.

Zia-ul-Haq visited India ostensibly to watch the cricket match at Jaipur and met Rajiv Gandhi to accelerate the process of de-escalation. It was all over by then. However,

Poverty Alleviation: Looking into the Budget Expenditures

by Babul Alam

GOVERNMENTS of the poor countries, whether democratic or autocratic, are presently predominated by the views of the egalitarian economists that development no longer means the growth of their economies, but simply the elimination of poverty.

The basic theme of poverty alleviation was introduced in the First Five-Year Plan (1973/74-1977/78) of Bangladesh in designing and formulating such projects and programmes as would alleviate poverty.

Planners argued that higher growth, though essential for poverty alleviation, did not always benefit the poor who live under the poverty line. It is because the poverty stricken people do not possess the human and non-human assets viz. education, skill, land, capital, etc and for such constraints higher growth cannot bring higher return for them; and higher growth may not create sufficient employment opportunities and provide adequate real wages for the unskilled people.

So they suggested two complementary approaches. Firstly, macro-economic and sectoral policies should be directed at improving efficiency and increasing productivity and growth in those sectors where majority of the poor live. Secondly, direct programmes should be taken to bring out the poor from below the poverty line.

The second approach generated the programmes what are now generally known as poverty alleviation programmes. These programmes have two broad dimensions. The first includes the programmes to enhance the earning capacity of the poor. The second includes the pro-

grammes to directly or indirectly transfer income to the poor.

The Bangladesh government expenditures through the budgets on the programmes to enhance the earning capacity of the poor are allocated in two areas. Firstly, development of human resources. This provides educational and health facilities. Secondly, development of training and credit programmes through Bangladesh Rural Development Board (BRDB) and Bangladesh Small and Cottage Industries Corporation (BSCIC). This expenditure does not lessen directly the current status of poverty but make the poor capable of earning in the future by

supplying them financial resources through credit and by developing their human resources through providing educational and health care (including family planning) facilities.

Government expenditures on the programmes which directly or indirectly transfer income to the poor are allocated in three areas. Firstly, in the policies which affect the relative prices. Examples are, price subsidies for foodgrains distributed through Public Foodgrain Distribution System (PFDS), support or procurement prices for crops grown by the poor, and subsidies for agricultural inputs. Secondly, in the programmes which provide temporary employment for the poor. Examples are, Food for Work (FFW), canal digging, and rural works programmes. Thirdly, programmes which provide foodgrains to the women and children who are severely malnourished. Example is, Vulnerable Group Development (VGD); it's a monthly programme for a period of two years which provides foodgrains to the destitute mothers having two children and whose husbands are disabled.

In addition to these two categories of poverty alleviation-oriented expenditures, the government operates relief programmes during the periods of natural calamities. Let us now look into the extent and trend of the government expenditures directed at poverty oriented programmes since 1972-73. The governments allocated resources, mainly through two types of budgets viz. revenue budget and development budget. Development budget here indicates only the Annual Development Programmes (ADPs), FFW and VGD programmes are, however, operated outside these budgets and documented in the food budget.

So, we have four sets of

the non-tax GDP ratio of the economy. In other words, it means that, of the total revenue earnings (tax and non-tax) of the government, more than one of its elements earnings go into the allocation of poverty oriented expenditures.

In the revenue budget, poverty oriented programmes during the last 23 years, on an average, shared 34 per cent of the total budget allocation. The highest share was in 1972-73 (64 per cent) and the lowest in 1975-76 (21 per cent).

It appears from the data that during the period 1972-73 through 1994-95, on average, an amount of Tk 2896 crore per year was allocated on the poverty alleviation programmes. The highest allocation was in 1994-95 (Tk 5042 crore) and lowest in 1974-75 (Tk 988 crore). During the 70s, the average allocation was Tk 1660 crore, in the 80s it

Under the development budget, over the span of last 23 years, on average, 40 per cent resources was allocated for the poverty oriented programmes. The decade of 70s enjoyed 42 per cent allocation, the 80s enjoyed 38 per cent and first half of the 90s enjoyed 42 per cent. Let us

It appears from the statistics that during the period of Bangladesh the average rate of allocation was Tk 1449 crore, indicating a share of 54 per cent in the total allocation, 6 per cent ratio to GDP and having a negative growth in the allocation. The share is highest among all the governments, the ratio to GDP is at par with General Zia's and General Ershad's periods. But the average rate of allocation is the lowest and there was no growth in the programmes. Here, one point should be made fully clear that the period of Bangladesh does merit for the research, because not only the time span was too short for any kind of statistical analysis but the definitions of the items were different and the programme like VGD did not develop at all and FFW programme was taken only for the last year with a little coverage, and also the period should simply be considered as rehabilitation period.

It is presented here only for the sake of statistics. But still then, the commitment for the poverty oriented programmes was there. Data says like that.

During the period of General Zia, the average rate of allocation increased to Tk 2014

crore, showing a share of 47 per cent (lower than Bangladesh's period but higher than the succeeding governments), ratio to GDP was 6 per cent (same as Bangladesh's and General Ershad's period but lower than Begum Zia's period), and the growth reached its peak at 12 per cent (highest among the governments and the period since independence).

Up to 1994-95, under the period of Begum Khaleda Zia, the average rate of allocation accelerated to a massive size of Tk 4,476 crore having the highest ratio to GDP at 8 per cent; the share also increased from the period than in General Ershad's to 43 per cent (though less than Bangladesh's and General Zia's periods) and the growth also doubled to 8 per cent (though less than that in General Zia's period).

All the figures used here are at constant market prices of 1984-85. It is only because figures at current prices (i.e., nominal prices) of different years are not comparable and cannot be aggregated according to the law of economic theory; only real figures (i.e., figures at constant prices of a certain year) are comparable and can be aggregated.

To observe the extent and trend of the poverty programmes, the author had the intention to deal only with the budgeted data, neither the revised nor the actual ones. It was in line to see the commitment of the allocations. However, for some years, budget documents were not available to the writer and hence in those cases actual figures were used.

The writer is a Research Officer of the Planning Commission

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.

Where the lids go?

Sir, Volumes have already been written on the open manhole menace. But who cares? WASA feels sick and tired in replacing the stolen manholes. But is it so?

Why can't the law enforcing authorities pull up the night guards? Or is it within the purview of DMP/DMC? Why the miscreants are not brought to book? Why this hide and seek game? Why stolen manhole lids are so much in demand allegedly? Is it because it has got underground market where it gets a very good price?

How long shall we run the risk of stumbling into the open manhole and succumb? This question must be answered by

the authorities concerned. And, of course the government owes an explanation to us for this flagrant lapse.

Fl Li (Retd) Mohiuddin Dhaka-1206

Slum in BAI

Sir, 'Slum problem' is one of the major problems inside the campus of Bangladesh Agricultural Institute (BAI), Sher-e-Bangla Nagar, Dhaka. Many unauthorised people have been living inside the BAI campus by creating slum areas. Due to these slums, the overall social and security situation inside the campus is deteriorating day by day. The BAI

administration, teachers, staff and students through different committees have been trying to remove the slums but due to some legal and technical problems, the move has yet to be successful.

The legal process for evicting the unauthorised people is very much complicated which needs approval from a number of authorities. The technical problems on the way to containing the slum problem include — absence of well-protected gates on the college's entry points, non-completion of the boundary walls, lack of enough security staff, etc.

It is, however, heartening that the Ministry of Agriculture is processing a pragmatic action plan towards resolving the slum problem once for all.

Now what is invariably needed is the cooperation from all the quarters including the VIPs.

M Zahidul Haque General Secretary BAI Teachers' Association, Dhaka

Paper crisis

Sir, A crisis of paper continues to persist in the country for the past one year while the fertiliser crisis is at its peak but there seems no hope to overcome the crisis (of paper) in the near future.

Magura Paper Mills, said to be a joint venture project of the Govts of China and Bangladesh, is yet to be on stream though shares and debentures were issued during the time of caretaker government in January '91. It is abnormal in the context of issue of initial public offering of shares that a joint venture could not be in production though enough public money was raised more than four years back.

Only recently Al-Baraka Bank, principal office, has reportedly sued BCIC, eight directors and two share holders of M/s Eastern Pulp and Paper Products for a sum of Tk 23.61 crore said to have been borrowed from the bank. If so, doesn't it seem evident in the above background that some

talented countrymen continue to manage siphoning off share holders' investment along with bank loan while students are in great difficulty due to exorbitant price of paper?

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Status of working women

Sir, It seems that in Bangladesh today we hear a new proclamation from the religious activists every day. The other day they said women are meant to stay at home and work under their husbands' feet. Recently they said that all women working for poverty alleviation under NGOs are up for grabs, basically there to be violated by any man (I fear for those NGO women working in the fields). No one said a word. How come our female headed government allows all this abuse against working women. In fact any women, continue and gain ground? Have we lost the rule of law in this country? One wonders if Jatiabajs can say what they want, why

couldn't Taslima Nasreen? Wouldn't it be wonderful if we could banish the Jatiabajs to the Scandinavian countries as well?

Outrageful Dhaka

Democracy grows on responsibility

Sir, Congratulations to the ex-Industries Minister Mr A M Zahiruddin Khan who had resigned on April 04, 1995, claiming to take the 'moral responsibility' for the fertiliser crisis, because democracy grows on responsibility. The ex-Minister Mr Khan had opened the gateway to sow the first seed of democracy by claiming to take the moral responsibility for the fertiliser crisis in the country. We the readers of the newspapers, would believe that his example shall be followed in the future and the country shall see a better tomorrow without much problems stage by stage.

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