

Plans for Twenty Towns

Sometimes extremely important news comes out in a very innocuous manner. One such news is the government plan to develop 20 mid-level towns in Bangladesh with the help of the Asian Development Bank.

This is one of the most sensible plans we have so far heard from the government. Not only do we support it, but would like to term it to be one with perhaps the most far reaching consequence.

But what we suggest is that the government should not move on this in a very casual manner. We feel that our most renowned town planners should be involved in this exercise.

A Landmark Decision

The government has approved a Tk 14-crore project to help prostitutes willing to abandon their calling. The project is designed to provide medical, maintenance, education and vocational training to them.

This is a landmark decision. The project cannot be expected to do anything substantial to ameliorate the pathetic condition of the girls selling their bodies.

To get the girls on the return trail in a big way the government must make a great success of this first initiative.

This is a small but very promising start to induce the girls back. The question remains can government, by itself alone, make the girls acceptable to society.

What about constricting the way down to this hole of ultimate indignity to humanity? That other side of the coin is far more important than this rehabilitation thing.

Barricade on Aricha Road

Imagine the horror of traveling in a bus or in your own car, with your wife and young children or worse with your sick mother or your pregnant wife, and you get stuck in one of Bangladesh's road barricades.

There are two points that need to be made here, one dealing with the students' behaviour, the other with that of the bus drivers. Setting up barricade on national highways is a serious offense and it should be treated as such.

On the other hand, there is merit in the observation that bus drivers run too fast on highways endangering lives, both of the passengers and of those outside.

In a land scarce, densely populated country like Bangladesh where two-thirds of per capita income is spent on food (nearly 40 per cent on rice alone) and where the demand for food grains is growing at around 3 per cent per year, the critical role of technological progress cannot, possibly, be denied.

Technological progress in rice production, uneven though across regions, brought home a kind of revolution called 'Green Revolution' in an almost primitive agrarian setting pervading Bangladesh.

To start with, the differential diffusion of technology across regions is added to infrastructure variables measured by access to electricity and transport facilities and subsistence pressure at the household and village level.

Agricultural Growth: The Veritable Varieties

It appears that the advent of MVs in Bangladesh contributes positively to employment generation, reduction of inequality and alleviation of rural poverty. But the journey is only halfway through...

fusion of technology across regions is added to infrastructure variables measured by access to electricity and transport facilities and subsistence pressure at the household and village level.

The diffusion of MVs modestly affects the rural land and labour markets also.

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Beneath the Surface

by Abdul Bayes



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Adoption of MVs tends to gear up the incidence of tenancy with large land owners renting in lands to small land owners.

arrangements shift away from share cropping in favour of fixed rent. Thus, through the operation of the tenancy market, a part of the incremental income from land is transferred from land owners to relatively labour.

The income gains from the cultivation of MVs are shared by all factor of production but they are distributed relatively more in favour of capital and land at the expense of labour.

The use of MVs also makes land market competitive and more often than not, raises the price of land in adopter villages.

SOUTH AFRICA: ONE YEAR LATER-II

No Quick Fix Solutions in Sight for Intractable Problems

by Prof David Welsh

There is clearly truth in the conventional view that alienation, unemployment, homelessness and poverty create highly conducive conditions for crime. The problem is that once the criminal way of life gets a grip on people it is very difficult to break it.



Nelson Mandela

Periodic spells in hopelessly overcrowded jails are viewed merely as incidental costs and, besides, the wealth of criminal talent inside the jail ensures that far from rehabilitating prisoners a sentence commonly sharpens up criminal techniques.

One had hoped that the new order would bring legitimacy to the police, but so far this has not happened. A demoralised, over-stressed and underpaid police force, such as we have, is unlikely to be an effective instrument for crime prevention.

hurting them most is the community turning against them' (Arqas, 24 April 1995).

For many blacks the structural inequality of society and the history of thwarted aspirations are added spurts to crime: it became legitimate kind of restitution for the wrongs of the past.

These thoughts point to a major policy issue: how to make this society a more equal one without endangering its productive capacity or without aggravating the already numerous invidious distinctions between races.

It would be difficult to refute that argument, but there is a cruel conundrum to contend with: affirmative action measures — or, more generally, 'preferential policies', do not achieve the results their protagonists claim, and they run the danger of generating more dangerous racial polarisation than they are supposed to reduce.

American political discourse blacks are liable to be lumped together, by themselves and by others, as though they were defined more readily by their membership of

one group, 'blacks', than by the qualities and opinions that make them as diverse in their individuality as whites or anyone else.

A problem with affirmative action is that its temporariness becomes permanent — because its beneficiaries develop too strong a stake in its continuation to let go of it.

It would be neither desirable nor politically possible for South Africa to dispense with policies aimed at making every institution from sports teams to universities to businesses more broadly representative of the population profile.

(The Americans) had sought to be free in order to make themselves equal; but in proportion as equality was more established by the aid of freedom, freedom itself was thereby rendered of more difficult attainment.

A related problem, of which President Mandela has warned, is the development of a 'culture of entitlement' — a generalised set of claims which entitles victims of discrimination to restitution or compensation.

Probably we are in for a quite lengthy period of ANC rule. I doubt the view that the 'broad church' (as President Mandela describes his party) will split in the near to medium future, by which I mean 10 to 15 years.

We face, in other words, single-party domination with all its attendant propensities and its similarities to sequences elsewhere in Africa — like Zimbabwe; but with the critical difference that South Africa is a much more developed, diversified, vigorous and volatile society.

If the quality of democracy is likely to be defective, it is imperative that second-best alternatives be pursued. Every effort must be made to ensure that as far as possible an open society is preserved, that is a society in which free debate about alternatives is maintained, government remains firmly under the Rule of Law, civil liberties are guaranteed and the autonomy of civil society is respected.

My ruminations have ranged over a number of intractable problems for which no quick fix solutions are in sight. When I addressed business groups in the days of apartheid I used to urge them that 'business was all about politics', implying that the very future of a reasonably prosperous private sector depended on South Africa's reaching a durable political settlement.

Our politics could go horribly sour if it is not underpinned by a vibrant economy. The requisite degree of vibrancy, it goes without saying, can be created only by a vigorous and thriving private sector.

(Concluded)

To the Editor...

'Save Dhaka'

Sir, The Daily Star is doing well with its agenda 95 including the 'Save Dhaka' campaign. The campaign, began on April 23, is still going on. There have been innumerable suggestions to save Dhaka.

1. Overcrowding: To avert further crowding of the city, there is no alternative to decentralisation of most Govt offices, business enterprises, NGO offices and many of the industrial units including the garments factories.

2. Housing: Multistoried buildings for all purposes including Govt offices, banks, other business enterprises and even residents is the answer to acute housing problem of the remaining city people after decentralisation.

3. Water Misuse: The roadside hydrants should have regulatory caps (Taps) to control misuse of water which is evidently in short supply.

4. Traffic and Transport: To solve the transport problem, more big buses including the double-deckers are to be imported or to be locally made.

5. Barrenness: Lack of adequate green cover cause the city to look barren. The increased volume of CO2 expired by crowded humans, and emitted by motor vehicles and industries contribute largely to the increased city temperature.

6. Pollution: To combat air pollution, the black smoke emitter traffic should be treated seriously. For better deal with wastes the city dustbins should have more capacity so that no garbage is kept outside the bin.

the DCC for its recent drive in driving away buses from self-styled roadside terminals! Now the DCC is to make room for the stranded buses in the existing terminals or build new ones.

5. Mugging: To reduce mugging problem, the present drive of the DCC through a special police squad is welcome. Now the 'great silent majority' should assist them by being bold enough to catch the muggers red-handed.

6. Pollution: To combat air pollution, the black smoke emitter traffic should be treated seriously. For better deal with wastes the city dustbins should have more capacity so that no garbage is kept outside the bin.

7. Barrenness: Lack of adequate green cover cause the city to look barren. The increased volume of CO2 expired by crowded humans, and emitted by motor vehicles and industries contribute largely to the increased city temperature.

8. Traffic and Transport: To solve the transport problem, more big buses including the double-deckers are to be imported or to be locally made. The private cars and rickshaws should be discouraged.

9. Barrenness: Lack of adequate green cover cause the city to look barren. The increased volume of CO2 expired by crowded humans, and emitted by motor vehicles and industries contribute largely to the increased city temperature.

Antiquated laws

Sir, I would like to bring to the kind notice of the Law Minister and also the hon'ble Prime Minister the unimaginable sufferings of the people of this country for the flaws in the existing civil law enacted during the British period.

For instance, for violation of court's injunction order the opposite party is required to file Injunction Violation Case in the court and is required to prove it by producing witnesses.

So, if a case is dragged on to twenty years the party illegally possessing the property will have to pay the government perhaps double the price of the property at the time of disposal of the case.

On the other hand, according to the existing law, in a civil suit if a party wants to delay the hearing of the suit and so to delay the disposal of case he can do so for years.

It is said that the number of pending cases now would exceed six lac. Can you imagine the sufferings of the party who is the legal owner of the property or land if he is to continue the case for twenty or twenty-five years in the court with his own money?

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will be difficult to attain the objective if sympathetic measures are not taken to keep the price of the construction materials within the reach of the people.

We would, therefore, request the Hon'ble Finance Minister to kindly reconsider the import duties on construction materials, particularly MS Billet and Cement, and fix the same at a level to provide incentive to housing construction activities which in turn would ensure more revenue income by Government and open up employment facilities.

A Sabah 25/1 Santinagar, Dhaka

Import duty on billet and cement

Sir, Through your esteemed daily we would like to draw the kind attention of the Hon'ble Minister for Finance to the Budget for 1995-96 in which though tariffs in a large number of cases have been reduced but in respect of two basic items of housing sector, i.e. MS Billet and Cement, tariffs have not been considered thus affecting one of the basic needs of human living.

In this context we would like to mention that in the Budget of the fiscal year 1994-95 import duty on MS Billets was raised from 15% to 30% in spite of the recommendations of the Tariff Commission to reduce the duty to 7.5%. Similarly, the import duty on Cement was raised with little justification.

In Bangladesh where purchasing power of the majority of the population is very negligible, owning of a house has now become a dream. Though the Government has formulated a National Housing Policy for providing shelter to all by 2000 AD, it

will be difficult to attain the objective if sympathetic measures are not taken to keep the price of the construction materials within the reach of the people.

We would, therefore, request the Hon'ble Finance Minister to kindly reconsider the import duties on construction materials, particularly MS Billet and Cement, and fix the same at a level to provide incentive to housing construction activities which in turn would ensure more revenue income by Government and open up employment facilities.

Brig. (Retd) AHM Abdul Momen President, REHAB 16 Mymensingh Road, Dhaka

Planting a sapling

Sir, Every year we observe tree plantation programme with great eclat, publicity and enthusiasm and many government and public sector corporations plant millions of trees involving crores of Taka from the public exchequer.

But after the end of a year or so or at least every five years we do never make any scrutiny or assessment as to how many million saplings have been planted, how many crore Taka have been spent by the government during the period and what number of saplings are surviving upto date.

It is an open secret that the forest area of our country has fallen down from 18% in 1947 to only 3% in 1994. Due to alleged corruption and irregularities in Forest Department, thousands of trees are being cut and sold illegally. Moreover millions of trees are being felled by the people here and there to provide for fuel to their hearths and tons of wood are also being used in brick fields and road construction works.

Unfortunately, our authorities concerned, especially the Ministry of Forest and Environment, have not taken any positive and concrete step as yet to stop the widespread destruction of our trees which normally take fifteen to twenty years time for a full growth.

What is the use in beating drums for tree plantation programme when we do fail to save our millions of saplings planted every year and we also continue to fell hundreds of grown up trees indiscriminately?

Let us from now on observe 'Save Saplings' programmes every alternate year to save the trees and save our environment.

O H Kabir Dhaka-1203

Magic card!

Sir, Government is introducing voters' identity card. Well, therein one's number of children can also be written. And we think this identity card can be used for effective family planning. The gov should enact law that nobody must be found with children beyond the number mentioned in the ID card, and that is preferably two.

This card may yield best result in planning the family, if the government desires so. But it is also true that whatever the suggestions are given, and plans and programmes are taken to curb the growth rate of population, these are nothing but crying in the wilderness. Because the mass of our country is illiterate and devoid of the futuristic sense. If they are not compelled, they will not do their job.

So this is the proper time to act promptly to compel them to abide by the principle of family planning. The ID card then may act as 'magic card'!

S M Ibrahim Khalil 385/7, Free School Street, Dhaka-1208