

Welcome to the President of Mali

President Alpha Oumar Konare brings the friendship of the people of Mali to us, in a three day state visit that began yesterday. We would like to assure him that people of Bangladesh reciprocate the friendship with utmost sincerity and warmth. It is our honour to have President Konare with us and we hope that he finds his visit as diplomatically satisfying as intellectually enriching. There is a lot to learn from each other, especially in the area of development and poverty alleviation. We are proud to say that in some critical areas such as micro-credit and non-formal education we have some experience that we could perhaps share with a fellow developing country such as Mali. There must be some successful experience from Mali which we could find extremely useful in our case.

The fundamental point is of acquiring a mind-set of learning from each other instead of always looking at the West or the World Bank. The South-South cooperation never achieved the level and stature of a serious alternative to the existing system of international cooperation primarily because the Southern countries — meaning the developing world — never gave that concept a serious try.

We deliberately mention it on the occasion of the visit of President Konare so that we go to the very limits in exploring all the possibilities of economic cooperation between our two countries. With the democratisation process in Africa, and in our own part of the world, the possibility of greater cooperation between Africa and SAARC is now bright. Bangladesh is putting more focus and resources on expanding trade relations with countries in that continent. We hope that this visit will further advance that prospect. We wish the President of Mali and his entourage a very successful and enriching tour of our beloved and beautiful country.

Educational Management

Education is not all that emanates from academia. There are managers who profoundly affect the course of education.

In 1993 the government decided that all text books for classes six to eleven would be changed by 1998 in accordance with a new curriculum. Rather than going for a wholesale change and all at a time it was decided to effect the change in classes six and nine and new books introduced in January '96 as the first of a phased out programme.

Education top-brass are confident of keeping the schedule. And yet with only four months to go not even the manuscripts for the new books are ready. Why? Only weeks back selected writers were given the job of writing and submitting their manuscripts in two months' time ending September 30. Another two months will be needed to evaluate, revise and edit the MSS, at the very least. One would then need to have Aladdin's Lamp to print the million copies, bind and distribute them in a month's time.

No, the new curriculum is not going to be effective in January next. The new books may not be ready by even March.

The writers have told the press that two months is not just the right time for writing the said books. According to the education authorities the new books are being introduced with a view to raising the standard of our school education to that of the international level. Can the books designed to raise the school education standards so high be written in two months or even a whole year?

The education bosses understand that teaching from these books would require extra orientation courses for about 300,000 school teachers set to begin in phases in October. It took the officialdom about two years to reach the word of decision to the writers. And the writers must write their revolutionary books in two months! This must be educational management at its weirdest.

The Manna Dey Affair

There are several reasons why we express our strong protest against the mysterious way in which the Home Ministry cancelled the proposed visit by Manna Dey, one of the most renowned, respected and popular singer of Bangla and Hindi music world.

We express our protest for the way his trip was cancelled. To say no at the outset is one thing. But to say yes, that also after months of introspection, inter-ministerial file shuffling and multi-layered clearances, and retract on it at the last moment is totally unbecoming for any government. Why was the permission cancelled on the very day the artist was to arrive in Dhaka for his concert? The cancellation took place after the organisers procured all sorts of permissions and clearances from three ministries.

An artist of Dey's stature needs to plan his trips months ahead, and is usually done at the expense of other obligations. We had no right to disrupt his plans, not to mention, insult him in this way. And what about the financial loss of the organisers and their considerable loss of face and credibility?

As it now stands, to invite a foreign artist, permission has to be sought from cultural ministry, foreign ministry and home ministry. We question this procedure, and consider it to be totally out of tune with the time. When air waves are bringing artists of all varieties right into our drawing rooms, what rationale could there be for creating enormous barriers against personal visits of great artists?

Such incidents not only leave a bad taste in the mouth for the cultural activists, but has considerable implications for diplomatic relations, particularly in cases such as these. Do we not have cultural exchange agreements with India? Do not such agreements clearly lay down rules as to how such exchanges should take place? And if the organisers have followed all such rules, then does not the arbitrary cancellation violate inter-State agreements?

We strongly suggest that our government should seriously look into this affair and examine why such a retraction of the permission occurred, and why in this sloppy and undignified manner?

HERE is, perhaps, very little disagreement to the premise that during stabilization and adjustment era, societies have to pay a price, heavy or light, in terms of growing poverty and other socio-economic adversities. The degree and duration of the pains so inflicted, would hinge, of course, on a variety of factors including the instruments used and the weight given to each instrument, the prior conditions and characteristics of an economy, the sequencing of policies etc. while a variety of experience with respect to poverty over the adjustment era could be in evidence across adopter countries.

...for most countries stabilization and adjustment policies were associated, with worsening poverty as measured by incomes, and with a slowdown and some reversals in improvements in social indicators.

Dr Frances Stewart (Director, Queen Elizabeth House, Oxford) addressed this issue of adjustment and poverty — so much talked about in our country and elsewhere that experienced a fair doses of stabilization and structural adjustments but which reaped, probably, a very little progress in alleviating poverty and elevating growth. According to Dr Stewart, "Governments can also protect the poor from the likely effects of the selected adjustment policies through conscious and specific use of meso-policies." She appears to have been drawn to this conclusion by investigating into the experiences of six adopter countries.

The decline in the standard of English language teaching and learning in the post-liberation years has been rather steep. The deterioration has been so appalling that people belonging to higher echelons of the society and government are already in a state of shock. People are wondering if by re-introducing English at the degree level the situation can be improved, without making an attempt to augment the basics.

If one systematically analyses the causes of such decline, it will be quite evident that the course-content of English textbook and grammar dished out at different stages of learning leaves much to be desired. Along with this the fact that gives a dissonance is the alarming deterioration in the capability of teaching English at the early stage of schooling.

The popular misconception looming in the public mind is that the sun had set in the British Empire long ago, but even then why should the shadow of English language linger for such an inordinately long period of time? Unsurprisingly, in many newly independent countries, this effort to keep English intact ran into resistance. Ironically, having command of English was seen as being under the sway of foreign influence and cultivating a colonialistic mentality shorn of nationalistic feeling.

Now that the bane has turned into a boon, giving an edge to those able to use the language in global communication, research, computer, finance and host of other fields, it is gaining importance and prominence with each passing day.

The simple fact today is that knowledge of English can bring laurels for us in a rapidly expanding scientific world where research findings on science, medicine, engineering and even genetics are transferred through English. Even in our country, till date, knowing English can be the key to top jobs and big money.

The reality today in our country is that people worry about their kids and the nation worries about the next generation. In Bangladesh all people at least with some concern for future want their

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tries of stabilization and structural adjustments viz. Tanzania, Ghana, Chile, Mexico, The Philippines and Indonesia. Needless to mention, perhaps, her thesis is derived from the experiences of countries lying in Asia, Africa and Latin America which undertook substantial amount of adjustments and stabilization and thus posing a wider canvas for a comparison. However, due to shortage of space, we would like to pick up one or two seemingly depicting more relevance for Bangladeshi situations.

The Experiences

Indonesia is reported to have successfully tasted adjustment, growth and human development. This could be achieved, according to Stewart, through judicious application of four major factors. First, the considerable macro success maintained a significantly positive growth of GDP per capita. Favourable supply responses, especially, from agriculture (crops grew by 1 per cent per annum (1984-88), non-food crops at 4 per cent and not at the major expense of other crops) and labour intensive manufacturing exports sowed the seed of success. The favourable supply response, again, could be adduced largely to earlier developments in rural infrastructure, extensive human capital and industrial and entrepreneurial experiences. Second, consumption growth continued to exceed the rate

of income and consumption during the recessionary period was protected. Third, "the growth was relatively egalitarian so that the distribution of additional consumption was favourable from the prospective of poverty reduction." It could also be observed that unchanging terms of trade and rising agricultural output pushed rural consumption ahead of the urban one. Within the rural sector, relatively equal land distribution meant that

proved when measured by the proportion of educational expenditure going to primary and secondary schools and the proportion of health expenditure going to basic health care." In short, Stewart argues, both macro and meso-policies supported adjustment in Indonesia with a "human face". The Philippine adjustment process falls into three phases. In the first phase both macro and meso-policies were hostile to the poor.

ing drastic cuts in social sectors.

It, thus, appears that while Indonesia succeeded in higher growth and lowering poverty levels, the other two countries did not succeed as much on that front.

Pro Poor Adjustments

The main elements of adjustment policies, according to Stewart, that protect the poor and may contribute to reduce poverty during adjustment are as follows:

(a) Expansionary macro policies i.e. adjustment with growth which imply a more gradual attempts to reduce fiscal imbalance, mere emphasis on switching than "disabsorption" and more exports with little cut imports (Ghana and Indonesia)

(b) Structural changes may be required in those adopter economies, where structure is inequalitarian to turn the growth towards the poor (pro-poor). The changes may include land reforms, professional taxation and credit reforms, special banks for the poor (e.g. Grameen Bank) etc.

(c) A review and reform of Meso policies is required so that "they support (and do not hurt) the poor. Pro-poor meso-policies include same combination of raising revenue, raising social allocation ratio and improving the priority ratio with the aim of ensuring that social sector resource flows to the poor improve and do not, as is typical, worsen during adjustment."

(d) Food subsidies should continue to go to the poor in real value. This may be universal or targeted.

(e) Emergency support policies are needed to allow the poor to eke out a base minimum trying standard during the adjustment period. These are: well designed employment schemes, pensions for the incapacitated and the old etc.

(f) Regular monitoring of the situation of the poor during adjustment period needs to be undertaken and necessary steps should be afoot in grave conditions.

Concluding Remarks

Unfortunately the conventional stabilization/adjustment package with emphasis on expenditure cuts and deflation, and other steps, so says Stewart, led to adverse development at macro and meso-levels. "Most of the countries which avoided the adverse effects adopted unconventional packages (sometimes with and something without Brettonwood institutions support) involving expansionary adjustment and revenue raising rather than expenditure cutting." Dr. Frances Stewart opines that policies of the Brettonworld's Institutions might not be a main cause of the adverse effects eating into most of the adopter countries, but the most disconcerting episode is that most of the adversaries could be mitigated had the instruction been wary of the worries of the poor in adopter countries. They simply turned a deaf ear to the issues at stake so far.

Beneath the Surface

by Abdul Bayes



The poor participated in increased output. And lastly, while government expenditure was axed from 26 per cent in 1981 to 21 per cent in 1990, the services of the poor were not let to be affected by this severe cuts. Stewart then goes on to present the unbelievable experience...

The second phase reversed many of the adverse trends with more favourable macro and meso policies. By and large, as a result of adjustment and stabilization in different phases, poverty increased in the third phase but social indicators did not worsen.

In Mexico both macro and meso-policy choices, allegedly, led to a worsening in the position of the poor contributing to rise in poverty and a worsening in same social indicators. To respect the debt obligations, Mexico had to release resource for debt servicing, garment expenditure on interest payment rose substantially from 23 per cent in 1981 to 61 per cent in 1989 necessitat-

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Decline in the Teaching and Learning of English: How can This be Arrested?

by Md Asadullah Khan

children to learn better and to be able to hold high-tech jobs. This idea of attaining first rate knowledge has seized the citizenry with no exception. That idea has driven many of our city based parents and also a good number of affluent persons in the district towns to send their wards to kindergartens and English medium schools that have sprouted in these areas. The fees that these institutions are charging for admission and as regular monthly tuition are almost an anathema. Other than winning a cultural elitist class, the success in teaching English in these schools which stress mostly on vocabulary with little effort on language skills and shorn of the actual knowledge of grammar has been far from satisfactory.

serious set-back and a loss of direction. There has been lack of systematic planning and failure to maintain a minimum standard borne out by the fact that the percentage of failure in English at the SSC and HSC levels, has in recent years, been alarmingly high. In this context a glance at the English text book prescribed for the SSC level students in Bangladesh would reveal a very gloomy picture. In a word, the whole book content-wise and language-wise is a bad selection. The book also shows poor judgement in selecting the topics. A young learner has to be encouraged to become something great in life. He should not be taught to be satisfied with just being a tailor, fisher

English in our schools is to teach students the language which means they are to be taught to express themselves correctly in that language. This makes it obligatory that there should not be any grammatical errors in the texts taught. Unfortunately in many of the sentences in the text book prescribed for the SSC level students and introduced as early as in 1983 basic rules of English grammar have been ignored completely. Some examples from the book will illustrate the point and would reveal some of the inherent weaknesses and deficiencies as a text book. The book is stuffed with structures that are repetitive, hackneyed and mediocre English and at least

page 18 which goes, "I am happy that you spoke highly about these products of our country. As far as it is known to us, 'To speak highly of' is a packet idiom. Let us look at the statement at page 25. We quote, 'Think about some cold countries like Britain or Canada which cannot grow green plants so easily because of lack of sufficient sun. We wonder what the authors wanted to mean by putting the word 'Sun' in this way. Another sentence appearing on page 114 needs scrutiny. We quote, 'Without drinking clean water you cannot keep in good health.' The readers must be at a loss to understand if the word 'Keep in' has been put correctly. We come across another sentence at page 122 that reads, 'Mr Rahman told the stu-

lacking in the book. After all, it is a book of English literature and not a book on social studies. The considered view, according to many, concerned with the decline of the English language teaching and learning is that wrong information and message and rules of grammar fed at the beginning of a student's career can cause tremendous harm and set-back in the student's learning process and capability. Young learners should be taught good, natural and acceptable English which has a minimum standard. It is at the secondary level that our students can build a strong base in English and that objective can hardly be achieved if they are provided with a textbook full of mistakes, clumsy and of defective structure.

The solution looks abundantly clear to all with vision and pragmatism. As it is known to all, "A fish rots from the head downwards." Here the rot stems from the school level teaching and school level books. In such a situation, the basics must be corrected first. No ad-hoc solution like re-introducing English at the degree level syllabus and arresting the pitfalls will cure the ills.

The solution calls for a massive effort, motivation, commitment and engaging a group of competent teachers for teaching English at the early stages. The book prescribed for the syllabus at this stage must also conform to student's needs and national aspiration. It is almost an absurd proposition to raise the standard of English without making an attempt to improve the overall quality of education which definitely calls for a congenial atmosphere in the educational arena and a strong logistical support. Most of the schools in the country, barring a few in cities and towns, are lacking in basic minimum facilities, not to speak of enough qualified teachers on English subject. It is because of this festering malaise and inherent weaknesses that the past 25 years could not deliver any goods in this arena of education. The government as it appears, till now has not made any dent in this area, so to say, restructuring the infrastructural facilities for learning English.

The success in teaching English in schools which stress mostly on vocabulary with little effort on language skills and shorn of the actual knowledge of grammar has been far from satisfactory. The students, it is revealed, have neither learnt English to the extent it was desired, nor Bengali...

These group of students, it is revealed, have neither learnt English to the extent it was desired, nor Bengali but have attained some pseudo elitist habits that alienate them from the traditional Bengali culture.

The post-liberation days saw an upsurge of ultra-nationalistic sentiment, driving people crazy about national language Bengali, which our students did not also learn properly. Promoting English in schools at the expense of Bengali, sometimes confronts a host of cultural values. Side by side, exclusion of English from our curriculum for the past 25 years has invited a plethora of ills, that seem to choke up the societal growth and a general improvement of education. After all the ills have accumulated to such a pathetic proportion, raising the standard of English to the utter disregard of the over all quality of education is almost an impossible proposition.

In analysing the dismal state of English language education, it will be revealed that the process of learning this language has suffered a

man, hotel boy, cashier, paramedic, carpenter, taxi-driver, or a tour-guide on the ground that these vocations may offer him a handsome income. The point is that a young learner has to be taught to aim high. Topics concerning the life and achievements of eminent personalities, great ideals and ideologies, important scientific discoveries, all challenging human activities leading to an expansion of the frontiers of knowledge should find a place in the young learner's text book to inspire him, enliven and illuminate his horizon and enkindle his passion for a life ennobling in all aspects. These texts influence the young learner's mind indirectly and tend to bring about a resurgence of moral values which are at such a low ebb in recent times. They must be encouraged to aspire after a life illustrious and glorifying in all respects. We may quote Disraeli who says "The youth who does not look up, will look down and the spirit that does not soar, is destined perhaps to grovel". The purpose of teaching

uninspiring. One wonders why the authors took recourse to structures like "She also wants the students happy" (page 174). Manhattan island is big, but its geography is easy to understand". We are trying to get at the meaning of the word "durative" in the last part of the statement at page 233. The sentence goes like this: Structures makes the action of the verb progressive and durative". There are mistakes galore in the use of appropriate prepositions in different parts of the book. The statement on page 77 reads "All, who was kind-hearted and sympathetic by nature, was moved to pity.....". Here the past participle "moved" should possibly be followed by preposition "with". Let us look at the following statements: Go and look in the dictionary. Arif took down the dictionary (P.166). Let us have a look at page 5 of the book. We quote: "First turning on the left and then it is on the right". The sentence appears to be structurally defective and confusing too. We come across another sentence at

denis how many passes there were last year and in which divisions". The sentence, no doubt, appears to be a bit clumsy. Let us look at the statement, "If you like you can enter services in a business firm, an office or a factory" (Page-133). We wonder how the authors took recourse to such an un-English structure. Let us look at the statement at page 150. We quote, He needs three things: ability, integrity and hard work. Bangladesh also needs people with these three things. We would like the readers guessing if the word "Things" put in this way has added grace to the structure. The statement made on page 173 which says "She also makes them confident and proves them clever" cannot be considered to be an expression of any acceptable standard.

We would not like to elaborate our discussion any further but we can't help adding that the objective in any language is to have an exalted style and a moving description of scenario and facts tinged with some amount of literary grace which is totally

To the Editor

BPCS and the BCS exam

Sir, As a national institution Bangladesh Public Service Commission shoulders the responsibility to conduct the BCS examination in order to select the deserving candidates for running the state affairs smoothly. Many significant national institutions of our country are beset with many ills and absurdities but PSC is still considered a solemn and holy institution, in order to cater to the demand of present developing society, several existing rules should be revised. In this respect only the government can do the needful.

I have been hatching the idea for a long time to express my opinion on the subject "Quota system in the BCS exam." But sometimes I get disheartened to express something because the opinions expressed in the letter columns of different dailies

hardly attract the authorities concerned, they remain only in the newspapers.

I advocate for introducing more incentives to raise the percentage of female education. But in respect of first class Govt service women should not be shown pity and sympathy maintaining a special quota for them. Both our Prime Minister and the leader of the opposition are women highlighting the fact that women are able to occupy higher, even supreme positions by dint of their own abilities and not by any concession. Our girl students of different universities are occupying the top positions in graduation and post graduation examinations by dint of their talent and intelligence, not by the mercy of the teachers. So, it is better to select the deserving candidates for civil service only on the basis of merit and not on the basis of gender quota and birth place.

The BCS candidates of greater Barisal, Noakhali, Comilla and Dhaka are to embrace a first class job through an awful tough competition exhibiting their real talent. They can not expect to have a job even after securing 75 per cent marks in the BCS examination. Whereas the candidates of the backward districts enter into the service obtaining 40-45 per cent marks. Their qualification is that they come from those undeveloped districts. Is it not a quite absurd step for a developing country like ours? Will the contribution and performance of the candidates having 75 per cent marks and the candidates with 45 per cent marks be same? This odd step gives rise to the following facts:

- (i) The country is being deprived of the service of brilliant candidates creating a vacuum of intelligence in the civil service sector.
- (ii) The nation is not evaluating her golden sons and daughters.
- (iii) Bright students are being neglected and
- (iv) Real learning is being discouraged.

practice now. The honourable chairman of PSC requested the honourable President of our country to reconsider this issue when he was submitting the annual report (1994) of PSC to the latter. But the government is yet to reach any decision.

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Consensus

Sir, Who says that ruling BNP and opposition AL-JI-JP do never arrive at a consensus?

Inside the Jatiya Sangsad the BNP, AL, JI and JP agreed on the purchase of duty free cars. Outside the Sangsad they decided not to renew the 25-year Indo-Bangladesh treaty. We wonder why don't they arrive at a consensus on ei-

ther a caretaker government or a no caretaker government?

If they really don't agree on the important issue, the consensus on 'duty free cars' and 'no renewal of 25-year treaty' may go in vain. Because due to impending chaos and confusion in the country arising out of the differences, the BNP, AL, JP and JI leaders may not be able to ride on duty free cars and we may automatically be involved in a dismal and invisible 25-year treaty with India enabling her to poke nose in our internal affairs.

Let the BNP, AL, JI and JP at least arrive at a consensus as to how, when and under whose supervision a referendum — 'Yes' or 'No' — on caretaker government may be held to resolve the political impasse.

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