

Feminisation of Poverty and Structural Adjustment Policies in Bangladesh

by Prof Jahanara Huq

"FEMINISATION" of poverty is a misnomer. It is an intellectual predicament to try to genderise poverty, although the catchy jargon has captured many, certainly the gender literature. For me, I would better call it as "poverty of women" or "poverty of women and children", although the latter is more generally used. It is not a new phenomenon, but increasing burden of poverty on women" as the "Platform for Action" at the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing has done.

As a small girl I remember a woman in tattered sari, asking for money from my mother. I asked my mother who she was and my mother said she was poor and a beggar. Immediately I retorted: "why was she poor?" Perplexed by my question my mother answered: "She was poor because God made her so". I thought then that it was God who made people poor or rich.

"Poverty" also takes me to

well. According to UNDP Report, 1995, they are:

(i) Do we know that world's women work longer hours? On an average 53 per cent higher, paid or unpaid, work is done by women?

(ii) Do we know that even in industrial countries two-third of the work is unpaid and done by women?

(iii) Do we know that trillion-dollar work is completely unaccounted for or lost because they are unpaid and done by women?

We have to judge Bangladesh case in the above context but adding some more critical dimensions. In Bangladesh there is no dearth of data depicting indications of higher pauperisation of women. The gender differentials in life ex-

balances. Very pious objectives indeed!

But the World Bank and IMF have been proved to be the neo-kabulwahals who with funds have impressive ways of attracting the borrowers. Through SAP and its instruments, the WB, the IMF have gained authority to enter, intervene the policy making processes in Bangladesh, made easy access to dictate aid conditionalities in many Third World countries' lives. We have been observing that greater the aid commitment, broader is the smile of the Finance Minister and his entourage after each of the annual Paris consortium meeting! This is surely all at the cost of our own self-esteem and independence to set our own goals and make

(Export Oriented Industries), Export processing zones, which have adversely affected women.

SAP prescribes garments, pharmaceuticals, electronics, telephone, telecommunications, electricity to be transferred to the private sector which minimises and marginalises women.

SAP overburdens women with lower wages, longer hours of work, with lower social amenities.

SAP favours multinationals rich investors which induces women into the formal labour market, where women face an extremely hostile workplace and unfair competition which make women's struggle for existence difficult with increasing levels of vulnerability.

budget allocation for women in all the sectors with full accountability for a non-compliance.

Make women's access to state credit easier and without collaterals.

Instead of gender behind planning we need affirmative planning for women. Make them assertive in decision-making positions.

Ensure economic empowerment of women through greater access to job opportunities, education, skill development and vocational training.

Reform and abolish all discriminatory laws, e.g. law of inheritance which will prevent disparity in the acquisition of resources.

Increase women's self-es-

teem leadership and economic, social and political empowerment which does not only mean taking but sharing.

Stop all mega-projects promoted by WB like indiscriminate embankment, artificial diversion of river course leading to river erosion which make women and children homeless.

Implement the Rio declaration for protection of environment in - natural, biospheric, eco-systems, hydro-spheric, geospheric and atmospheric dimensions, environment is being degraded by unsustainable exploitation of natural resources and environmentally unsound agricultural practices.

We need full ratification and true implementation of UNCEDAW.

These steps taken together can eliminate poverty, destitution of both men and women and can offset the effects of SAP.

Minorities Left Out in the Cold

by Andrei Ivanov

RUSSIA'S newly affluent is being presented in many news stories as the face of the new order in this country, but the reality includes the deteriorating living standards in the north.

Indeed, life expectancy among the ethnic minorities there is almost 20 years less than the Russian average.

Indigenous groups and scientists blame this on too rapid industrialisation with too little concern for the environment. But the situation is made worse by Russia's economic problems, with officials in Moscow saying they simply do not have the money to improve the quality of life in the resource-rich Arctic region.

Yevdokiya Gayer, President of the International League of Small Ethnic Groups, though says the real problem lies in the lack of a state programme for the development and support of the small ethnic groups in Siberia, north Russia and the Russian Far East.

This is compounded by the mismanagement and misappropriation of funds. In 1994, for instance, the Arctic received only 77 per cent of the food, fuel and medical supplies it needed because of budget restraints and bad organisation.

This year, the situation is unlikely to improve. While 37 million tonnes of fuel, food, medical and other supplies have been earmarked for the region, the finance ministry says it does not have enough money to fulfil the budget pledges.

Officials in Moscow are worried. Says Ethnic Affairs and Regional Policies Deputy Minister Andrei Chernenko: "We will depopulate the North by depriving it of food and other goods if this continues."

He adds that this would be a short-sighted, policy as Russia's 27 Arctic regions account for 90 per cent of the country's natural gas and oil, 75 per cent of its crude oil and 35 per cent of its timber.

To be sure, the Russian Arctic is an area of unique mineral and other resources as well as being a strategically important military and industrial area for Russia in general.

But it is the indigenous people who have borne the brunt of widespread ecological destruction that has resulted from decades of clumsy and ill-considered exploitation of raw materials - all of which scientists say have had a direct impact on health of region's population.

Life expectancy among the northern people - once among the longest in the former Soviet Union - is now around 45 years old in many communities, compared to an average 64 years old in Russia and around 74 years old in northern Europe.

The people of Russia's Arctic regions also suffer more illness than the average, say scientists at the Russian Academy of Medical Sciences.

Sickness among newborn babies and infants in the north is three times higher than the national average.

Tuberculosis cases among the indigenous inhabitants of the Nenets, Taimyr and Koryak National areas are between 2.5 and three times more frequent than among other residents of those territories.

In Chukotka for example, respiratory diseases predominate largely because the indigenous peoples of the permafrost regions usually have no natural immunity against infectious diseases brought to the peninsula by people from other areas. Experts say this is because bacteria usually cannot survive in such low temperatures.

But Valery Trufakin, an expert on the problems of the north at the Siberian Branch of the Russian Academy of Sciences, says the reasons for the comparatively short life-span go much deeper.

Industrialisation, he says, has also resulted in the destruction of native cultures largely as a result of the forced resettlement into collective farms and Russian-dominated communities.

The traditional diet based on raw fish and reindeer meat has been replaced by processed foods, which are lacking in vitamins and minerals.

At the same time, most of the more remote communities have no health, educational or social facilities and depend on air-links with bigger settlements for these essential services.

As a result, Viall Kaznacheev of the Russian Academy of Medical Sciences says northern ethnic groups are facing serious threats to their development and in some cases their survival.

Small ethnic groups are in danger of disappearing not only as a result of disease but through assimilation. Half of the Ngenasans, for example, are already of mixed ethnic origin.

Of the 45,000 Chukchi who lived in Chukotka before 1971, only 15,000 remain. Asks Kaznacheev: "Have we already paid too high a price for 'civilisation' on the peninsula?"

Today, 186,000 people are officially acknowledged as members of indigenous and small ethnic groups.

Gayer insists though that the real number is closer to 400,000. This disparity in figures is partly because some ethnic groups that should have been given the status of small nations have never been officially registered, he says.

Meanwhile, the misappropriation of state allocations of consumer goods and food for the north continues. Last year, for example, billions of roubles of federal consumer goods allocations to the Far North were illegally squandered by state-supported companies in the Sakhalin Region.

Today's poverty means a lack or denial of basic needs. It is not pre-ordained by the lack of natural endowments but certainly is due to lack of distributive justice, which is man-made, human-engineered. More so for women.

my university days when a teacher used to say: "A country is poor because it is poor". I knew then, that poverty was due to poor resource endowments.

But today's poverty means a lack or denial of basic needs. It is not pre-ordained by the lack of natural endowments but certainly is due to lack of distributive justice, which is man-made, human-engineered. More so for women.

Poverty today is a tool through which the powerlessness is destined on many and the powerful ones exploit them. In case of women's poverty, it goes hand in hand with vulnerability - may it be due to patriarchy, bureaucracy, class structure, state machinery or international politics. Their poverty and destitution in Bangladesh is an endless saga, which can hardly be addressed by disjointed, sporadic efforts matched with cosmetic approach.

Therefore, instead of trying to genderise poverty, a borrowed concept, trying to address it through peripheral and superficial approach, it is better to consider women's endless unabated poverty with a holistic approach matched with pragmatic perceptions, policies and programmes to alleviate and ultimately eliminate it.

At this point it is time to pause and ponder over certain facts not known very

pectancy (male 54.2 yrs, female 53.4 yrs); infant mortality 116 male/105 female per '000'; child mortality (11 male/14 female per '000), caloric intake, protein intake, maternal mortality, health care, lower percentage of women in wage-labour force (4 per cent); symbolic number of women in the decision making hierarchies all speak about a deep-rooted gender disparity in a patriarchal societal structure. Even in case of male-female literacy increase rates (male 34.6 per cent/female 20.3 per cent 1992); women's technical backwardness and also the comparative male female expenditure allocations (male 67.8 per cent/female 32.6 per cent) are adequate testimony to the lower status of women.

The WB-IMF prescribed structural adjustment policies (SAP) which have been pursued in Bangladesh since '80s have hardly made any real dent in poverty alleviation or any anticipated correction of the structural imbalances. In case of women and SAP, with the question of persistent and increasing poverty of women, needs a thorough evaluation.

What is SAP? They are the policies or instruments of the World Bank-IMF for correcting chronic structural disequilibrium in the trade balances, cushion debt repayment problems, and also correct fiscal and monetary im-

our own budget. The trade-off is, of course, not totally benign and harmless, as we understand. Bangladesh, which has been pursuing market politics as prescribed in the SAP since the '80s contains: a tight monetary policy, a tight fiscal policy, withdrawal of subsidies from agriculture, liberalisation of Trade through withdrawal of tariffs, and Privatisation of public enterprises.

On the plea of "systems loss", inefficiency of governance, privatisation, laying off of many indigenous enterprises are prescribed.

Use of market forces for an automatic adjustment and free allocation of resources. In fact, SAP did not correct many of the imbalances but had serious adverse effects on women and their economic empowerment.

SAP had enhanced and further impoverished, the already-poor women in the interest of the big investors and multinationals. Many women were displaced or were employed on very poor wages.

Eighty-two per cent of the industrial employment comes from home-based small-scale and cottage industries. Trade liberalisation, GATT have already adversely affected our indigenous textiles, most of which are facing extinction. Women are the first and foremost victims of such action.

SAP promotes EOIs

It encourages mega-projects which force the government to lower allocation to social sectors like education, health.

Globalisation of the market economy ignores protection of women's right to form trade unions to voice their employment rights.

GATT leads to withdrawal of tariffs has unfavourable affect on small industries with large-scale displacement of women. 96 per cent female headed households have increased and of them are below poverty line and are among the "Hardcore poor".

SAP has ignored women's access to credit, modern technology, foreign aid share of allocations.

Unequal distribution of resources lead to unequal gender power relations, less access to education, technology, housing, health and recreation.

What To Do?

Affirmative policies should be undertaken for alleviation of women from their poverty syndromes, economic subordination, social-economic exploitation.

Count women, count their work and make their contribution visible in the GNP.

Take positive policies and supportive actions to remove all the barriers - cultural, social, attitudinal, structural, impeding women's full integration into national development.

We need a transparent



Photo-Courtesy: UNICEF

Unique Problem of Marine Bio-diversity Conservation and Possible Solutions for Bangladesh

by Karar Mahmudul Hassan

BDHAKA Occupies a unique position on the map of the globe with 120 kilometer "economic zone" for the seashore. It is characterised by lush green long coastal belt with vegetative treatment enabling to stabilisation new accretion by human endeavour. The largest mangrove in the world, the Sunderbans have had harbour numerous aquatic fauna and flora and provided an opportunity for countless marine fauna to spend some period of the year to complete the life-cycle since time immemorial.

Mangrove - delicate ecosystem subjected to abnormal changes for want of freshwater upstream discharge and other impediments resulted in multi-dimensional problems. Linked with diversion of the Ganges water vis-a-vis physical alternation, extreme salinity, large-scale mortality of major species, abnormal load in water and sedimentation of river beds, prohibition of natural regeneration by floating buoyant seed, high soil salinity, destruction of aquatic habitat eliminating shelter and cover, excessive eutrophication, abnormal BOD level leading to the physical environment to serious deterioration including negative impacts created by unwise activities to cater basic need such as trawling, particularly in deep sea, destroying spawning ground of presently commercial and also non-commercial marine biological resources, pollution by ocean-going vessels and threatening of waste material of various nature, noise pollution disturbed the serene environment, on the one hand and bill spillage, discharge of waste heat from thermal plant and industries and physical damage by sophisticated fishing gear including current rate on the other. Human activities to earn livelihood, living around the Sunderbans and coastal areas resorted to catching shrimp fry destroying thousands of pelagic and fin-fish young for a single shrimp fry.

Further physical alteration of marine ecosystem includes: logging of mangrove, construction facilities such as marine-jetties and pipelines, dredging and filling, mining and anchoring for a longer time.

Diversion of the Ganges water forced to adopt flood control measures such as dikes and embankment, dams, road-building, extreme land degradation, desertification causing accelerated erosion during dry season with the removal of the vegetative cover and pass on erosion products from river system to marine situation during monsoon, bring major changes in coastal water. Forest health in the mangrove of Sunderbans and adjoining areas had seriously been jeopardised bringing the world famous unique and the largest estuarine-cum-marine ecosystem virtually on the verge of extermination.

Release of water through the Ganges during monsoon in large proportion than the capacity of the riverine system suddenly create man-made flood and concomitant result in accelerating current in water destroying once recognized harbour of aquatic-cum-marine biological resources along with washing out various forms of waste products from terrestrial to the seas. This situation is extremely harmful from view point of natural productivity.

Conversely many estuarine organisms such as swimming crabs, ecosystem of mangrove and cyster reef largely depend on constant or frequent freshwater input, without which they are gradually replaced by marine species.

As estuaries alluvium tract are important for biological diversity, and vital for many fisheries, failure to maintain the quantum of water, scale, intensity, duration and timing, suspended sediments and nutrients may completely

wipe out aquatic biological resources from the surface of the planet.

Mitigation: The following measures are suggested to tackle the complicated issues pertaining to marine bio-diversity conservation in the context of Bangladesh.

a) Sharing of legitimate quantum of water during lean period of the year from the Ganges in conformity with international norms (upper riparian vis-a-vis lower riparian rights).

b) Extensive research to evolve semi-natural condition for the benefit of flora and fauna in Sunderbans and adjoining areas.

c) Appropriate institutional arrangement to deal with the precarious situation and put a halt on further deterioration.

d) Action programme to create awareness by motivation.

e) Involvement of the people, the NGOs, academicians, journalists community, lawyers and others in the process of mitigation measures.

f) Conservation ethics formulation; and

g) Appropriate legislative measures.

In the preceding paragraphs on the marine bio-diversity issue may encourage

concerned quarters to come forward with exhaustive suggestions to salvage the world's largest mangrove harbouring countless genetic resources through centuries, acting as buffer between true marine and setuarine situation may face complete annihilation with the passage of time.

The writer is National Project Director National Environment Management Action Plan (NEMAP) and Joint Secretary, Govt. of Bangladesh.

'Thousands Dying' from an Epidemic of Doctors

Pamela Cowan writes from London

DOCTORS kill people. This is the chilling claim made by Dr Vernon Coleman's new book, *Betrayal of Trust*.

The book attacks doctors for over-prescribing drugs, and charges that one hospital patient in six is made ill by doctors.

"Doctors are as big a problem as heart disease and cancer. If you look at the number of people doctors make ill by over-prescribing medications alone it is mind-boggling," says Coleman.

A doctor himself, Coleman no longer practices medicine, but devotes his time to writing books and a weekly newspaper column.

Through a mixture of ignorance, incompetence, prejudice, dishonesty, laziness, paternalism and misplaced trust," he warns, "doctors are killing more people than they are saving and they are causing more illness and more discomfort than they are alleviating."

They are doing more harm today than at any time in history, he argues, and claims

doctors do not understand the hazards associated with the drugs they prescribe - 50-90 per cent of antibiotic prescriptions, for example, are unnecessary.

the greatest reason the medical profession kills so many people is its alliance

"The incidence of doctor induced illness is now epidemic throughout the Western world" claims the author of a controversial new book, which aims to explain why doctors do more harm than good. Gemini News Service nervously reads on.

and more plentiful food and safer methods of transport.

"The things I'm saying are known to the medical community but no-one likes to talk about these issues. The predominant feeling is 'Thank God somebody has actually stood up and said some of these things'." Coleman told Gemini News Service.

The British Medical Association (BMA), however, is not one of his supporters.

"Doctors prescribe very effectively," a BMA spokesperson told Gemini. "In terms of antibiotics there is always a balance doctors must maintain. Do they prescribe an antibiotic when a patient comes into surgery with symptoms of what could be a bacterial infection, or err on the side of caution and wait until tests confirm that the infection is viral? There will always be cases where a doctor must use his discretion."

But recent research gives credence to some his claims. A survey has found that hospital errors in Australia accounted for 14,000 deaths

must take back responsibility for their care. The answer doesn't lie in legislation. People must be aware of the dangers and patients should have a healthy scepticism of the drugs doctors prescribe and ask their doctor for alternatives to drug therapy."

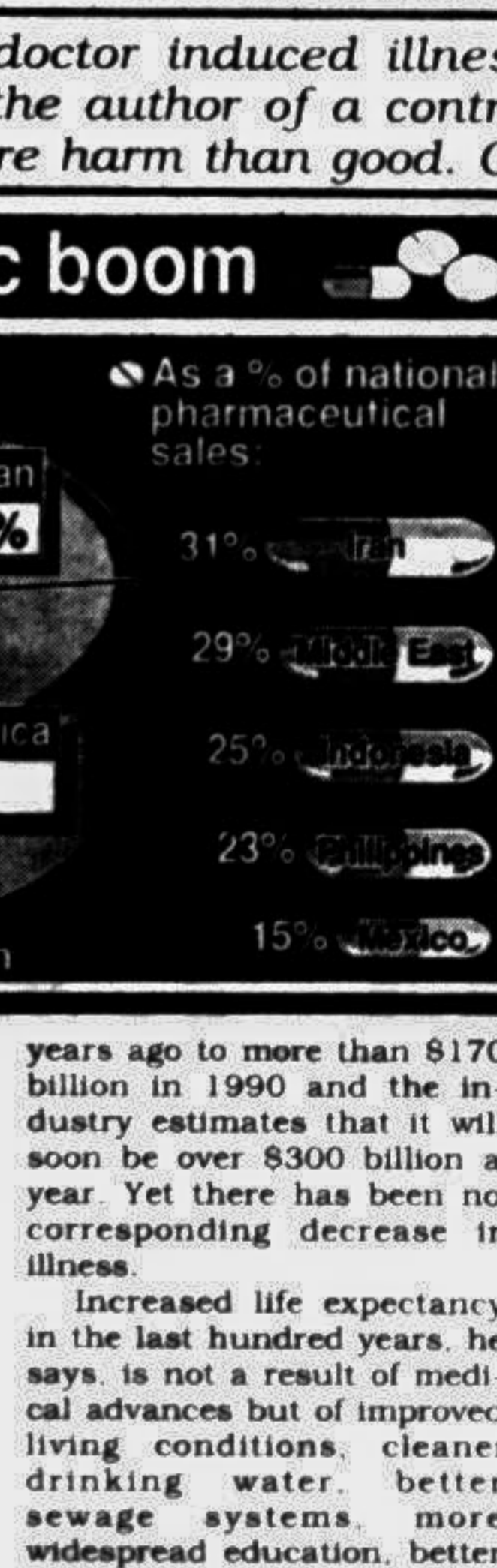
The author of a new book on a similar theme, *Problem Drugs+*, health journalist Andrew Chetley, agrees with Coleman's premise that most of the information that doctors get about drugs comes from the pharmaceutical companies.

"There is a tendency to over-prescribe. Some of the pressure comes from the drug industry and some from patients who think they should come away from the surgery with a prescription," Chetley says.

"However that is beginning to change. There are improvements in medical education about drugs."

"Another thing that's happening concerns the economics of health care. More hospitals, practices and insurance companies are looking at how to curtail costs so there is a tendency that prescribing is becoming mere controlled."

PAMELA COWAN is a Canadian journalist who has been on a fellowship with Gemini News Service in London.



years ago to more than \$170 billion in 1990 and the industry estimates that it will soon be over \$300 billion a year. Yet there has been no corresponding decrease in illness.

Increased life expectancy in the last hundred years, he says, is not a result of medical advances but of improved living conditions, cleaner drinking water, better sewage systems, more widespread education, better

Reporting the findings of a study of intensive care units in 17 European countries, a recent issue of *New Scientist* magazine revealed that 45 per cent of all intensive care patients had infections, nearly half of them contracted in the unit and a fifth acquired elsewhere in the hospital.

Patients who stayed in intensive care for three weeks or longer had 33 times the risk of infection of patients who were in the unit for a day.

Coleman attributes the high incidence of problems with pharmaceutical drugs to inadequate testing. Some trials involve only six patients, but severe problems often do not appear until at least 50,000 patients have taken a drug or it has been in use for months or even years.

Coleman says: "There must be much more openness on the part of the medical community and people

must take back responsibility for their care. The answer doesn't lie in legislation. People must be aware of the dangers and patients should have a healthy scepticism of the drugs doctors prescribe and ask their doctor for alternatives to drug therapy."

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