

Poverty Alleviation and Human Resource Development

How to Attain and Who Will Accomplish?

by Hybat J Chowdhury

EVERY land, every country, every nation has assets and handicaps, both in natural resources and in human intellect. Some are exposed and some are not so well exposed. Assets usually show out, even otherwise palpable for the people to draw benefits from. Handicaps are neither easily recognised nor readily acknowledged. People are normally tempted to sweep them under the rugs, put them out of sight, much less make attempts to mend. To our dismay we in Bangladesh even fail to recognise some of our assets, let alone take advantage from them.

Bangladesh has two great assets, fertile land and large population if one is ready to accept large population as an asset. What is needed is to know-how to make the best possible use of these two to draw maximum benefit. Fertile land is always taken as a great asset, but large population a severe handicap. Could this handicap be turned into an asset? The need of the time is to find the appropriate talents for making such a thing to happen.

The land-use in Bangladesh happens to be far short of our expectation to provide enough food for the large number of people the country holds. A great proportion of the population live below the poverty line as our food production is still far below the level expected from such fertile land. As for people they are far less productive due mainly to our inability to know and use their potential and the severe lack of opportunities. The question is why is it so. Why we fail to produce enough food for our population from this fertile land? There might be thousands of reasons and excuses for such failure put forward by the specialists in this field. It remains how far one would buy these excuses. There are enough scope open to use to compare this aspect with other countries and judge our ability. Also, in order to make the people productive, one should ponder over the constraints.

People of this country often hear two very popular expressions that are ceaselessly spelt out on papers, documents and in discus-

sions, meetings, public addresses, seminars or any other forum one could think of. These are "Poverty Alleviation" and "Human Resource Development".

What would be the reaction when people come across such comment that says 99 per cent of power and resources in this country are in the hands of one per cent of total population and 99 per cent of people do not have any access to those? That much for the poverty alleviation so far and one does not need to elaborate further.

As for human resources development, one could firmly say that every human being has some productive ability, either by virtue of intellectual faculty or physical skill they possess. Even through manual labour by sheer physical power, one could make enough contribution to the productivity of the

academicians. Thanks to Dr Mohammad Yunus, Bangladesh is now better known with any credibility to the outside world by Grameen Bank, more than anything else. Through the press and satellite transmission, one could see for himself how the image of Bangladesh has been enhanced by this scheme alone. The only other field that helped in brightening our image to some extent and made us feel proud was the drug policy once introduced by Bangladesh with certain boldness and courage. This policy was enacted and firmly sustained for much longer period than the attempts made by any other country including some developed ones against the intense pressure of multi-national companies.

ever unable to meet with the President and CMLA and was instead allowed to see the Principal Staff Officer. The PSO with the excuse of his deep involvement in power politics and pressure of work, left Dr Yunus with me to listen to his ideas and give my views on the scheme. I was not an economist nor had any opportunity to work in this field but I listened to him. He introduced the subject in such plain and simple way to understand, even by a novice like me in this field. I was highly impressed, more by the fact when I learned that he came from Chittagong University where he had just joined as a teaching staff. The more I listened to him, the more I felt the urge to know more. It was after ten at night when Dr Yunus left and I kept on wondering what he

course do not expect him to recall it after almost two decades. But I do cherish the privilege I had in meeting and discussing with him, face to face, the ideas that have now turned out to be so successful and famous, not only in this country but also far beyond our national boundary. The success of his scheme has provided the beacon of hope to the most downtrodden and neglected section of population. One could see and feel and success of how best the human resources, even at its lowest strata, could be made so productive. This remarkable success story alone is enough to eclipse all the exercise made so far on poverty alleviation and human resources development put together. Where the knowledge acquired from world famous institutions have failed this humble effort by the initiative of a single individual has succeeded without the application of standard concepts long established in this field. People have watched with interest and appreciation the interview given by Dr Yunus at the recent Beijing conference where he announced the inclusion of access to borrowing as one of the basic human rights. This surely deserves to be promoted by all in every forum worldwide.

One really cannot separate poverty alleviation from human resource development in as much as these two are so interlinked, each dependent on the other. Most of us would agree that poverty alleviation cannot be attained by handing out help or assistance only. This would turn it even worse by making the people more and more dependent on outside help instead of helping themselves. It would be the negation, not only to the meaning of poverty alleviation but would lower the self-esteem and dignity expected of a human being as a productive person who could stand on his feet. As for the aim of human resources development it is to improve the productive ability of a person and make him progressively more capable, not only to support himself but also to contribute, however small, to the progress of the society and the country.

Enough academic exercise on these two challenging aspects have already been taken care of and are still being pursued through ever-proliferating number of centres and institutes in the country. What this country, placed very low even in the list of LDCs, needs are definitely not words, documents or discussions but some deeds on the ground. It is about time we reckon this hard fact before it is too late and believe it or not it is already getting very late. We have enough academicians. Let us have from the many intellectuals and thinktanks the country has produced, some pioneers like Dr Yunus to venture in other untapped fields. Our intellectuals in their own right have wide exposures. Is it too much to expect from them some practical application of their knowledge? They are surely the ones who have the potential to show the way for others to follow.

What the Grameen Bank projects have proved, similar endeavours in other fields could dramatically change the whole concept of considering large population as handicap and turn it into great asset. A vast range of opportunities always exist in any society if one only looks for it. There are communities of people who have mastered in various skills through generations and Grameen Bank has already taken up some sectors like handloom, handicraft, fishery and other agro-based activities. Many sectors are still open that are under the vocational domain of such close-knit communities who, if properly organised and motivated, could be made into self-sustaining generative force. All that the country needs are only some pioneers with clear perspective, wide vision, creative ideas and above all practical ability to organise these communities of people into highly productive work force, thereby making them great assets instead of burden to the society. No amount of academic exercise will ever work unless some effort is made on the ground. People can do wonder only if they can be made to do.

The writer is a former UN official



Effort to overcome: How much the family needs they meet?

country. The female population who are much less literate by any standard than the males in the country, have already set examples through Grameen Bank projects how they could improve their lot within such a limited period. Grameen Bank with its diversified activities has already taken firm root on this poverty-stricken land of ours. It has proved that given the will and foresight anything could be achieved by people that might look impossible to

Only once I had the occasion to meet with Dr Yunus way back in 1977 and the opportunity to discuss his planned scheme when I was working on a short assignment at the seat of power. It was at Sena Bhaban in Dhaka Cantonment which then housed the office of the President and Chief Martial Law Administrator (CMLA) Dr Yunus came to present some ideas of his scheme to the then Chief Executive of the

was after. His scheme was still in embryonic state and he did not give a start by then. Little did I realise or foresee that one day this simple and unassuming person would create such world sensation with his ideas coming true against all odds and change the whole concept of established banking system, especially in borrowing and recovery process. I am sure Dr Yunus would not remember the occasion when I met with him and I of



Self-employment of sorts: Striving hard to sustain

Conference Close to Agreement on Toxic Pollution of Oceans

Jerry Stilkind writes from Washington

REPRESENTATIVE of more than 100 countries have reached agreement on the need to "expeditiously" reduce or eliminate the use of pesticides and certain other compounds that are a risk to human health.

The agreement reached at a conference here on marine pollution calls for negotiations to begin on a legally binding treaty that would reduce or end the use of what are called persistent organic compounds, which include the pesticide DDT, and PCBs (polychlorinated biphenyls) used in electrical equipment.

Delegates to the conference on land based sources of marine pollution reached the agreement within a few days of beginning their meeting October 23.

Scientists have determined that persistent organic compounds are toxic

and accumulate in sea life, making them potent sources of cancer in humans that eat a lot of fish from contaminated waters. Furthermore, the compounds often travel on winds and fall into the oceans far from the sources of the pollution.

Another major issue at the conference — one that has almost always stirred controversy in international environmental and development conferences — has been the insistence by developing countries that they need substantial financial help from the industrialized nations to take effective action.

But in the meetings leading up to this conference on marine pollution, many developed countries made clear that budgetary problems prevented them from making new financial commitments, particularly anything approaching estimates prepared by the World Bank. — USIS

IT'S a small patch of land, just 25 sq km in area. But in the Jaffna peninsula, it's a big enough prize for the Sri Lankan army to talk tough, the LTTE to posture with threats of retaliation. President Chandrika Kumaratunge to hope for another step in trying to swing her battered country towards accepting a radical plan for the devolution of power — a change from a unitary to a liberal federal system — which she is convinced can bring peace. And for the nation to cross its collective fingers yet again for a reprieve from chaos.

Chances of that happening seemed ever more remote with the two big hits the LTTE took early last fortnight. On October 1, the army overran LTTE positions in Jaffna and then retained a stretch of land deep in Tiger territory south-east of Palaly military base. Both sides took losses. And two days later, when the LTTE tried to hit back, the army's Operation Thunder Strike won out — the Tigers suffered over 200 casualties with about 250 injured in one of its worst reverses; the military lost 52 in the entire week. Soon after, government officials claimed dissension in enemy ranks, saying that LTTE supreme Velupillai Prabhakaran had fired his trusted intelligence chief Potu Amman and that Dominic, who runs the rebels' northern administration, was in trouble for em-

bezzlement.

So where does that leave every body? "Exactly where they were," says a respected Colombo-based political analyst, who declined to be identified. "The LTTE will hit back, so will the army, and so on. This is a no-win war."

That much has become pretty clear after years of severe clashes. But what makes the latest encounters different is that they leave Kumaratunge, more than Prabhakaran, little time to sort out her problems. The LTTE chief has survived numerous internal problems and there is no sign yet of him stopping — the latest setbacks are only expected to bring retaliation, as a similar army victory in July did, having already forced Kumaratunge to clamp censorship on coverage of military news and convince parliament to extend the state of emergency by another month.

Kumaratunge needs a compromise — fast. Gloom spread in Jaffna after the Government stand, but the President, who promised to give up her all powerful executive presidency by July this year, is facing a restive majority Sinhala population which has had enough of conflict and broken promises. On the other hand, she can't afford to lose mili-

Slaughter on the Path to Peace

Overrunning LTTE positions in Jaffna and risking retaliation, the army notches up major wins even as Kumaratunge reaffirms her resolve to push through her political package for the north

by P Jayaram in Colombo



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tary gains — a lesson learnt the hard way last year when a government-led ceasefire and peace talks with the LTTE backfired. She also staved off a crack in the ruling People's Alliance's hold earlier in the month when the Eelam People's Democratic Party (EPDP) — which supports the Government — threatened to pull out with its nine seats in a 113-112 situation in Parliament. The pressure of a political-solution-or-else, even as the opposition United Nationalist Party watches from the sidelines, remains. Says EPDP chief Douglas Devananda: "Without a political solution, we can't support this offensive."

A political solution is something Kumaratunge still swears by. Fresh off the offensive, at a meeting of trade-union leaders, she reiterated her stand. "The war cannot be won unless the Tamil people are guaranteed their rights as a community," she

told the gathering. "The Tamil youth carry cyanide not because they hate life, but because they want to protect their rights and identify as a community." This pitch may help to keep Tamil parties in the ranks as the devolution package — announced on August 3 — still needs a two-thirds majority in Parliament to become a law.

But even if that happens, she is stuck. Too much depends on making a point in Jaffna with stick to force the Tigers to talk peace, as much as devolution of power is a carrot. There is talk in defence circle of capitalising on military gains by making a push for the LTTE bastion of Jaffna town, backed in large part by Deputy Defence Minister Anuruddha Ratwatte's statement in the House that government control over Jaffna would be "re-established soon." Meanwhile, the army plans to keep up the of-

fensive right through the north-east monsoons, which many defence analysts see as bad timing. "We are prepared for the monsoons and we are going ahead with the operation," says a senior Lankan defence official, "even if rains and Sea Tigers (the highly trained naval arm of the LTTE) make our supply lines by air and sea difficult."

That, to some observers, is just the sort of attitude government forces should avoid, or pay the price as the army's July move did, when, besides recapturing lost ground and mauling the army, the LTTE scored a major hit by killing Brigadier Nalin Angammana, the army's eastern region commander. "You may plant the Lion flag in Jaffna to please the Sinhalese, but you will have to pull it down and run in two or three months unless you are adequately prepared," says former air force commander Harry Goonetilleke. The entire operation, tailored to the Government's political needs, may go up in smoke, he warns. "I am opposed to the military being used as cannon fodder for a political time-table."

Kumaratunge also runs the risk of her move backfiring if the army does push ahead: a takeover of Jaffna could cost thousands in civilian casualties and create about five lakh

refugees, say unofficial estimates. There are already signs of a setback in other ways. The army has relocated thousands of troops from the east to the north. And the LTTE has moved right in. Even officials admit privately that, besides Batticaloa, Amparai and the port town of Trincomalee on the eastern seaboard, most of the region is under Tiger control. Army sources say they were given a cryptic reply by the Government when they pointed this out — as did some MPs in Parliament — last fortnight: "You take care of the north."

It's a huge gamble, and the pressure is only increasing even as the country's newly resurgent and pro-military-solution Buddhist clergy turn up the heat. And there is a bizarre twist, resulting in another front for Kumaratunge. Barely days after the army push began, a letter addressed to "Sister Chandrika", authored by Dhanu, appeared in the LTTE mouthpiece Viduthalai Puligal. Dhanu is also the name of Rajiv Gandhi's deceased assassin. "You who won the election with slogans of peace," went part of the letter, "are including yourself in the list of Rajiv Gandhi, (former President Ranasinghe) Premadasa, (UNP leader Lalith) Athulathmudali, (former prime minister Gamini) Disanayake..." Kumaratunge is already trapped in the present. It would be a pity if history caught up with her.



Troops on the Jaffna front: Turning up the heat.

