

Economics of Mastani : Some Observations

by Kabir U Ahmad

"Mastani" certainly a dangerous crime and economists can bring out in a very meaningful and measurable way the damages it is doing to the economy and the society and can prescribe the degree of punishments commensurate with such damages taking into account the direct and indirect effects of such crimes on the society

It is a pleasure to read an article by Dr R H Khandker, a senior econometrician, planner and development economist...

Economic Effects of "Mastani"

Before analysing the effects of "Mastani", one has to define it first. In simple language, "mastans" are those who take away money or valuables from other individuals or institutions at gun point...

"Mastans" by agreeing to pay them a regular sum of money every month. The former (ie, the production slow down) reduces output while the latter (forced extraction of money) cuts into the profitability of the existing levels of output as well as savings of the entrepreneurs...

Should "Mastani" be Treated as an Economic Activity? The straight answer is "no", because when economists talk of an activity, they normally mean a legally approved activity of the society...

However, the paradox here is that if one places "Mastani" under the "Enterprise" head in the national income accounts producing "bads", then in the "Household" account it should reduce income, but "Mastan" households are having handsome amount of money (not economically defined 'income') to spend...

Should "Mastani" Remain in the Domain of Crimes Only?

Dr Khandker has concluded his article by saying that "Let it (ie Mastani) remain in the domain of crimes and not brought in to confuse economics". One has to respectfully differ with him on this...

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Economic Incentives and "Mastani" The other way that economics can analyse "Mastani" or crime is to see how and when an individual will have incentive to adopt an illegal activity or "Mastani".

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Political Dimensions of "Mastani" in Bangladesh It is a dangerous subject and it reminds one the epithet that "fools rush in where angels fear to tread".

How to Eradicate "Mastani"? How to eradicate this cancer from the fabric of the society? An answer to this question needs years of hard thinking, policymaking, commitment at the highest level of administration, planning and effective implementation of policies over decades.

colleges and do not find jobs, they continue with what they were doing before. Newspaper reports have it that there are independent locally-based "Mastan" groups who establish their authority to collect ransoms at gun points.

Balkan Vietnam-Syndrome

SOME experts call it "post-trauma stress syndrome", others refer to it as "Vietnamese syndrome-Serbian style".

Emotional residues of war, the memory of conflict, and the trauma of withdrawal from the tension of battle, are tugging at hearts and minds in Serbia.

The war in former Yugoslavia... will continue to exist in the hearts and minds of thousands and thousands of people who were its victims. Says Vuk Draskovic, leader of the Serbian Renewal Movement (SPO), the biggest anti-war opposition party in Serbia...

Draskovic made the comments at a recent panel discussion here. Participants in the panel discussion concluded that the economic destruction caused by four years of war, and the disintegration of the federal political system, would leave big scars on the mind of the nation.

Brutal episodes chronicled by today's newspapers headlines are likely to endure and become tomorrow's nightmares.

Several months ago, a drunk young man went to a psychiatric clinic in Belgrade and asked to be "cured". The doctor had a quick diagnosis — he told the man he was drunk. The man went outside, removed a pin from a

Four years of war has left deep emotional scars on the people of former Yugoslavia. Vesna Peric Zimonjic of Inter Press Service reports from Belgrade.

hand grenade threw his body on it, and blew himself to bits.

Another young man tossed a hand grenade into the back of a bus because he felt the people were talking too loud. One woman was killed. In another incident, a man went to his girlfriend's home and used an automatic rifle to kill her and her whole family.

All three were "volunteer guards" who had fought in Croatia and Bosnia for years, along with local Serbs. Experts say they all suffer from post-trauma stress syndrome.

Experts at the panel discussion noted similarities between some of these episodes and the "Vietnamese syndrome" suffered by US soldiers after the Vietnam War. Victims feel manipulated and used for the needs of daily politics of national leaders and politicians.

"The US government used to say that America was defended in Vietnam to explain its adventure to the soldiers... Belgrade used the similar sentence — Serbia is defended in Knin," said Dr Jovan Maric, a prominent Belgrade psychiatrist. Knin is the stronghold of rebel Croatian Serbs which was overrun by the Croatian army last August.

"Once the US soldiers saw they have been manipulated and the war was lost, their eyes opened. And the sober-

ing moment looks like the one here. People see that they have fought for nothing, that their national 'Serb ideas' were used and then disposed of," he said.

Official Serbia has backed the war in Bosnia since August 1994, when Serbian President Slobodan Milosevic, longing for international sanctions to be lifted, turned from war instigator to peacemaker politician.

Victims of wars — both soldiers and civilians — are often depressed, and many commit suicide. Although it was never officially admitted that Serbia was at war, thousands of people from Serbia proper volunteered and joined local Serbs in wars in Croatia and Bosnia since conflict erupted in former Yugoslavia in 1991.

Some believed the official propaganda that "Serbian national interest was at stake". Others went in search of fun and adventure. Experts say they all returned with problems related to the fighting.

Compounding the problem, said the experts, is the fact that official Serbian policy has changed from pursuing war, to the role of peacemaker adopted by Milosevic. "People are disappointed, disillusioned and feel manipulated," said one expert.

Official statistics on involvement of Serbs from Serbia proper in wars in Croatia and Bosnia were never released, but several

associations of "Serbian volunteers" but the number at 120,000 to 160,000 men.

Experts say the problem of hundreds of thousands of refugees who have fled war-torn areas only adds to the picture. Serbia has hosted some 400,000 refugees since 1991, including 200,000 who left Krajina when that region fell to Croatia.

"The first studies of those people show that they have almost lost the wish and the ability to adjust to the new situation, due to the shock they suffered. They are falling into the state of emotional stupor, they don't feel satisfied for being alive and have lost the joy of life," Maric said. "They have great fears for their future. One can say those people have suffered permanent damage of personality.

In Bosnia, "there is not a single man, regardless of national origin, who will not feel the mental consequences of war for a long time," said Maric.

A report in the Belgrade independent weekly Vreme cites 14 cases of random killings in Serbia proper since the autumn of 1991, in which 47 people died and dozens were injured.

Dr Aleksandar Vuco, psychiatrist from Belgrade Dragisa Misovic hospital, argues that the return of fighters into a deeply divided society caused major psychological troubles that lead to "Vietnamese syndrome" — Serbian style.

Rice Productivity Trend over the Current Century

by Dr Subash Dasgupta

BANGLADESH agriculture is land-based and synonymous with rice production. Aggregate production and per hectare yield of rice is all-important criteria to measure its development. In the years ahead issues related to rice production would dictate the direction and dimension of agricultural development.

In the 19th century, used to export 30000-40000 tons of rice annually. Constraints related to rice cultivation became evident during the 20th century. Between 1901 and 1947, foodgrain production remained stagnant. The population and cultivated area rose by 38 and 18 per cent respectively.

During this period (1901-1947) the annual output of foodgrain was constant but output from cash crops was notable (53 per cent). This resulted increase of agricultural output by 18 per cent. It was because Europeans getting permission to buy lands in undivided India first of all moved towards increasing the production of commercial crops to protect their own interests.

Rice productivity did not show any consistent decline or increase. The possible reasons for stagnation yield over the first-half of the century might be due to colonial regimes, exploitation of peasantry under the system of Zamindari, lack of technical know-how, etc.

Besides, rising and falling of empires, deteriorating law and order situations also caused lower productivity of rice. However, the newly developed countries at their early stage of development prospered agriculturally by using improved varieties of foodgrains. It was the era of beginning of using HYVs in agriculture which unfortunately did not affect profoundly our agriculture.



was 0.8 per cent which was almost similar to foodgrain production. As a result, the country did not face any food crisis during British period. We started importing rice since 1947-48 of the order of 5602 tons. After creation of India and Pakistan we could not have any irrigated lands and use of improved varieties and chemical fertilisers were nil. Research works on Boro rice were initiated after 1947. It is true that at that time more emphasis was laid in increasing rice production than cash crops.

Whereas Japan, Taiwan and China registered the highest yield record in rice during this period which helped them to become developed countries. Some major reasons of low yield of rice in our country were massive migration of minority community to India have resulted to loss the land productivity records and proper idea about crop suitability as well as cropping patterns in the new landowners; well to do farmers were more inclined to buying lands in order to become land lords which was accelerated through the Basic Democracy concept of the then Pakistan government; number of ab-

sentee landlords and thus small holding farmers started increasing gradually. As a result, the land productivity was gradually impoverished due to lack of investment in land and improvement and it was directed towards exploitation of lands. Furthermore, fragmentation of land holdings, systems of share cropping, increase in cropping intensity, lack of technical know how etc., also contributed to low yield of rice.

But in the early '50s a miracle variety (Pajam) was evolved through Indica-Japonica hybridisation programme. This variety was suitable for cultivation in all the three seasons. Massive cultivation of Pajam variety in early '60s and introduction of IR-8 variety in the late 60s have resulted in increasing rice productivity to some extent in spite of declining soil fertility alarmingly.

Unfortunately, the concept perceived during the '60s for increasing production appeared to be the same in this period also. In fact, rice productivity trends in the countries which already achieved remarkable success in this direction were almost similar to our country's trends at the beginning of this century. But at the end of the century, we see that they outstripped us in terms of rice productivity manifold which helped them to become prosperous countries. So in the future we should not miss any opportunity that would help us increase the productivity of rice crop.

agricultural development was the expansion of previous efforts. As a result, problems of productivity remained unsolved. Between 1971-72 and 1991-92 we were able to increase our rice productivity by 2.4 per cent annually whereas the population growth rate at the same period was 2.7 per cent. One weighty reason for low yield of rice is that in developing HYV major attention were given to climatic conditions than stress situations. The later one is more crucial in increasing yield than former one. We had also missed the scope for using Hybrid rice technology in rice cultivation. Absence of scientific approaches in input (irrigation, fertiliser, pesticides, skill, etc) utilisation and management is another cause of low productivity. Thailand, the Philippines, Indonesia, Vietnam, etc., are some of the countries which registered significant achievement in increasing rice productivity during this period.

Hence, over the century, rice productivity has not increased to our expectation though yield growth were the primary contributor to rice output growth in many countries of the world through these periods. Lower productivity of rice brought serious consequences to our life. If the present trend continues, a grave hardship is unavoidable in near future. There is no other alternative except to increase per hectare yield of rice and thus attain self-sufficiency in food and vacant scarcelands for cultivation of other crops. Produce more rice with less land will be dominating concern of the future. Our present rice production systems are performing below their potential. Rice production system will be sustainable if we will be able to increase the per hectare yield by 40 per cent from its present level or if we ensure three per cent annual growth rate which is quite achievable supported by proper planning and management backed by scientific policies of government.

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Garfield®

by Jim Davis



Table with columns: Year, Ausrl (t/ha), Aman (t/ha), Boro (t/ha), Average (t/ha). Rows: 1947-1948, 1971-1972, 1981-1982, 1991-1992, 1992-1993.

Population and Rice Productivity Index (1947-48=100)

Table with columns: Year, Population index, Rice production index, Total rice area index, Per capita rice production index. Rows: 1947-1948, 1971-1972, 1981-1982, 1991-1992, 1992-1993.