

Attracting FDI

Korean Prime Minister Lee Sung-soo in a meeting with our visiting state minister for foreign affairs, Abul Hossain Chowdhury, said "There is no doubt that investors from Republic of Korea will go to Bangladesh in a bigger way to take advantage of the new investment climate there." Coming from no less a person than the Prime Minister himself, it is no doubt a very significant expression on the investment climate of our country, at a time when we need such indications of confidence very badly. It needs to be stressed that immediately following assumption of power, Sheikh Hasina's government has launched a vigorous campaign to attract FDI. The PM herself has led the way by addressing the potential investors everywhere she has visited, making it an essential part of her tour, not just an adjunct to it.

The question that we would like to ask today is that, are we taking sufficient preparation at home commensurate with the vigorous call that we are making internationally? It is not what we say during our trips abroad, but more the situation on the ground which will determine ultimately how much FDI will come in here. It is our view that our internal preparation is not measuring up to our claims abroad. It is true that procedural wrangles are being simplified and that BOI today is a far more dynamic and vigorous organisation than before, yet the totality of the investment process still remains bogged in a quagmire of permissions and signatures that is a sure turn off for any foreign investor. Law and order situation, though improved, is far from sufficient for the challenge. Corruption is something that the government knows well about and is at its wit's end as to what to do. The chaos in our banking and financial institutions is also a turn off. The commitment of our bureaucracy and the efficiency of our professionals remain to be tested.

It is in these circumstances that the government has launched its vigorous drive to attract FDI. We feel that a more vigorous and coordinated approach needs to be taken, and the existing problems need to be solved very fast if we are really to live up to the promise we are making. The recent complaints by the Japanese about how long it takes for decisions to translate into actions should serve as a stark reminder as to where reality is compared to our wishes and claims.

A Bureaucratic Crime

There is a set-up called the Chittagong Development Authority. Whoever lives in Chittagong cannot but be aware of the existence of this organisation. Not as familiar is the Chittagong Metropolitan Master Plan, for CMMP has yet to make a start on its 1000-crore Taka project. CDA has a wing, its Planning Department, which drew out the CMMP at a cost of some 13-crore Taka. The smooth and efficient functioning of the Planning Department is essential to a successful execution of the CMMP.

All 28 that man the department, including nine specialists, are not getting salary for the last five months. This kind of administrative incompetence or failure was not unknown in the past. But even then this could not happen in key areas of performance-oriented projects and in broad daylight, so to say. With improvement in administration over the years such news has become a rarity. Privately run schools and colleges and newspapers were once the main source of such failures which owed mostly to capital crisis. Even these have recovered very impressively indeed. There is no question of the CDA wing's suffering from funds constraint. This has been an ideal case of bureaucratic procrastination.

If the 28 have outlived their use for CDA and CMMP they should be asked to go with whatever it needs to say so. If not, they must be paid on the dot. There cannot be any other position in the matter. But bureaucracy or the game of file movement without anyone with a mind touching it, improvises so many imponderable variations in between the two positions. The question is whether bureaucracy is essentially such or there occur at times and in unpredictable areas strange derelictions. Be whatever that may, when people suffer, they do not do so for the good or bad of a system but because of the good or otherwise of personnel at the relevant point of the system.

One of bureaucracy's crimes is that it jealously guards its members from exposure to punishment. It starts to rot as soon as it turns itself into some esoteric unanswerable community like the Free Masons. The files in the present case has reportedly got stuck in the Finance Ministry. Our very responsive and no-nonsense Finance Minister will no doubt untie the knot in a jiffy. But that's not enough. The persons sitting over the file must be made to wait five months to get their salary or they wouldn't learn. Throughout God's creation one reaps what he sows. Why should the bureaucrats be an exception?

Thanks to British Airways

It is a small news but reflects a very laudable aim. British Airways donated Tk. 1 lakh to Unicef, Bangladesh, for its programmes here. The money was raised through the airline's global 'Sleigh Ride' programmes for the children of the world. It is not the money that attracted our attention but the sentiment, sensitivity and the management's determination to follow through on both. For an airline to take a fund raising initiative as a part of its regular operation shows a social awareness that is really praiseworthy. We would like to thank British Airways for this gesture.

This mixing of business with social responsibility is something that we most vigorously support. As the whole world is now going towards market economy and free enterprise, big corporations and leading entrepreneurs will have to exhibit similar sentiments and awareness for us to build a better world.

We take this opportunity to draw the attention of our own big business houses to take up similar projects to help our needy, especially the children. It is our view that our community and society leaders need to think a lot more about philanthropy than they have been doing so far. We believe a lot can be done only if we think sincerely and creatively about it. Can we start a serious soul search on this matter?

Rice: Susceptibility, Supply and Security

If the supply falls shy, price would jump seriously, blowing out poverty alleviation programmes in LDCs. LDCs thus need to restrict international trade in rice although this might hurt the high income-food deficit countries.

Suppose all Asian countries — producers and consumers of 90 per cent of world's rice — take a vow to stop producing the 'unprofitable' rice and release resources to more profitable economic activities. They decide to ensure food security through imports from the international market. What would be the likely consequences of such 'efficiency first' consideration? There will be some Asian countries who would be able to purchase rice at the ruling price, even at a much higher price. Consumers of Japan and Korea are already paying many times more for domestically produced rice consumption than the ruling international price. But who will produce the exportable surplus? What would be the impact of rising food prices on inflation and other macro-economic variables?

If Asian nations decide to embrace economic efficiency as an ultimate goal and stop producing rice, uncertainty might grip the world market. The world rice market is very thin, only four per cent of the rice produced is being traded. This can be compared with 20 per cent for wheat and 11 per cent for coarse grains. Variable nat-

ural conditions would exacerbate the fluctuations further. Here again, the influence of giant economies of Asia — China, India and Indonesia — on the world rice market should be accounted for. Interestingly, the size of the total international rice market is equivalent to 13 per cent of the rice

production in Japan that faced abnormal weather. Theory says that, a rise in the price of the commodities, given other things equal, should promote their supply. In the event of a price hike in rice market, we can also expect supply to respond. It is estimated that there are 20 million

hectares of potentially suitable rice land in river valleys in west and southern Africa of which only 15 per cent are currently cultivated. In tropical South America, rice cultivation could be extended to an additional 20 million ha. However, the exploitation of these unused or sub-optimally used land would require a big rise in rice prices. The exploitation would also hinge on government's capacity to invest on land reclamation and the development of marketing infrastructure. The unit cost of production and the marketing margin are reported to be already higher in Africa and Latin America, as compared to Asia, and gives that the demand for rice is also growing fast. Asia's hope of getting exportable surplus from those countries might get a big jolt.

In the Asian realm, only Myanmar and Cambodia could generate additional exportable surplus to help their Asian fellows. But this capacity is subject to massive investment on land reclamation, expansion of irrigation, technologies for improvement in rice quality and development of marketing infrastructure. Thailand's age-old comparative advantage of producing exportable surplus is reported to be eroding in the events of rising farm wages and opportunity costs of family labour — a process that Japan, Korea, Taiwan faced over the last three decades. Growing internal demand in Vietnam might also eat up its own surplus very soon.

Free trade in rice might not hurt the richer echelons of the Asian consumers (e.g. of Korea, Taiwan, Japan) because they

have the capacity to pay more for rice if required. A free market in rice might appear friendly to the affluent because the market then distributes the scarce supplies in favour of the affluent who are ready to pay the high price. It is the poor of the low income countries who would be the eventual victims of a crisis in staple food. Any rise in the international food market would significantly contribute to domestic inflation and put pressures on industrial wages. That would shake industrial profits and competitive edge.

Available evidences tend to suggest that rice production must increase by another 270 million tons over the next three decades to meet world's growing demand. If the supply falls shy, price would jump seriously, blowing out poverty alleviation programmes in LDCs. LDCs thus need to restrict international trade in rice although this might hurt the high income-food deficit countries. Asian countries need to adopt a strategy of mutual collaboration to curb population growth, strengthen agricultural research and develop irrigation and marketing infrastructure with a view to meeting the crisis in the offing.

From a paper by Dr Mahabub Hossain (IRRI) 'Rice Supply-Demand Projections'

Beneath the Surface

by Abdul Bayes



needed in China and eight per cent of the combined consumption of Asia and China. If these two countries alone, for some reasons or the other, decide to meet only one-tenth of their rice demand through imports, the additional demand, so generated, might rock the boat in the international rice market. Let us recall that during October 1993 to April 1994, world prices of quality rice surged just in response to a 25 per cent reduction

in production in Japan that faced abnormal weather. Theory says that, a rise in the price of the commodities, given other things equal, should promote their supply. In the event of a price hike in rice market, we can also expect supply to respond. It is estimated that there are 20 million

RESOLVING CONFLICTS

Role of Bilateral, Sub-regional, Regional Dialogues and Co-operation

The examples of the European Community, North American Free Trade Arrangement, ASEAN and the Asia Pacific Economic Co-operation forum demonstrate that irrespective of the size and relative economic strength of nations, all member-states stand to gain from such arrangements, writes Abul Ahsan

In their own context the nations of western Europe and South East Asia have demonstrated what regional co-operation can do to help resolve old and difficult issues and problems. The Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) was set up in 1967 in the background of Singapore falling out of Malaysian Federation, confrontation between Indonesia and Malaysia and on going territorial dispute between Malaysia and the Philippines over the control of Sabah. However, since ASEAN came into being the member-states began to interact closely and regularly with each other. They came to realise better that they share common interests, views and perceptions on a number of important regional and international issues including internal and external security matters trade investment etc., which could be better addressed through joint action. Their priority and preoccupation started a change. Many differences and conflicts which hitherto separated them started to disappear. In fact, during about three decades of its existence a sense of regional identity that ASEAN has been able to establish in the area are considered to be its best achievement overshadowing even its success in the economic and other fields.

The experience of the European Community (EC) even more dramatically highlights the role of regional co-operation in conflict resolution. It began with the joint control and supervision of production of coal and steel by the two age-old adversary countries, France and Germany, along with Italy and the BENELUX through the mechanism of the European Steel and Coal Community (ESCC) established in 1953. The European Economic Community (EEC) was formed in 1958 on the experience and success of the ESCC. The Community is the basic foundation on which peace friendship and the unprecedented economic prosperity of the war ravaged Europe came to be built. The rewarding experience of shared prosperity and social stability the absence of which threatened western Europe in the aftermath of the war over-shadowed the past history confrontation and animosity. The new United Europe whose membership including former socialist countries aspire is a testimony to the success of the idea of building peace through co-operation.

It is however true that the lessons of South East Asia or Europe cannot be applied universally. The two organisations and the political and security context in which they were conceived and developed have their own peculiarities. But the contact and dialogue that co-operation make possible and the vested interest that successful co-operation creates cannot but impact positively on the process of reconciliation and understanding among nations anywhere.

SAARC

The Charter of The South Asian Association for Regional Co-operation (SAARC) specifically excludes bilateral and contentious issues from its agenda. Even the SAARC has provided unique opportunity to heads of government, ministers and senior representatives of member-states regularly to meet and exchange views on subjects of common concern. In the past, leaders used the opportunity bilaterally to discuss even such sensitive subjects as Kashmir, South Asian nuclear issue, Tamil question and water disputes. These discussions in many cases helped manage and contain some explosive situations and provided for con-

structive follow-up action and even agreements. There are suggestions from different quarters for the creation of a framework for crisis management within SAARC but at this point in time the idea does not seem to enjoy support from some quarters within the organisation.

Potential of Sub-regional Co-operation in South Asia

Because of certain peculiarities sub-regional co-operation in South Asia seem to hold good potential for improving relations and solving some contentious issues among the neighbouring countries. No doubt any such co-operation can be best organised under the overall framework of SAARC.

From sub-regional point of view South Asia can be divided into three distinct areas. The north-west comprising Pakistan and the adjoining areas of India, the South comprising concerned Indian states, Sri Lanka and the Maldives, and the north-east which includes Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal and

part of India. In each of these sub-regions there are common resources which in varying degrees are subjects of controversy and dispute. Joint exploitation of some of these resources to the extent possible and mutually agreeable can both increase benefit to the people of all the countries and at the same time promote peace and reconciliation. The problems of floods, droughts, and environmental degradations which cause so much of suffering every year lend themselves to sub-regional approaches better than individual or bilateral action. Any movement in this direction is bound to positive on the other ongoing accusations and counter accusations including those involving alleged illegal cross border movement of people, support and training to tribal insurgents etc.

It may be underlined that India and Pakistan were able to conclude the Indus Water Treaty in spite of many outstanding problems between them which still defy solution. The benefit from the treaty can be greatly

enhanced by further provision for building dams to provide irrigation, mitigation of floods and power generation. The current moves by both India and Pakistan to bring natural gas from the Middle East and Central Asia can be better organised and duplicated avoided through mutual co-operation. Similarly opportunities for trade, investment, tourism etc., are quite substantial both in this sub-region as well as in the southern part of South Asia.

In the North-East which is both most densely-populated and relatively poor, the potential for improving inter-state relations through joint development of common resources is very obvious. The Himalayas and the river system represented by the Ganges, Brahmaputra and the Meghna decisively influence the economic, social and environmental condition of the area, the hydro-electric potential existing in Bhutan, Nepal and India which is variously estimated between 150,000-200,000 MW can meet the growing needs of the area and reduce its heavy and grow-

ing outside dependence. Through efficient planning and management and by building dams, reservoirs and other structures based on sub-regional co-operation and consultation, it is possible to address the problem of floods, provide increased and improved facilities for irrigation and navigation and reverse environmental degradation. A successful breakthrough in the exploitation of the water resources can also go a long way in removing many of the problems currently impeding socio-economic development in the region. Side by side this may pave the way for co-operation in the joint development and use of port facilities, road, rail and water ways for the common benefit of all the people in the area. The subject has been a matter of investigation and study in recent years by both regional and foreign scholars who have come out with positive conclusions.

Conclusion

The examples of the European Community, North American Free Trade Arrangement, ASEAN and the Asia Pacific Economic Co-operation forum demonstrate that irrespective of the size and relative economic strength of nations, all member-states stand to gain from such arrangements. South Asia, which has long lagged behind most regions of the world in several fields, can greatly benefit from the experience of others.

The writer, former SAARC Secretary General, is Vice President of the Independent University, Bangladesh.

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OPINION

Thoughts on Curriculum Development

Mufti Md Ibrahim

The result of higher secondary certificate examinations has recently been published and no doubt that it was discouraging as well as disappointing, for about two-thirds students have cut sorry figure. In fact, this negative result is mainly due to the faults in the curriculum. It is the failure of both the curriculum as well as instructional aspects of the curriculum. Curriculum makers should be feeling ashamed of this unwanted situation. The students alone should in no way be blamed.

What will be the fate of this large number of pupils who could not come out successful? Most of them will undoubtedly feel themselves as burdens of the families and the society. But if the curricula could have been psychomotor-oriented, pupils could provide themselves for self-employment. In fact a successful curriculum will have both the arrangements for higher education and self-employment.

It should also be remembered that curriculum does not mean the textbooks only. It includes all other facilities like teaching aids, classrooms, teachers, furniture, playgrounds, hostels, libraries, laboratories, co-curricular activities, evaluation and so on. These are the ways and means to implement a curriculum. But in most of the cases instructional aspect of curriculum is not thought as per the curricular aspect of the curriculum. The outcome will be like this year's HSC results. Our curriculum makers give importance to the curricular aspects much more than the instructional aspect. Even it is not taken into consideration the level for which the curriculum is being developed.

The present secondary curriculum can be cited as an example which is not up to the level. The curriculum is not as per age, ability and talents of the students at the secondary stage. Most of the curricular aspects in the textbooks have been developed only to lead the pupils for higher studies. In fact, 10 to 15 per cent of pupils of this stage may avail such opportunity. The fate of the rest is to lead a life of frustration.

The present secondary curriculum requires special attention for the children outside the institutions too. It means a big

amount of additional expenses which a few number of parents can afford. Many children remain out of school care, showing poor results. Very often pupils practice unfair means in the examinations. This is nothing but another unwanted gift of the improper curriculum. Even teachers of most of the institutions cannot carry the present secondary curriculum on smoothly. If teachers cannot take curriculum with confidence, how can the pupils go through it?

Most of the schools do not have subject-teachers for all the subjects. Masters degree holders are seldom found, specially in the rural areas, where 80 per cent schools are situated. In the rural areas — even in a good number of urban areas — the picture is: physics is taught by the biology teacher, biology is taught by the chemistry teacher, mathematics is done by the Bangla teacher and agriculture is taught by the drawing teachers.

The question is: are the schools ready to cut with the curriculum of higher physics, mathematics and so on? It is the responsibility of the curriculum makers to conduct situation analysis, that is, to ascertain a real picture about the institutions — its physical facilities along with the availability of teachers before developing any curriculum. With this study curriculum makers should plan on what whom how and who to teach?

Actually, there are five important elements to develop a successful curriculum. These are: a) aims and objectives, b) selecting contents, c) selecting learning experiences, d) integration and articulation of contents, and e) evaluation. A successful curriculum development is dependent on the successful development of objectives. Behavioural objectives should be used to frame curriculum, because these are observable and measurable. To denote behavioural objectives action verbs like — to tell, to narrate, to examine, to compare, to explain and so on, but the verbs like to know, to understand and so on should be avoided. In fact through education, teachers must bring behavioural changes among the

learners. All other elements of curriculum development should be conducted on the basis of objectives otherwise, the curriculum has got no alternative but to collapse. Therefore, it is very much important to give deep thought in deciding the objectives. If through evaluation and objectives are not achieved, it should be assumed that faults lies either with contents or with the objectives. If an objective for class III is developed as the children of class III will be able to prepare oxygen in the laboratory, in the true sense, such behavioural change cannot be expected from the pupils at this level of education. So, fruitfulness of curriculum lies with the fruitful objectives.

Primary level of students cannot be given the curriculum of secondary level, secondary level of students cannot be offered a curriculum of the higher secondary level or degree level of curriculum. It should be kept in mind that different levels of education have been made on the basis of age, merit and ability of the learner. No credit goes to anybody if curriculum of higher level is imposed upon a lower level of education. On the contrary, it creates problems to the students, parents, teachers and the society as a whole.

The failure of curriculum can easily be avoided if the curriculum is treated with the following steps before its implementation. These are: 1) try-out of the curriculum, 2) teachers' training, and 3) ensuring physical facilities. Try-out is nothing but a preliminary evaluation of the curriculum, which may be done in a small number of schools representing all grades, covering both urban and rural areas, to find out not only its effectiveness, but also its faults, defects, limitations are measured from the root levels. With the findings the curriculum is changed and modified, and corrections, additions, omissions are made to make it acceptable. After this, teachers are called for training on the new curriculum. During the training periods, additional suggestions are found out from the teachers. It too helps to make the curriculum more effective. In the light of the above two steps, physical

facilities in various institutes can be chalked out to ensure their availability.

In the past, Esho Nije Kart (let us do it ourselves) in the science curriculum of the lower secondary level was not successful, for the curriculum was not treated with these three elements. So was the case with the agricultural education of 1974. Similar approach has been taken to introduce the recent secondary curriculum. No try-out and no teachers' training before the implementation have been done. But after the implementation of a curriculum teachers' training is being conducted which is not at all logical. Because once a curriculum is implemented it cannot be withdrawn until new budget is allocated in spite of its demerits and non-acceptability.

Secondary curriculum is not found as per level for another important reason which is: the textbooks are written by the college and university teachers. School teachers are not given preference. But it should be remembered that the school teachers or teachers of this level are well-acquainted with the realities of the level they are working for. It has been observed that in a group of four teachers as writers, only one belongs to school, the rest are from colleges or universities. If curriculum makers want and desire to develop a curriculum as per level of education, teachers of that level should be chosen as writers in greater number. But one college or university teacher is to be included in the textbook preparation as a subject specialist.

Conclusion may be drawn with the view to develop a fruitful but a curriculum as per level following considerations should strictly be kept in mind: a) Deciding behavioural objectives; b) Selecting contents and learning experiences; c) Organisation and articulation of contents and learning experiences; d) Try-out of the curriculum; e) Teachers' training; f) Implementation of the curriculum; g) Evaluation of the curriculum; h) Above all selection of writers must come from the root level along with a subject specialist from college or university level.

The writer is a lecturer at the Dhaka Teachers' Training College.