

Cabinet Directives

The widely-shared concern over tardy development work has now ruffled the feathers of the centre-stage apparatus of the government which is obviously the Cabinet in a parliamentary form of government. A stock-taking cabinet meeting on Monday over the pace of ADP implementation recorded after the seventh month of AL rule ended on a note of reprimand for the plodding contributions of the bureaucracy behind it. The focal-point of attention flashed around the unmitigated rigma role characterising implementation of government decisions understandably taken at the highest political levels to accelerate the pace of development.

If one had a catalogue of 'government decisions' in each ministry awaiting implementation, one would have been in a position to delineate the responsibilities for non-compliance; but then it is crystal-clear that the overly large number of signatures needed to be appended to the papers as they travel up and down, is causing most of the delay. There is the sitting on files in slothful indifference in tandem with a *querimania*. If one can so coin a word. Queries result from over-caution which in turn reflects a certain lack of initiative and drive. The government needs to enforce a file-clearing time-table in each of its ministries. After the file-work is done accountability will have to be ensured at the field level which presents another set of problems to be dealt with.

The cabinet meeting in question has yielded clear-cut directives for the Cabinet Secretary, Principal Secretary to the Prime Minister, and the Establishment Secretary to use their experiences in pinpointing exactly where the implementation processes got caught up in bureaucratic tangles. They will be helped in this exercise by inputs received from the various departmental secretaries who are also under cabinet instructions to file reports on their respective ministries with suggestions for improvement and remedy appended thereto.

Since their reports will be of a self-analytical nature these would be highly valued when filed with the government. The secretaries for their part are urged to speak up with an open mind in regard to both the bearings political decisions are having on their functioning as well as the vibrations off their handling of the donor-aided projects. Because we want all the cards placed on the table for arriving at a package of solutions that has been eluding us so far.

Trouble at ZIA

Unruly taxi drivers attacked on-duty Ansars injuring a number of them while on a rampage at the Zia International Airport (ZIA) on Monday. The taxi drivers had really targeted the Ansars following an incident in which one member of the latter intercepted a microbus on the flyover to the airport building for security reasons. Clearly the incident should not have sparked off the violence it did, but the driver being a member of a taxi drivers' association thought he could flout the security rules at his sweet will. So he did not feel any qualm or compunction before resorting to — as most organisations are habituated to abusing — the collective rabble power. If we go by the taxi drivers' earlier record at the ZIA and closely observe the sequel to the sudden explosion of their anger, we can understand that the cab drivers were looking for an excuse to create troubles.

The truth is that the taxi drivers more often than not resent any legal binding or discipline that might curb their freedom of movement. But at the same time we have to ensure that there is a methodical application of rules. If strict discipline is enforced at the ZIA, the taxi drivers could abhor this because their vested interests cannot be served in such a situation. In an earlier incident too, drivers of different types of vehicles united together to foil the authority's move to bring order in and around the ZIA.

So the message is clear: there is an undeclared competition within our society to flout laws and give a damn to discipline. At the ZIA, in the very least, we can and should make a difference in the trend. After all, the only international airport of ours presents the nation's face to the outside world. We must not let our national image down simply because of a few organised ruffians who are out to make the most of a chaotic situation at the airport. Let the process begin there and gradually spread in other areas of our life.

Put the Records Straight

Now that the government has come up with a press note on the sale of text books for primary school and some irregularities involving their distribution, all controversies about the issue should come to rest. But unfortunately, the government version of the story has not addressed all the questions. One definite question it has adequately answered though is about the distribution of both old books and new books together. The aid agencies with whose financial support the books are printed have advised that one old book out of three and two old books out of six could be the right proportion for distribution.

On the key question of illegal sale of those books in open market, the government claims that an investigation has got underway. The government has, however, no knowledge whether more books than the planned numbers have been printed by any quarters or not. Reports on open sale of those books were carried in different dailies. Why the government failed to act instantly is a mystery. How did the books meant only for free distribution get on to the shelves of book stores? Is it too difficult to nab the culprits?

We do not question the government's intention or the validity of its distribution policy, but what we find inexcusable is its failure to act timely and catch the corrupt elements who have sabotaged the government's good policy. They must be punished. Let the government assert that such corruption will not be rewarded or tolerated in the future.

D Minus 5: Countdown or Meltdown?

The pre-elections polls show that the PPP suffered mightily because of the 3 years Zardari reign. Its vote bank has been eaten into mainly by Imran Khan's TI in all the Provinces but especially by Ghinwa Bhutto's PPP (SB) in Sindh

THE third and final Pathfinder Poll (16-25 Jan 97) ascertained the preference of the electorate in 75 cities and towns on a much more comprehensive basis, including most of the rural areas not fully covered in the two earlier polls confined to only 30 cities and towns. Two vital queries had been added, viz 1) whether elections or accountability first? and 2) the voter preference for candidates in different constituencies? In Punjab, Sindh and NWFP a majority did want accountability first but over a slight majority (5 per cent) of the populace favoured elections first, mainly because in the urban areas of Sindh, mostly the deprived MQM, wanted elections first in overwhelming numbers.

The translation of voter preference to seat acquisition by political parties remains a somewhat inexact science in Pakistan, particularly because of the 'first past the post' system. Imran Khan's Tehrik-i-Insaf (TI) displays nationwide support of almost 1 per cent, averaging about the same in all the Provinces, but has only 3 seats projected in the National Assembly (NA) to show for it. In the NA seat for the Islamabad Capital Territory, Benazir's Pakistan People Party (PPP) is ahead at 38 per cent to Mian Nawaz Sharif's Pakistan Muslim League (PML) (N) at 32 per cent with TI a distant third at 22 per cent. The PPP vote has been buoyed by PML (N) turnout MNA. Haji Nawaz Khokhar's vote bank going to PPP as well as the fact that PPP candidate Nayyar Bukhari has always been a strong candidate even in previous NA elections.

However there are indications that Khokhar's supporters may not vote his line and will still vote PML (N). Out of the 1765 people who responded to questions in the Punjab in 34 cities and towns, a solid 42 per cent supported PML (N) with only 21 per cent for PPP and 3 per cent for it's PML (Junejo) ally, making a total of 24 per cent for the Pakistan Demo-

cratic Front (PDF), the PPP-PML (J) alliance. The TI followed at 16 per cent with non-contestant Jamaat-e-Islami (JI) at 4 per cent and Ghinwa Bhutto's PPP (Shaheed Bhutto) at 2 per cent. In actual seat counts for the NA in the Punjab, PML (N) is favoured to win about 73 seats while PPP is ahead in 22 seats with PML (J) expected to get 3 seats. For the Punjab Assembly consisting of 240 seats, PML (N) with 141 seats has an overwhelming lead over PPP's 61 with ally PML (J) getting only around 8 seats. It's 16 per cent support Province-wide in Punjab gets the TI only one seat. In the NWFP, PML (N) at 23 per cent is leading in voter preference of the 577 voters approached in 17 cities and towns, slightly over the PPP at 22 per cent but when you add ANP's 14 per cent to PML (N), the grand total (37 per cent) of the alliance is much more than the PDF count of 27 per cent when including PML (J)'s 5 per cent.

TI is at 17 per cent, JI (9 per cent), PPP (SB) 5 per cent with others such as Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (Fazlur Rahman) clocking in with 6 per cent votes concentrated in certain areas. PML (N) is projected to get 9 NA seats and its ally ANP 6 seats while PPP has 4 and its PDF ally PML (J) 1 seats. The JUI (F) should get 2 seats. For the Provincial Assembly which has 80 seats, the results are startling as PML (N) despite leading in voter preference (more than 6 percentage points) agreed to give away more constituencies to ANP to preserve the alliance. Result is the ANP should get 30 seats while PML (N) only 14, PPP has 10 and PML (J) 4 seats. JUI (F) has 5, but there are a large number of independents who may get elected, as much as 14. In Sindh where 966 voters were requested to give their choices to a menu of various questions in 17 cities and towns, both PPP and PML (N) had equal support

at 21 per cent except that PML (N) support was spread throughout the Province as was the 12 per cent support of TI but the PPP support along with PML (J) at 4 per cent was mostly focussed in the rural areas. PPP (SB) clocked in with mainly rural 11 per cent support, most of it because of the crossing over of mainline PPP rebels. Caretaker Chief Minister Mumtaz Bhutto's Sindh National Front (SNF) has little electoral support but would get about 4-5 seats in the Provincial elections because of seat adjustment with PPP (SB). In contrast, most MQM support (17 per cent) is in their major urban strongholds of Karachi and Hyderabad. This translates into

each with PML (J) at 16 per cent and PPP at 11 per cent. A large number of voters (13 per cent) were still undecided, while PPP (SB) had 3 per cent support, JI 4 per cent and MQM 5 per cent. In seat count, however, the results are mostly area/tribe represented. For the NA, PPP, JUI (F) and Nawab Akbar Bugti's Jamhoori Watan Party (JWP) stand to get 2 seats each, while Balochistan National Party (BNP) headed by Sardar Ataulah Mengal, Balochistan National Movement (BNM) and Balochistan National Movement (Hayee) (BNM (H)) and Pakhtoonkhwa Milli Awami Party (PKMAP) 1 seat each. While in the Balochistan Assembly of 40 seats, the fragmen-

with 14 seats and PPP (SB) with 7 seats will join the ruling coalition with a number of independents. The FATA tribals are likely to follow suit. Mian Nawaz Sharif is, therefore, on course to lead the Federal Government with a comfortable majority in the NA.

The PML (N) with about 141 seats projected in the Punjab Assembly is clearly placed to establish the government in the Punjab while an ANP-PML (N) alliance is on course to form the government in the NWFP. Despite the surprisingly strong projected PPP showing (42 seats) in Sindh, one expects it to be in the Opposition with the cobbling together of a post-elections alliance of MQM with PML (N), PPP (SB) and SNF with a number of independents joining in with one of the political parties in the ruling coalition. In Balochistan, who will form the government is anybody's guess as the permutations and combinations thereof among the parties is quite mind-boggling. Maybe Nawab Zulfikar Ali Magsi can repeat his last Houdini act as Chief Minister, maybe Nawab Akbar Khan Bugti's JWP will lead the alliance. It is also quite possible BNP's Sardar Ataulah Khan Mengal can be the leader of a new coalition. In any case the fragmentation of parties makes any safe guess impossible. Balochistan will have more of the same.

The pre-elections polls show that the PPP suffered mightily because of the 3 years Zardari reign. Its vote bank has been eaten into mainly by Imran Khan's TI in all the Provinces but especially by Ghinwa Bhutto's PPP (SB) in Sindh. With political survival at stake and Zardari away from the scene, Benazir Bhutto has fought bravely to remain in contention. It has been quite a performance in the circumstances. PPP (SB) has benefitted enough

for it to be in line for a possible slot in the ruling coalition in the Centre as well as in Sindh, but TI has been left out in the cold in spite of its strong showing voter-wise nationally. TI has less than half the seats JI normally gets to show for its performance nationally or in the Provinces. TI should be proud to have made a statement of sorts but has no real future in the present electoral system. Some of the problems can be traced back to lack of time for preparation, bad organisation and logistics as well as very poor selection of electoral candidates. Unless TI learns that politics is the art of compromise, its supporters stand to be performance completely disenfranchised because of the present 'first past the post' electoral system. There is a strong case here for 1) Proportional Representation (PR), and 2) a run-off vote. If the first election does not yield an absolute majority (50 per cent plus) in any constituency, a Joint Electorate is a must simply because the competition for Minorities seats is a farce, they are not largely contested and are not really representative of their communities. Above all there is need for a National Census on an urgent basis and fresh delimitation of constituencies thereof. Fully 60 per cent of the people of the country now live in the urban areas but have only 40 per cent of the seat allocations in the Assemblies whereas rural population (40 per cent) has 60 per cent of the seat allocations i.e. less than half the cake given to their rural cousins.

For Mian Nawaz Sharif, winning the elections after 3 years out in the political cold will be the easy part, the problems Pakistan faces are daunting enough for any person. Mian Sahib has to exercise checks on his close aides and advisors, the type of opportunists who failed Benazir. They may now try and out-do Asif Zardari. Mian Nawaz Sharif's control over them will be the measure of this success, in that success will lie the future prosperity of the country.

AS I SEE IT

Ikram Sehgal writes from Karachi

focus of seats in rural areas for the PPP hoping to get 12 seats in the NA while the urban area is dominated by MQM's 14 seats. PML (N) gets 6, PPP (SB) 7 and PML (Functional) of Pir Pagaro only 1 seat. Independents (at least 2 aligned with PML (N)) are favoured to win in 5 constituencies. For the Provincial Assembly PPP could get as many as 42 seats but is short of an absolute majority (at least 51 in a house of 100 seats). MQM follows not far behind, favoured to win in 29 constituencies. PML (N) is on target for 8 seats while PPP (SB) 6 and SNF 4 follow with independents winning in 6 seats. PML (J) is expected to win in 1 constituency and PML (F) in 1. TI's 12 per cent spread gets it no seats.

In Balochistan, 241 voters were requested to answer questions in 7 cities and towns, PML (N) and TI were tied at 23 per

cent each with PML (J) at 16 per cent and PPP at 11 per cent. A large group being independents (9), followed by PPP and BNM 5 seats each. PML (N) 4 seats, BNP, PKMAP, BNM (H) and JWP 3 each. JUI (F) 2 seats while new entrant Awami Qad Party (AQP), PML (J) and PKM (AL) are on course to get 1 each.

There are at least 9 independents slated to win Nawab Zulfikar Ali Magsi, the former Chief Minister, has already been elected unopposed as an independent. PML (N) with 88 seats in the NA and its electoral ally ANP (6 seats) make a total of 94 MNAs between them are near the magic figure of 109 seats to get an absolute majority in order to form the government at the centre. The PDF alliance, PPP 45 seats and PML (J) 3 are quite a ways behind with a projected total of only 48 MNAs. It is expected that MQM

Prison Administration: Reforms Needed

There must be endeavour to immediately streamline the prison administration and modernise the prisons which are no longer to be treated as places of punishment, torture and degraded life, writes Abdul Khaleque.

MODERN prison is different from its older counterpart but carries with it the legacy of corporal punishment, deterrence, retribution, hard labour and various forms of torture and persecution. With the development of the doctrines of Human Rights and Fundamental Rights, the concept of prison has idealised moral and general education, reformation, rehabilitation of prisoners under a system of humanistic and paternalistic administration.

In Bangladesh, prison counts among its inmates the convicted and the unconvicted prisoners, detainees who come from various strata of socioeconomic and political life, and the administration is run under the statute of 1898. Broadly speaking, the administration suffers from financial constraints as a result of which marked deficiency prevails in officer and staff training, prisoners' education and correction programme and in respect of medical service, sanitation, accommodation, workshop as well as in the classification of prisoners according to age, temperament, record, length of sentence, security risk, social and economic and political status etc. The prison visiting system is ineffective, under-trial prisoners suffer for long-delayed trial of their cases while prisoners against whom accusation has not been established suffer for long-delayed investigation. In fact, multiple suffering of prisoners starts from the time of arrest and police custody.

There was a time when private persons maintained pris-

ons. In ancient Rome, the creditor had the legal authority to arrest and confine his defaulting debtor, and mutilate his body into pieces for birds and beasts. Historically judged, Shakespeare's Shylock "was not the most cruel creditor. Britain nationalised prisons in 1877 and vested the administration in a prison commission which has since modernised prisons on humanistic lines and visualised prison as an institution where people come not for punishment, but as a punishment. Modern prison administration is run on the basis of well-defined principles and practices effectively monitored, and covered by intelligence system. Convicts are generally required to do useful work, unconvicted prisoners are not required to work unless they wish to. Payment is made for piece work or at flat-rate. Manufacture of lethal instrument, explosive substance and any offensive thing is not allowed in workshop. In UK and USA, prisoners are allowed to work outside during day. This is called Hostel System.

With the emergence of Prison Union in recent decades in the advanced countries, prisoners enjoy privilege of visits, letters, association (PROP - Preservation of Rights of Prisoners), home leave, parole with right of appeal in case of refusal. Access to legal advice and correspondence with lawyer.

disciplinary hearing, access to independent medical opinion have been allowed in modern prison administration. The European Court of Human Rights ruled in 1975 that it was breach of the European Convention to deny a prisoner the opportunity to bring action against prison officer. The current trend in prison administration seems to be in favour of opening prisons to the public and to the press, and allocating gaol in prisoners' home area.

Prison administration in Bangladesh has the responsibility to ensure safe and peaceful living and working, and to prevent, detect and deal with breach of peace, any act of violence and misdemeanour. For a prison to function there has to be a high standard of conformity. Prison rules list activities which constitute offence and provide for action in proven cases. In the modern prison system, such action includes caution, forfeiture or post-ponement of privileges and loss of remission, etc. In Bangladesh, we have the record of the most brutal killing of top political detainees by outside assassins in presence of helpless officers and staff. Besides, there have been killings of prisoners by police firing, the latest occurring in mid-December, 1996 in Jessore prison.

According to newspaper reports, the prisoners of Jessore

jail mutinied against officers and staff, demanding fulfilment of a charter of demands which, among other things, included restoration of the period of life sentence to twenty years. The district and divisional administration in cooperation with political leaders made efforts to bring the prisoners back to discipline for a discussion preparatory to fulfilment of the charter of demands. The prisoners insisted on dialogue with the Home Minister and the Home Secretary only. The Prime Minister made a public statement assuring due consideration of the demands but there was no indication of change in attitude of the prisoners. The police action in Jessore prison cost some lives including the life of a policeman in the confrontation. The mutiny could not spread seriously in other prisons in view of police action which reportedly did not cost life.

In the above context, we may prefer some arguments and suggestions. Arguments: (1) The mutinous occurrence in Jessore prison did not take place without any prior planning and preparation. There must have been a few sittings of prisoners in connection with the listing of demands in the charter. The officers and the staff failed in their duty to keep watch over activities of prison inmates if they would say that they did not know what the prisoners were

planning to do. (2) Normally, one would believe that the officers and the staff knew about the preparation of a charter of demands but did not anticipate that the prisoners would go in for a mutiny during the most sensitive time of mid-December when the country was at the peak of enthusiasm observing the Silver Jubilee of Victory in the Liberation War. (3) The intelligence agencies of the government failed to visualise that the Jubilee would inspire the prisoners also into some activities which should be covered seriously, particularly when the period of life sentence was drastically enhanced recently. (4) A dialogue with the leaders of the mutiny could perhaps be organised by bringing some of the prisoners outside on parole for the purpose.

Our suggestions are as follows: (i) There should be an institution where prison officers and staff would receive initial and in-service training under competent teachers on subjects like psychology, human rights, character traits and behaviour, reformation, delinquency and modern prison concepts and administration. (ii) Recruitment of officers and staff should be made with special emphasis on candidate's sharpness in intellect, coolness in temperament and embellishment in attitude towards humanism and dedication to

service. Such versatile qualities will obviously call for compensatory pay, emoluments and service status.

(iii) The prison administration may be placed under the Ministry of Law and in a Prison Commission composed of a judge, a psychologist, a lawyer, a doctor and a journalist.

(iv) There should be an effective panel of prison visitors in all jails, and report of visitors should be gone through promptly by specified authorities to see the state of things in the prisons. Doctor, psychologist, educationist, social worker, journalist and female personality may be included in the panel.

(v) Human Rights activists may look into allegations of torture at any place including police station and remand cell.

We must nurse the civilised view of freedom of speech which includes the right to silence also. In the United States, when a person is arrested and brought to the station house (police station) he/she is reminded of the constitutional right to speak or not to speak, and also of the right to speak in presence of lawyer.

Conclusion: We must endeavour to immediately streamline the prison administration in the light of the principles and the practices referred to briefly hereinabove, and make sufficient budgetary allocations to modernise the prisons which are no longer to be treated as places of punishment, torture and degraded life.

The writer is former Inspector General of Police.

To the Editor...

Letters for publication in these columns should be addressed to the Editor and legibly written or typed with double space. For reasons of space, short letters are preferred, and all are subject to editing and cuts. Pseudonyms are accepted. However, all communications must bear the writer's real name, signature and address.

Campus politics: No transparency

Sir, "Why Should the Students Listen" (DS Jan 21) is a clear exposition of the background prevailing in the DU as analysed by an insider professor. One thing is clear: the political parties, especially the two major ones, are not displaying any transparency about tackling this vice seriously, because the stakes are very high, and the implications complex, as the malady has taken deep roots.

Strategically, disinvestment exercises will provide a big headache for the political leaders. The psychological aspect is 'who will sell the cat,' as it is not easy to synchronise the disarmament and disbandment. Post-rehabilitation aspects will defy consensus, as the new 'have-not' status in the cadres will create severe reactions. The monster has got out of control for the master! Depressions are dangerous!

A series of seminars and debates at all levels may be initiated by the government (who else?) to be participated by the politicians, students, and the non-politicians, to elicit the direction of public opinion. This may be followed by a longish debate in the JS. The solution will not come in one phase; but the first phase of the operation wipe-out will be critical for the

follow-up or mopping up formalities. Reap as you sow. It is time for the politicians to taste their own medicine!

A Husnain
Dhaka

Unity is the necessity

Sir, I sat down the other day (18th December) with a copy of *The Daily Star*. I was horrified. My attention was on the news item, "22 killed, 6 injured in road accident." Was it to be expected after the epoch making happy news of the signing of 30-year agreement on water-sharing between Bangladesh and India on the eve of the celebration of Silver Jubilee of Independence?

I do not have the statistics of other countries but I have a feeling that we top the list of most insecure places on earth. Reading the casual news items of deaths due to accidents, murders, rapes etc. one cannot but come to this sorry conclusion. But why? We Bengalis were not like that. What has happened to us? Let us identify the reasons behind this state of affairs. Is it because of lack of discipline, inefficiency of the law enforcing machinery, deterioration of moral values, unsatisfactory greed or what?

Is there no way that this situation can be changed? The political parties can change it if

they want. If they have any feeling for the unfortunate people of this country, they should forget their differences and sit together to find out how this country can be put on the track again. They should not waste time on trifling issues. If they fail they will definitely be rejected by the people. Posterity will not forgive this generation if we leave them an utterly miserable and disorganized nation.

A Citizen

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Trips to Savar

Sir, Whenever foreign dignitaries are on official or state visit to Dhaka, it is noticed that almost in all cases they pay a visit to the national Mausoleum at Savar. If they do so voluntarily of their own accord they are welcome. It is hoped it is not binding or compulsory on all occasions or during every visit, as per international norms. Even an indirect suggestion officially from Dhaka before the trip would make it diplomatically obligatory. What is the protocol?

A Curious Citizen

Dhaka

Delinking student wings

Sir, The question to stop student politics has again been arisen among some wise quarters in a new way. It seems to them student politics is the root of all campus violence.

But to cut a long story short, the role of the students in 52's Language Movement, 62's Education Movement, 69's Mass Uprising, 71's Liberation War

and 90's Anti-autocracy Movement is a glorious history.

Are the student really responsible for terrorism on the campuses? Is or was there no failure and negligence of law enforcing agencies at all? Where from and how do arms come to the student's hands? Who indulges them to use those? In every election, they are used in election campaigns. Do their lust for money end after election?

Without solving these questions, there won't be any benefit in delinking the students wings from the political parties.

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PM's fair comment

Sir, A large number of eligible youths are getting prepared to sit for the forthcoming BCS examinations. I am also one of those youths. We hope that the BSC exams will be fair under the newly-elected government. If any undesirable event takes place, the consequence will afflict not only the qualified examinees but it will also tarnish the image of the country.

We heard that in 1973, some inefficient people were recruited with the favour of a high-up. So we were in an apprehension seeing the fact that the forthcoming BCS exams are being held under the same regime, and the same person is also alive with vigour.

But a recent statement of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina at a reunion of Bangladesh Chhatra League at Ramna Green remains a source of assurance for us. His statement was published in *The Bangladesh Observer* on January 6, 1997. The PM, with an honest and impartial mind, made a fair remark

on this biased recruitment in 1973. She said: "We have seen in the past the result of appointing inefficient people... a few people, recruited in 1973, were obviously inefficient."

She added: "Mr. Tofael is seen laughing. But I think he'll agree with our present policy to consider merit and efficiency as only criteria for government job." "We want right person in right place." (*Bangladesh Observer*, 6-1-97). In an outspoken way, the PM made her impartial comment and her determination to make the BCS examinations fair. We appreciate this.

I think Mr Tofael got a good lesson from the PM. Nobody loves a biased fellow. An upright and morally good work has its own laudable reward: the other hand, a nefarious pursuit has also its due repayment whether on this world or hereafter.

Ibne Younus
Dhaka University

Agri Census

Sir, I would like to congratulate the Government for launching the 3rd National Agricultural Census (January 6 to 25, 1997). The first agricultural census after the independence of Bangladesh was held in 1977 and the second in 1983/84. Agricultural census is very important for undertaking development programmes in different sub-sectors of agriculture.

Meanwhile, I would like to put forward some suggestions to the authority concerned regarding the preparation of final report on Agri-Census 1997.

1) Area should be indicated in hectares, while the per ha crop yield in Kgs.

ii) Instead of 'lakh', figures should be expressed in 'million'.

iii) Counting of agricultural implements including tractors and power tillers should be mentioned.

iv) The census report should contain projections on agricultural manpower requirements, land, production and other related aspects for the next two decades.

It may be mentioned here that recently while I was conducting a survey work on different agricultural matters as the Country Correspondent of APO, Japan (nominated by the Government of Bangladesh), I found it very much difficult to gather correct data on some agricultural matters. For instance, the number of tractors and power tillers was difficult to know. No statistics on tractor and power tiller has been shown in the Yearbook of Agricultural Statistics (1994).

But it appears from an article published in the 'Sunshine' (Vol. 7, Issue VII, 1996), a publication of the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) Alumni Association, that by 1970, about 2,000 tractors and 4,000 power tillers were imported in the country. In 1992, power tiller users were about 35,000 which rose to about 55,000 by 1995.

It is sincerely hoped that the officers entrusted with the responsibility of data collection and analysis for Agri-Census '97 would try their best to present the nation with an up-to-date Handbook of Agricultural Statistics of Bangladesh.

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