

Karbala All Around

The town-dwellers all over Bangladesh have been getting inured to power blackouts without a notice. They were hoping against hope that this would not affect nights during the SSC exams. Sudden unwarmed power cuts, strangely called loadshedding by even the consumer, hit the nation, and with it Dhaka, with a vengeance never experienced before — ironically enough roughly around the commencement of the exams.

If that was irony what followed was mindless cruelty. It can safely be said without fear of contradiction that in this metropolitan city at least six million people have been for the past dozen days going without their daily bath. In a million houses in Dhaka soiled clothes are piling into hills and pans and pots and dishes are being dumped redesignly into heaps for days on end. In many families there isn't even a drop of water to drink. This is Karbala, literally. Newspapers have for quite some time been publishing photographs of endless rows of vessels and pitchers kept around some street tap with teams of women and children mounting a round the clock vigil in the hope of catching a gallon or two of water whenever the dream of gushing water materialises for a spell. In fact, this has been a yearly press feature around these times of the year. These pictures this year do not speak of the inferno that the well-plumbed mansions housing dozens of flats have been reduced to. Bengalees may not be the cleanest of the nations — they cannot simply be so with the scandalously sickening public as well as personal hygiene records still holding good for the society at large. But they are — each one of them — compulsive bathers.

Power shortage, built into the energy sector by the earlier administration, joined by a dangerous fall in the ground water level, has been making it impossible to cater to the water needs of Dhaka's snowballing population up to any human level. But there is no sign anywhere that the intolerable domestic water situation has been able to touch the sensibilities of any important people and move any quarter to do something helpful on an emergency basis.

Mosquitoes are a menace, may be even a foreboding of some looming epidemic. Power blackout is irritating for those that are used to power — and definitely it spells doom for industrial production and exports. What is a waterless house? It is the end of civilisation at its best and death at its worst.

Corpse on Campus

Again a corpse. The deadly blend of gun and politics in our educational arena has once again taken its toll: this time on Arifur Rahman, a third-year of the Bengali department of Dhaka University. He was brutally killed on Thursday dawn by the feuding peers of the party he himself belonged to, Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD).

It gives a sad commentary on the party high command's sincerity and ability to control its activists. The most unfortunate part of it all is that no one seems keen to learn from these pathetic and premature deaths. If it has been the AL plan to keep its own student front BCL off violent incidents and get the JCD into trouble by breeding disunity within its ranks through allurement then it can be safely said that the former has succeeded to quite an extent and JCD has failed in coming up with a ruse contra ruse. Of course, the BNP and JCD leadership can attribute this to the obvious effect of being a party on the receiving end in an atmosphere of political adversity but then the character of a political organisation is best shown in times of crisis.

As it came as the umpteenth proof of the suicidal trend and depravity of our student politics, Thursday's killing comes to show how sadly the law enforcing agency has failed to live up to the expectations in manning a place traditionally as irritable as the campus. There must have been police patrol in or around the campus when those miscreants with their weapons and professed militant mood, scaled the walls from the adjacent roads to carry out the operation. Yet it all happened by the path of an all too familiar pattern. Surely, this will not bring any relief to the Home Minister. Government will probably give its opposition a handle or two for criticism based on allegations of repression and partiality but as long as it remains committed to the cause of violence-free campus, moral approval and support from the saner and larger section of country's population including the students will never be in short supply.

After Mother Teresa

She was astonishing in her ability to fight age and illness as she was in spreading the message of love and offering succor to the suffering and un-touchable people. There were times when it seemed that this daughter of an Albanian grocer whom love and affection for humanity transformed into the greatest living epitome of the Christian concept of agape would go on forever as the head of the order she established way back in 1948, the Calcutta based Missionaries of Charity. Such was the universal expectation over a prolonged stay of this Nobel Laureate at the helm of the sect she founded to alleviate man's sufferings.

But time and mutability are great foes of human longing for permanence and Mother Teresa too had to pass the mantle of leader of the order. Sister Nirmala has been elected as the new leader of the Missionaries of Charity Order. Although we all would have liked the universal mother to stay there a bit longer we nevertheless deem it as salutary that she has seen in her life time the development of the leadership of an organisation so close to her anima. While praying for her health and longer life and, of course, an inspiringly effective reign of sister Nirmala as the head of the order, we hope this transition to be an apotheosis of the true spirit of leadership which envisions the life of an institution beyond the rise and fall of its founding figures.

No More 'More' Rice

"In general, urban households spend a relatively smaller share of their income on food than do rural households. A 10 per cent increase in per capita income for rural households will increase the demand by 16 per cent for livestock, 8.9 per cent for fish and edible oils, 5.6 per cent for potato and vegetables and pulses and only by 2 per cent for rice and wheat."

It has now become crystal clear that with the avowed goal of food security as enshrined in successive plan documents, Bangladesh, inadvertently or inadvertently, was destined for a monocrop system where agricultural growth related policies tilted heavily in favour of increased food production especially rice. Available evidences suggest that almost 70 per cent of the total land area in Bangladesh is now cultivated, 95 per cent of cropped land used for food production and 75 per cent is devoted to grow rice only. But how long can we cling on to rice production alone, albeit, mostly?

In a recent seminar paper,

"Sustainable Agricultural Development in Bangladesh: Challenges and Issues" two of the celebrated economists of Bangladesh Drs. Mahabub Hosain of IRRI and Quazi Shahabuddin of BIDS attempted to provide a fairly thought-provoking response to the question posed above. At the outset, however, one needs to bear in mind that, in Bangladesh, agriculture's contribution to national income had already dwindled to 35 per cent in 1993/94 when compared with 51 per cent in the immediate post-independence era. The apparent wane has been in evidence in the face of the 'moderate' economic progress that the country witnessed over the last two decades or so. The most pertinent question is, if Bangladesh at all succeeds in accelerating its economic growth at say, 6.7 per cent per annum, what kind of structural transformation should await our agriculture?

Quite obviously, the immediate problem would be caused by the expected income growth — induced rise in demand for non-food items among income recipients. Let's not forget the famous Engle's law that states that proportion of income spent on non-farm goods and services goes up at a relatively faster

pace pari passu the income growth. And so, in Bangladesh, consumers would possibly reallocate their budgetary expenses in favour of vegetables, fruits, fish and livestock products leaving less to think about rice. Again, since economic growth and urbanization go hand in hand, a change in consumer tastes and preferences springing from a rise in urban population from around 20 per cent to a higher level in future would possibly add another fillip to the necessity of budgetary maneuverings.

The above mentioned economists tried to project such a shift in demand drawing from Household Expenditure Survey

noncereal crops and fish and livestock production.

"Faster development of livestock and fisheries may promote both equity and food security by focusing attention on the disadvantaged social groups and regions where the crop environment is favourable." There is another social-economic argument that tends to clinch the above strategy: "Livestock and poultry raising are usually performed by women who can do the work within homesteads, in between performing their domestic roles." The policy implication that follows suit is the provision for credit, especially to the poor women to raise poultry

in the past. The government, therefore, will have to use more judiciously the technology, trade and pricing policies to promote a balanced agricultural development.

Economic growth is likely to substantially lessen the pressure on rice by consumers who would be looking for more balanced diet. At a 6.5 per cent rate of growth of national income, for example, rice production would go up by 2.3 per cent per year till 2010 and only at 0.5 per cent during the next decade. In 2010, rice production needed to meet the growing demand is projected at 46.4 million tons (in paddy terms allowing 10 per cent for seed, feed etc) under the business-as-usual scenario, and 49.5 million tons under accelerated growth. In 2020, the required growth in rice production is 52 million tons. The earlier emphasis on rice dominance should, thus, wane and not wither since any imbalance in rice supply-demand might lead to an increase in prices of rice relative to other commodities. This should not be allowed to happen as that could throw us back to the origin! That is, higher prices of rice might lure farmers to a substitution of non-rice for rice crops.

Rice research, therefore, should explore possibilities of inducing non-rice crops into rice-based farming which is not beyond the possibility frontiers given that seasonal distribution and other agroclimatic conditions are duly taken into consideration. The projected urbanization at 40 per cent by year 2020 is likely to tilt the balance of food production from subsistence orientation to commercial production. Thus, the relative prices and profits will become a more important driving force behind the growth of food production than it was

conducted by BBS for 1991/92. "In general, urban households spend a relatively smaller share of their income on food than do rural households. A 10 per cent increase in per capita income for rural households will increase the demand by 16 per cent for livestock, 8.9 per cent for fish and edible oils, 5.6 per cent for potato and vegetables and pulses and only by 2 per cent for rice and wheat."

Thus a tripling of the per capita income over the next quarter century, the authors tend to argue, would force consumers to a substantial slash in the budgetary allocation for food. The observations, thus, point to an imminent differential pattern of demand growth and a pertinent necessity of a much more diversified agriculture in the early 21st century. In other words, keeping the changing patterns ahead, the upcoming agricultural strategy should embrace the development of

and livestock. On the other hand, the commercial fishermen are found to hail from low income groups and the promotion of rice-fish cropping system in the deep-water flood plains and saline affected coastal areas — areas so far by passed by green revolution to cut both ways: increased rice and non-rice crops.

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Beneath the Surface

by Abdul Bayes



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Dhaka Day by Day

Inclined Overseas

Way

by M J H Jabed



dian sarees, rather than those of Tangail or anywhere else in Bangladesh are overwhelmingly accepted by Bangladeshi ladies because these are both cheaper and better designed compared to ours. Our market is not under our control at all. In the eyes of passive observers, such a situation is advantageous for us as once we had to travel to Calcutta or Bombay to buy some Indian things, now we can easily procure those from Dhaka.

The trend is so strong that some indigenous garments factories are making endeavour to sell out their products under the false name of any Thai or Australian company. Any domestic name is not reliable to them. They adopt this way, understanding the prevailing psychology of the customers. The smart businessmen are putting any foreign sticker, or domestic sticker bearing name of any foreign company in the hope that this would serve them well. What a fine strategy to sell out goods (domestic) that buyers are not ready to buy!

Finally, such apathy towards home-made goods is not necessarily for quality-related reasons; rather mainly for socio-psychological reasons. Our failure, in all spheres of national life has resulted in such a negative attitude. A stereotype, notwithstanding partly true, has developed in our minds that very few things of this land are pure and qualitative. We have no faith in ourselves and the base of our confidence as a nation is very weak. May be our goods are at fault or not up to the mark but who would accept those if we refuse? Is another movement necessary to patronise our home-made things as we did during the British regime in protest against colonialism?

OPINION

The Road to Development and the Human Side of Enterprise

M Wahiduzzaman

This has reference to the Foush article entitled 'Poverty Alleviation and Growth with Social Justice', by Md Anisur Rahman (The Daily Star, Dhaka, 11 March 1997).

Mr Rahman's article is a counter to the economists' long refusal to consider ethics and make any value judgment in their discipline, and I agree with the learned author that the poor must not be reduced to the level of productive animals by maintaining their productive power only, ignoring their creative power. Man rises to his best stature by creating things. And things are produced only after they have been created. Clearly then, there is a difference between creation of things and production of things. You create a thing first and then after you produce a thing time and again as long as you are it. In the former case you are a creator (and in the latter case you are a manager or a worker. In his article, Mr Rahman argues that in our development analysis we are concerned with achieving growth through poverty alleviation — just by maintaining the productive power of the poor, which necessarily means their muscle power only, and this is how they are reduced to the level of animals.

In the developed societies of the West the managers of production learned long ago that they could not increase production but also implementational difficulties like widening the roads and taking over at least marginal land. But that is inevitable. We cannot cure a serious patient by massages or just a painkiller when he needs high-powered antibiotic. For an ever-growing metropolis like Dhaka, a little far-sighted programme as suggested above would help not only the present generation but also the posterity. We would expect the DCC, LGED and other agencies concerned to sit together and chalk out plans that would be beneficial as a long-term solution to the endless, painful problem of traffic jams.

We are not optimistic about an early solution to Kashmir dispute.

We, however, wonder if Bangladesh and India can solve sharing of the Ganges water after long 20 years of negotiations, why Pakistan and India cannot work out a peaceful solution for the 50-year-old Kashmir dispute. Indian Prime Minister H D Deve Gowda said he wants to resume talks with Pakistan, but not on the biggest

development, which has been trodden by all developed countries. There is no shortcut to this. A producer must make profit. Otherwise he cannot survive in business. So long as profit is not there in the production system, growth will either slow down or fall or will stagnate.

But if the developed societies recognized the human side of enterprise, it is not out of their altruistic love for workers. And it could not be so, either. The reasons are that (1) of all creatures man is the noblest as well as the most wretched one; (2)

even if all the people of a society were given equal opportunities to become their best, all of them will not be equal in all respect; (3) so there cannot be absolute equality between man and man.

So, to achieve growth, (1) all people must be given equal opportunities to develop their faculty to the fullest extent; (2)

since even with equal opportunity everyone will not be equal in all respect, we should not insist on having absolute equality between man and man; (3) following the reason 2, one must not have any hindrance in becoming as rich as one can be through his creative and productive efforts so long as by becoming so one does not make others suffer or make them poor; (4) if one should be allowed to become as much rich as one can be, one must also have the obligation to alleviate the sufferings of one's fellow citizens with his affluence. In other words, the rich must share their riches with their fellow citizens. If necessary, one must be reminded of altruistic love one must have for one's fellow citizens; and (5) finally, the governors of society must find out the needy and disadvantaged people and give them everything they need to stand on their own feet.

Finally, achieving development means releasing human energy to create and produce things. It is expected that the fulfilment of above conditions may release human energy for achieving growth and development, if not fully, to a certain extent.

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