

## Utilisation of Education

The education policy draft presented by the Shamsul Huq Commission has received its first public commendation and from no less a personage than the President of the country.

The President also struck at a core-problem affecting our education and its role in the society while speaking at the National Education Week conference on Sunday. This is the problem so hilariously derided by Dr Muhammad Shahidullah in a couplet ending in *Padhe Farsi bechey tel*, students of Persian finding no better avocation than selling oil. We have, in spite of a ramshackle education machine, thousands of science graduates, a lot of them masters. That doesn't mean they are pursuing careers consonant with what they had been trained in and equipped with. President Shahabuddin said on Sunday that education policy be so designed that every student from every discipline can find a job in line with his academic background. It should be a two-way system of satisfaction — the students coming to the best use of the nation and the society sustaining the scholars as they should be. If the Presidential behest is realised even partially, both quality of education and quality of the professions would gain radically. But how would this be done?

President Shahabuddin evidently depends on the education policy makers to come up with the answer. Can even a supremely wise — and pragmatic — education policy give the whole answer? As things are, there is not much scope here for good mathematicians or historians or philosophers to get a meaningful job where their knowledge and skill in their subjects would best benefit the society. Will a pragmatic education policy go for curtailment of intellectual workers in these lines? Or policy planners for the whole society should develop programmes and establishments that would utilise ever more mathematicians and linguists and anthropologists? Education planners have so far cared little about the question of the utilisation aspect of education. And socio-economic planners have so far failed abjectly to properly utilise the available educated and, specially, scientific manpower.

Education has been our most dismal national performance. Mainly because extra-educational considerations were there all the time, trying to fit the national psyche into. This or that straitjacket. Let our education be as free as the sky, free of taboos and concerns of personal or group aggrandizement. Let a sense of good citizenship and an urge to being of use to the society be the best product of our education.

## Indo-Pak Dialogue

Recent border clashes, trading of allegations of spy-war and exchange of vitriolic statements notwithstanding, foreign secretaries of India and Pakistan have resumed their talks in New Delhi.

Indeed the marked feature of their current pattern of interactive diplomacy has been its engaging nature admitting of no stand-off to gather moss. In other words, both countries under their mutually sensitive leaderships, committed to beneficial bilateralism, have, by and large, prized the 'positive' over the 'negative'. Which is why the unbroken series of meetings. Outlook-wise we cannot fail to notice the expanding circle of positivism although one wished the ballistic statements and expulsions of diplomats were avoided to prevent some of the old rancour from surfacing.

Towards establishing a mechanism for tackling substantive issues the two countries have advanced reasonably well. In the March meeting they decided to form working groups to home in on the bilateral concerns and in the June one the foreign secretaries set an eight-point agenda with the Jammu and Kashmir and peace and security issues placed on the top of the list. The on-going third round is focussed on operationalising the mechanism already agreed upon by both sides. It is now time they got on with substantive negotiations leading to an early formation of the working groups and began implementing understanding as and when reached by an individual group without being distracted by lack of progress in the work of another working group.

It is important for the region that Sharif-Gujral talks slated for September 24 in New York on the sidelines of the UN session provide a fresh impetus to the on-going dialogue between the two subcontinental giants.

## Unprincipled

The spectre of encroachment on thoroughfares by political parties for their public meetings should have been a matter of the past now. But the DCC Mayor's announcement of seven venues to mitigate universal public revulsion against the malaise has apparently fallen through. Thanks to BNP's persistence in holding its protest rally in front of the party office at Nayapaltan despite being reminded by the DCC of the need for avoiding it.

Of course, the BNP as the principal opposition party in the country, could say that Mayor Hanif's selection of venues was flawed and furnish its own list of choices. Even if they had opted for a place of their own liking other than the street in front of their party office they would have had a technical justification for expressing their displeasure over the DCC's denial of permission to hold the meeting at Nayapaltan.

BNP will do well to recall that during its rule the party had once made known its aversion to using roads for public meetings. Party stalwarts even designated a few spots for the purpose, but somehow things did not work out that way. Now the DCC mayor has done it. So, a consensus essentially exists for not holding public meetings on the streets. We only urge an early implementation of the same after both sides have publicly indicated their choices of venues and agreed on a common list. Meanwhile, the BNP better avoid any city street for its meeting behoving its status as a leading political party.

# A Farm Income Policy

The fact remains that agro-processing industries of all kinds committed to give a fair return to farmers is the surest way to ensure a stable farm income in the long run without any state intervention.

LAST week, I wrote about jute price stabilisation fund in the light of the present depressed market for raw jute. It is only one aspect of a farm income policy. There are many issues involved which call for detailed analysis.

First of all, we must establish the basis of a farm income policy. Why we need it? Farming is as old as civilisation itself and why only now, I am proposing government intervention in support of a set of measures and programmes which should ensure farmers, stable as well as remunerative returns on a continuing basis. As a result, farming should become profitable and farmers generate the surplus for on-farm investment. A policy of input subsidy and free irrigation cannot be the viable basis for agricultural growth in the long run.

Farmers used to grow rice primarily for subsistence consumption; while jute is grown for a cash income. This was the age-old pattern of agriculture in our country. This is however no longer the case. The rapid commercialisation of agriculture in the recent past ought to be noted. Even as late as early 1970s, hardly 20 to 25 per cent of the paddy produced used to enter the market. The bulk of the output used to be processed by *dehki* and consumed within the homestead and also paid in kind as agricultural wages. It has all changed now. The bulk of the paddy amounting to almost 65 per cent of the crop is now sold in the market for cash. Thus, from an output of 10 million tons, around 2.5 million tons used to enter the market. Today output has doubled to 20 million tons and marketable surplus have enormously expanded by over five times.

Cash returns from the production of paddy is now critically important to farmers. A farm gate price of 20 taka (per maund) would imply an additional gross income of Taka 700 crores to farmers. If the retail price of rice is Taka 12 per kg in the Dhaka market (minimum), then the farm gate price of paddy, according to my estimates works out at Tk. 208/maund. After allowing 30 per cent as the cash cost of inputs, the disposable income to farmers from paddy alone should have exceeded Taka 5,000 crores in 1996-97. Translated into demand for urban goods and services, the impact is obvious. Not only agriculture sector, the demand pull effect would have moved the entire economy at higher levels of productivity and growth. This is the basic dynamics of economic growth which though internal, is yet to be exploited. Paddy price support is only one out of several important programmes which should place farm income policy on a sound footing. Agro-processing is an important way to enhance the value added from agricultural commodities. At present, bulk of the paddy is processed into rice by perhaps a million strong small husking mills where not only the extraction rate is wasteful, several important byproducts of rice are lost in the process. *Dehki* is still worse in this respect. If the 13 million tons of paddy entering the market is processed in modern rice mills then the extraction rate can be increased to as much as 70 per cent.

It would mean an additional 400,000 tons of rice from the same quantity of paddy. If exported, this quantity would earn 120 million US dollars. Not only that, rice bran oil to the tune of 160,000 tons and de-oiled bran cake — an excellent animal feed ingredient will also be available. The basis of an animal feed industry will be established and therefore large scale promotion of modern poultry farms will be feasible.

The modern rice milling will lead to better farm gate prices of paddy provided socially committed investment in agro-industries is made possible through fiscal incentives geared to this end and if the NGOs are given the opportunities to branch into commercial ventures through easy credit and effective supervisory mechanism. In India, Amul dairy was established on this principle of providing remunerative prices to farmers

for their milk. Later on, profits generated by dairy processing and marketing utilised for dairy development programmes including setting up of cattle feed plants. Today, such cooperative milk marketing and processing ventures cover the entire country and India is one of the leading producers of milk in the world.

After milk, the cooperative principles have been applied for development of edible oil industry and in irrigated rice-growing areas, cooperative rice processing ventures have also been successful. Cooperatives in our country constitute a sad story of business disasters.

Milk Vita was established to replicate the Amul model in Bangladesh. It did not make much headway since the bureaucracy in this country believed cooperatives to be an extension of themselves. They never could conceive cooperatives as profitable business enterprises. Since bureaucrats consider themselves to be the masters of everything — what else could be done? It is interesting to note that NGOs never picked up the cooperatives as the institutional mechanism — even by the longest barge pole.

At the same time, the fact remains that agro-processing industries of all kinds committed to give a fair return to farmers is the surest way to ensure a stable farm income in the long run without any state intervention. As a result, farm level investment will go up, productivity will increase on a continuing basis and ever expanding supplies of farm commodities will enable

the agro industries to prosper. Following the Amul principles, not only paddy processing, but the basis of an intensive irrigated agriculture producing a well diversified range of farm products can be firmly established in our rural economy. Immediately, however, an agricultural prices commission on a permanent basis should be established. It would be an independent commission — not under any particular ministry. The responsibility of the commission will, among others, include a) determination of farm gate prices of farm commodities well ahead of harvest time; b) Ensure wide publicity of those prices; c) Establish mechanisms for purchase of farm commodities at the determined prices; and, d) Suggest fiscal and other measures including project financing in support of a fair farm income policy.

The announced prices must be effective in the thousands of rural markets. It is not an easy task but direct procurement by government-owned purchase centres is not the only way to fulfill the commitment. For example, easy financing for modern rice mills can be complemented by short-term borrowing for purchase of paddy. Committed private sector companies can do the job. Entrepreneurs with political ambitions should be interested. If they can ensure a fair return for farmers paddy, a vote at the election time may be assured. To any democratically elected government, a fair return to farmers should be a significant vote winner. It will be argued that 50 per cent of the voters are landless. However, their income and employment is indirectly tied down to what land-owning farmers secure at the market for their produce.

Cooperatives are dead and gone. Therefore the prospects of reviving the Amul model is likely to be an exercise in utter futility. In particular feel very sad about it, since it was me who set up the dairy plants and the first group of cooperatives of Milk Vita. Instead, NGOs should have access to credit lines for promoting agro-processing industries. In return, they should ensure a fair and remunerative prices at the farm gate.

A farm income policy have many dimensions. It calls for thoughtful and investigative analysis and a beginning should be made within the next few months. Perhaps, the Centre for Policy Dialogue should take the initiative. Let us begin the discussion process to answer one big question: HOW TO ENSURE A FAIR RETURN TO OUR HARD-WORKING FARMERS?



## Window on Asia

M. Ali

# Pakistan Back on US' Strategic Agenda?

When Madeleine Albright visits India in next November, the thorny issue of America's renewed 'tilt' towards Pakistan is bound to come into focus whatever may be the shape of subsequent Indo-US relation as its result.

TWO years before when Hank Brown amendment was enacted in the US Senate allowing its government a military hardware transfer to Pakistan the mood in Islamabad was ostensibly festive while there was a corresponding gloom in New Delhi's south block. Apart from 8 370m package that included, among other things, the spares for F-16 aircrafts, Orion anti-submarine aircrafts and Harpoon missiles from the US, the waiving of a stringent Pressler sanctions of 1990 to oblige Pakistan was significant and in itself a great moral booster for a country torn by ethno-sectarian strife, plagued by a sagging economy and continuously rebuffed by India on Kashmir issue.

However, the US with a rejuvenated Indo-US relationship following Indian PM's 1994 Washington visit in mind as well as her eyes fixed on India's vast market after recently-initiated economic reforms took care in allaying India's anxiety over the transfer. She advanced several reasons and excuses for the 'partial' and 'one-time' amendments with her tone apologetic. The US, on the whole, remained on the defensive repeatedly drawing the critics' attention to the moral dimension of the deal i.e., the fairness of the equity of a paid-up arms contract between her and Pakistan.

Now only after two years the Harkin, Warner amendment to the US Foreign Assistance Act authorising the resumption of certain form of economic assistance and military training facilities to Pakistan and thereby reinforcing Brown amendment of 1995 confirm many of the assumptions and speculations raised then about a possible US-Pakistan strategic consensus. In retrospect, the Pressler sanctions were imposed essentially to contain the region's arms race and dilute its nuclear programme, particularly after bringing under leash Pakistan's nuclear ambition after giving it almost a decade of freedom. Because Pakistan had to be kept in good humour during the period for America's own interest. The US stand on the implementation of Pressler amendment hardened since the fall of Najibullah government in Afghanistan, precisely the time when Pakistan's role as a conduit for Afghan war was over.

Pakistan, the most 'allied ally' of the US had similar experience also in the past when she was let down more than once and deceived by her American patrons. After 1971 she was virtually abandoned by the US and its successive administrations unequivocally endorsed India's pre-eminence in the subcontinent. Only the unfolding of an Afghan crisis salvaged Pakistan from an impending ignominy. After the crisis she obviously proved redundant and the US was reluctant to accept the liability of a nuclear-ambitious Pakistan. Yet an overwhelming urge for security prompted Pakistan to maintain her link with the US, the lone superpower of the post-cold war world. She even joined the US-led multinational forces in the Gulf in 1990 much to the chagrin of its public to revive American interest in her, but failed to make any dent on American attitude. After the cold war, Pakistan's position in US' security calculation was one of decline. So much so that by early '90s it was about to be branded as a 'backlash' state of Islamic fundamentalism sponsoring international terrorism and almost lumped up in that category with countries like Iran and Libya. All Pakistani efforts to cosy up with the US as its old ally were no avail.

When viewed against this backdrop, two extraordinary US legislations favouring Pakistan baffled many. But then as much of the dust settled down after the cold war and a clearer picture emerged out of the haze of initial uncertainties and ambivalence with a new battle line drawn the US as well as its adversaries. In its consideration, dealing with them would be easier with, among other things, Pakistan on their side. The Harkin-Warner amendment by the US administration aims more at ensuring Pakistan's loyalty and co-operation on the basis of a *quid pro quo* to be worked out while the US would launch its three-pronged grand strategy vis-a-vis China, Russia and Iran where Pakistan is going to be a relevant strategic player.

Although the US professes a constructive engagement with regard to China, yet she is compelled by the ground realities to move fast towards a 'contain China' policy-making a confrontation inevitable by the turn of the millennium. Her desire to exploit Central Asian market as well as resources brings her sharply in clash with Russia's inherent interests in its 'near abroad'. America's policy of 'dual containment' in the Gulf aims at isolating Iran from international community. In all these future conflicts the US cannot achieve her objectives without the help of Pakistan. This partly explains why the US has suddenly started wooing Pakistan.

In the post-cold war strategic matrix, the contending parties are strikingly the same as they were after the second world war with, of course, some changes in their approaches, priorities and emphasis. And the opportunities their power struggles would be offering to Pakistan as well as the latter's equation with India, her archival remain more or less similar. However, unlike in the past there are chances that even the potential contenders of the US also would try to enlist the support of Pakistan, frustrated by American track record of the past. While China already has a

'special relationship' with Pakistan, Iran despite her differences with the later on Afghan issue would not, in the country's present predicament, alienate Pakistan. Russia now shorn of its ideological proclivities can seek help from any quarter including Pakistan on the basis of her geopolitical imperatives.

But Sino-Pakistan relations are somewhat unique and could develop despite the countries' rival systems and philosophies right from the days of ultra-conservatism of Mao era. Since the early '60s, China has been heavily investing in Pakistan which had once been its 'window to the world'. It has been assisting Pakistan on nuclear and missile technologies. It is believed to have supplied Pakistan with highly potent M-II missile and assisted in developing Haft-Ill which would be indigenously produced in Pakistan with the capability of M-II missile. Many believe that Pakistan exploded her N-Bomb in early '80s in a western Chinese desert under China's supervision. China also cultivated Pakistan as its link with the Muslim world with which the former is believed to be developing an axis to counter the dominance and influence of the West. In the whole process, both China and Pakistan have developed high stakes in each other.

Now as China is rapidly becoming the globe's second-most powerful nation and challenging some of US's long standing interests in the Pacific, China and the US will be adversaries in the major global rivalry of the first decades of the twenty-first century. Even an actual military conflict between the US and China, provoked for example, by a Chinese attempt to seize Taiwan by force or to resolve by military means its territorial claim in the South China Sea, is always possible particularly if the coming conflict between China and the US escalates beyond certain limit. Pakistan as China's close ally would be even stronger if its great game in the region involving China, Russia and to a lesser degree also Iran coopts Pakistan's strategic partnership.

During the early '50s, both the superpowers wanted to win over Pakistan which ultimately opted for the US. In the current scenario, the question as to who would win over Pakistan is again raised: China or the US? The obvious choice could be for the US, declining but still the strongest power of the world but for her dubious role in the past and the occasional flashes of her 'softness' towards the 'largest democracy' of the world and of course, its vast lucrative market. Nevertheless, in any event Pakistan stands to gain in the emerging strategic milieu.

The American establishment is, however, confident that in spite of Pakistan's linkages with China it is still in more advantageous position to manipulate the Pakistan Army and establishment in its favour. The notion of a close tie between the US and Pakistan Army is reinforced when in a recent statement Ms Bhutto declared that it was not possible to be the country's prime minister without the approval of Pakistan Army and the US. According to General Haunad Gul the former Chief of Pakistan's ISI, the recent Senate legislation actively backed by the US administration is definitely a ploy to appease the Pakistani Army.

The Americans feel that the Pakistani Army and the establishment will have to be on the side in the event of any future contingency in the region. So the US attempts to keep through the removal of legal barriers, its communication lines with Pakistani Army and establishment open. Senator John Warner, the brain behind the latest amendment, says that the measure would ensure Washington's continued 'constructive engagement' with Pakistan, a nation that has a long history of being a friend and ally of the US.

In the meantime, India seems to have accepted the emerging realities in good grace. In 1995, there was a furor over Hank Brown amendment. This time there was no fuss except some soul-searching observations over the development. India has, however, been quietly taking steps to meet the future contingencies. She already enjoys an edge over Pakistan with regard to its military's size, the quality of its arsenal and overall force projection capability. Her capability has now been further beefed up through the indigenous production of most of its defence requirements. It has far more advanced nuclear and missile programmes. It produces its own battle tank and aircrafts. The recently introduced Russian-made versatile Sukhoi-30 (SU-30) in the IAF fleet has been India's most prestigious acquisition in many years.

She also has been able to revive to an extent her traditional military relation with Russia notwithstanding American pressure not to release some of the sensitive military hardware to India. She steadfastly kept her nuclear option open and opposed the signing of CTBT. Now the US relaxed attitude toward Pakistan's nuclear and missile programme will embolden India to go nuclear at long last and deploy both her 'Agni' and 'Prithvi' in a changed security environment. When Madeleine Albright visits India in next November, the thorny issue of America's renewed 'tilt' towards Pakistan is bound to come into focus whatever may be the shape of subsequent Indo-US relation as its result.

## OPINION

## Demise of a Gracious Lady

Nasiruddin Ahmed

right connections did not necessarily buy love. She never stooped to the privileges of royal family. Diana voluntary relinquished her Her Royal Highness (HRH) title after divorce.



For 16 years, Diana had been the focus of thousands of cameras as she turned from a blushing ingenue into one of the

world's most elegant woman. She wanted to be a sort of ambassador, a queen of people's heart — because she earned a lot of respect and admiration. Diana had been frozen out of royal circle since her divorce.

But she was held in higher public esteem than the royal family as a whole. For much of the past two years, however, princess appeared in limbo. After her divorce she started to work for the AIDS patients, children, and visited the counsellors and new-age therapists.

Lately, Diana crusaded against the worldwide use of land mines in the months before her death, first visiting Angola and then Bosnia, two war-ravaged countries where United Nations had programmes to destroy anti-personnel land mines. She met 20 survivors of land mines in Tuzla. This was really outstanding. Land mines, virtually are the deadliest weapon — because they kill or maim people. That's why she was vocal against.

People around the world were shocked and stunned by the tragic death of Diana. Her death is not only a loss for the British royal family but also for the suffering humanity in the entire world. Diana's contribution in campaigning humanity will keep her alive.

## Why not a hartal for Seema?

Sir, In view of the fact that the people are losing confidence in law, in some places they are taking law into their own hands and creating dangerous situation, there are widespread incidents of mob violence, lynching and killing of alleged child lifters, cattle lifters, muggers and hijackers and great discontentment prevailing in the country due to rape and murder of Jesmin of Dinajpur, Seema Chowdhury of Chittagong and tragic death of a Biman steward of Dhaka under police custody, the latest inquiry into Seema Chowdhury rape and murder case and also on account of deteriorating law and order situation we demand of our people's elected government to reinvestigate Seema Chowdhury rape and murder case for the sake of restoration of confidence of law among the people and maintenance of law, order and peace in the country.

In support of our genuine, just and noble demand we call upon our people, all social and cultural organisations and all political parties irrespective of

Awami League, BNP, JI, JP, Worker's Party and others to observe one-day hartal on a suitable date agreed on consensus to raise the morality and demonstrate the unity of 130 million people of Bangladesh in the greater national interest — law and order.

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## Water meters — WASAs

Sir, In the UK, the water companies do not use any meter and charge households at flat rate decided to ensure recovery of expenses, profit and cost needed for future developments. This there was coined by one of the staff at Chittagong WASA — he was rather obstinate to the extent that he ultimately developed mental ailments, when no one, including me as chairman entertained his recommendations.

In our country, even using meters imported at high costs, we could not ensure conservation of water supply and billing, resulting into huge loss of revenue each year. I am now inclined to suggest a 'Block Tariff' instead of the rate now existing. In which cost of water to household would rise according to the quantity they use. The system would mean that every home receiving water for essential purposes like washing, cooking and flushing toilets to be at minimum cost but those

## To the Editor...

### Under threat

Sir, Our attention has been drawn to an article written by Mr Kabir U Ahmad titled 'Is the Political-Economic Stability Under Threat?' in the DS on July 3. We like to add the following for further information: One of the letters published in your paper about the changes of the Zia International Airport by Biman authority is a glaring example.

2) The weekly holiday ceremony is, no doubt, a damaging act done by some interested quarters.

3) There is systems loss in every sector, both political socio-economic activities of the country.

4) The financial sector, including revenue earning, seems to be in an alarming state etc.

5) The last but not the least point is that the other day one secretary while addressing senior officials told that every where, he finds, go-slow principle is followed.

M Ali  
Dhaka

### Closing down of mills

Sir, Couple of days back, we had the good fortune of visiting the biggest jute mill in the world. And you know where it is located — in our very own country, Bangladesh. Isn't that a source of pride? And when you visit it, it is more so. For it is so large, spread over a sprawling one square-mile area with a large number of mills, residential areas for officers and workers (which are more than 35000), 4 schools, 4 outdoor clinics, 10 big ponds, a police station, a post office, a bank and huge lush green trees (for the mill is very old). It is like a whole city in itself.

But the sad part is, it is in the verge of closure or collapse. You can't help but give credit to the man who engineered the whole idea, worked and invested to set up a huge complex like this. And we couldn't even keep it running, something that we got all ready-made. Couldn't we put in, even this much effort and honesty to keep it functioning? For, dishonesty at all levels is eating away its very roots. Of course there are other factors, contributory too. Like the undue power in the hands of the labour unions. But a whole-hearted, sincere and honest effort on the part of everybody involved, can surely overcome any problem or obstacle. If only we were as patriotic as our

neighbours, if not more so, then they couldn't have taken away the world market from us.

Like, when we are told to make something with 1st grade raw jute, we make it with 3rd grade, but give the bill of 1st grade, to pocket rest of the money! So the quality of the product is naturally 3rd grade. After that, who will give us another order?

Then when the jute is to be bought from the farmers, it is not done so, in the peak season when the price is lowest, but, a month or so later when the price doubles and so the price of the product also doubles. In this way, so many factors are contributing, to the mill being run at a loss. For which only we can be held responsible, nobody else.

Isn't there any remedy for this? For it's a shame for the whole nation and its citizens that so many mills are closing down one after another, but nobody seems bothered. Not even the people elected democratic government. Already Monno Ceramic, which was nothing short of a pride of the nation has closed down. Then some Sugar mills, Tanneries Salt factories etc, are at the threshold of shutting down.

Why, why, why, nothing is being done?

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