

## FOCUS

## SILK

## A Solution to Problems: Rural Poverty Alleviation

by Prof Sajjad Hussain

**Bangladesh has an over-populated and under-employed rural sector where the burden of poverty is borne by the landless and the marginal farmers... The way to solve this under-employment and poverty of the rural population is to take up a crash programme in the growth and development of sericulture in which Bangladesh has a long history and enormous potential.**

THE Ministry of Textiles is in the process of setting up a private non-profit-making company entitled Bangladesh Silk Foundation (BSF) "for qualitative and quantitative improvements in the production of silk in Bangladesh through research and training" and for carrying out other programmes for its stakeholders, namely, the Government of Bangladesh, NGOs and private entrepreneurs engaged in silk and sericulture. The organisation is to be headed by an MD whose responsibilities will include, among others, functioning as Chief Executive with full responsibility for formulating both short and medium-term work plan, management and execution of work plan, mobilising the flow of funds, preparing the annual budget and monitoring and controlling expenditure, fostering functional cooperation with various government, non-government and private sector organisations engaged in silk sector for development, appointing professional and other staff and so on.

Such an attempt by the Government of Bangladesh could not have been more timely. On the one hand the silk industry in Bangladesh is literally dying. On the other hand a revival of this industry is perhaps the only solution to the problem of wide-spread rural unemployment and poverty in Bangladesh, particularly among the landless and marginal farmers. The experience of Bangladesh with the Silk Board tells us that, the tall task that has been set for the Bangladesh Silk Foundation (BSF) is easier said than done, and there is no room for complacency. However, given the right motivation, proper political commitment and the backing of the government, and the right kind of professional approach it is a task that is not unachievable.

The proposed BSF could start functioning by initiating a 'Strategic Planning Process' by using the 'Log Frame Approach'. The strategic Planning Process should involve the management, the staff, and qualified professionals, if necessary by

hiring them from outside the organisation. It should culminate in the development of programmes for the removal of impediments to the development and growth of silk industry in Bangladesh, as well as for actively promoting their development.

An immediate outcome of the 'Strategic Planning Process' should be the development of a 'Mission' or goal for the BSF as follows: 'To assist the poor landless and marginal farmers of Bangladesh to improve their economic status and living standard by creating employment opportunities for them through the distribution of credit and provision of technical assistance'.

The Mission of BSF could be achieved through the following objectives:

1. A credit programme through which credit could be offered to the landless and the marginal farmers both directly and through associate/grantee agencies;

\* Credit disbursed to be invested for sericulture.

\* BSF could take a 5 per cent service charge from associate/grantee agencies which, in turn, could take a 20 per cent service charge from the farmers.

\* Associate/grantee agencies are to repay the credit plus interest to the BSF in 30 equal monthly instalments after an initial moratorium period of 6 months.

\* Associate/grantee agencies, in turn, could determine the repayment period and the method of credit disbursement and repayment according to the principles, rules, and by laws determined by the BSF.

\* Associate/grantee agencies could meet their administrative and related costs from the service charge retained after paying the BSF its 5 per cent.

2. A technical assistance, training and institutional development programme.

\* To assist the associate/grantee agencies to run their credit programmes more efficiently and effectively.

\* To train the landless and the marginal farmers in the various aspects of sericulture.

3. A research programme to primarily promote sericulture among the landless and the marginal farmers of Bangladesh.

The following activities could be performed in order to achieve the objectives of the BSF:

1. To provide various types of financial, institutional, advisory, and technical assistance to various NGOs, autonomous, government, and social-welfare agencies, associations, and local government bodies within the norms of the BSF to enable them to create employment opportunities for the landless and the marginal farmers of Bangladesh through sericulture.

2. To assist associate/grantee agencies in their programme to remove poverty and unemployment from the rural areas through credit programme, and provide cooperation and assistance towards increasing their efficiency through education and training.

3. To provide technical assistance to strengthen the institutional infrastructure of associate/grantee agencies and other national and foreign agencies and associations, various associated international agencies and associated UN agencies and affiliates with a view to achieving the objectives of the Foundation.

4. To support, encourage and promote various innovative sericulture programmes and projects that would aim to create self-dependence through increasing awareness and creat-

ing productive employment opportunities for improving the living standard of the landless and the marginal farmers.

5. To encourage and patronise innovative ideas and techniques of sericulture with a view to alleviating poverty in the rural areas, and provide technical assistance and cooperation for the development of programmes that give importance to innovative/new technology, creation of employment opportunities and development oriented activities.

6. To take up various research activities with a view to alleviating poverty and creating employment opportunities through sericulture, provide cooperation for the establishment of sericulture research and training institutes; provide scholarships and fellowships for the study of sericulture, organise seminars, workshops and conferences on sericulture and take steps to publish reports, periodicals, monographs, bulletins, journals, and books for fulfilling the objectives of the BSF.

7. To develop an effective MIS for the regular monitoring and evaluation of the poverty alleviation programme through sericulture of associate/grantee agencies.

8. To establish contact and develop links with associate/grantee agencies and other national and foreign agencies and associations, various associated international agencies and associated UN agencies and affiliates with a view to achieving the objectives of the Foundation.

9. To encourage, patronise, support and cooperate for taking up various educational, social, commercial, agricultural and industrial programmes for achieving the objectives of the Foundation.

10. To participate in all

types of legal activities/programmes and take all necessary steps to achieve the objectives of the BSF and in the interest of its continued growth and development.

In order to perform the activities listed above the BSF must have its own funds which it could develop through: 1) government grant; 2) grant from international non-government sources/organisations; 3) credit/grant and technical assistance received from foreign governments, international agencies, institutions, and other sources; 4) own income of the Foundation.

## Conclusion

Bangladesh has an overpopulated and under-employed rural sector where the burden of poverty is borne by the landless and the marginal farmers who constitute an overwhelming majority of the rural population.

The only way to solve this under-employment and poverty of the rural population in Bangladesh is to take up a crash programme in the growth and development of sericulture in which Bangladesh has a long history and enormous potential.

Although Bangladesh is lagging behind in sericulture and the silk industry is all but dying, there is a tremendous scope for its development. Through the development of sericulture it would, in turn, be possible to solve the problem of rural unemployment and poverty provided number of important measures are adopted which are not easy, but also not impossible, given the right commitment and support.

The decision of the Bangladesh of Government to establish a Silk Foundation could be a step in the right direction provided the government sets it up with the necessary goals, autonomy, funds, and proper commitment. We must not forget that the Bangladesh Silk Board failed to achieve its goals less for want of proper policy decisions or funds, but more due to a lack of sufficient commitment on the part of the government to implement the programme set.

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## US Gives Tentative Approval to UN-brokered Accord with Iraq

by Vasantha Arora

*According to some estimates, the present level of arms build-up in the region would cost the US exchequer about a quarter of a billion dollars per month.*

US President Bill Clinton Monday night gave a tentative approval to the deal brokered with Iraq by UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan.

He however reiterated his threat of airstrikes in case Baghdad reneged on its commitment to allow unrestricted access to all its weapons sites.

Addressing a news conference, flanked by his national security team, including Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, in the Oval Office, Clinton said the military force in the Gulf that had grown in size over the past several weeks would remain until it was clear that Iraq was honouring the terms of the agreement it had signed with Annan in Baghdad yesterday.

According to some estimates, the present level of arms build-up in the region would cost the US exchequer about a quarter of a billion dollars per month.

However, there is an apparent sense of relief in Washington over the fact that there is now no immediate possibility of another Gulf War, which appeared imminent last week. US officials also made it clear that there was no promise on their side on lifting economic sanctions slapped on Iraq after the Gulf War in 1991. Under the UN Security Council resolution, the issue would come up for consideration after the receipt of the report of the weapons inspectors.

"We have seen that diplomacy must be backed by strength and resolve," Clinton said, lending credence to the view that the massive demonstration of force by the United States had forced "recalcitrant" Iraqi President Saddam Hussein to come to the negotiation table.

Though the draft of the agreement has not been made public, informed sources say one of its provisions calls for "senior diplomats" to accompany UNSCOM teams to sensitive weapons sites.

The US wants clarification as to who will select these diplomats and whether Iraq would have a say in their selection. US Congressmen, especially those associated with the majority Republican Party, are

least enthusiastic about the terms of the UN-brokered accord and hit out at the Clinton administration for what they called its lack of a long-term policy to deal with Saddam Hussein, "the root cause of the trouble in the region." Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott disliked the UN intervention in the stand-off and called it another example of US foreign policy "subcontracted" to another entity.

Senator John McCain said, "I believe in situations like these it should be for the United States and not the Secretary-General of the United Nations to make a settlement, since it is American lives at risk."

He believed the proposed settlement came about not because of the threat of US military action. Lott, however, found it important for Congress to offer its support for US military action should the President consider it necessary.

Senator Arlene Specter said he would sponsor a resolution calling for Saddam Hussein's trial as a "war criminal." Asked about the possibility of US sending troops into Iraq to get Hussein, Specter said, "one way or another, we've got to topple Saddam Hussein. It may be a covert action, it may be a lot of pressure on the Voice of America."

"Saddam Hussein has a lot of enemies within Iraq. We may be able to avoid that kind of military action, but, one way or another, we have got to get rid of Saddam Hussein. Specter said, "If Saddam Hussein goes back on his word," said House Speaker Newt Gingrich, "there should be immediate retaliation." India Abroad News Service

## Sangskritik Jote protests assault on Ramendu

By Staff Correspondent

## Russia keen to assist afforestation programme

Russia is interested to help Bangladesh in the afforestation programme, visiting Russian parliamentarians said here yesterday, reports BSS.

The five-member parliamentary delegation of state Duma of the Russian Federation, who met Minister for Forest and Environment Syeda Chowdhury at her office, offered to assist Bangladesh, a PID handout said.

The meeting discussed about the publication activities of the Islamic Foundation and related matters of Hajj camp.

It was informed that the foundation has so far published more than 1,900 Islamic books with an objective to reach the Bengali translation of *Tafsir* on the holy Quran, *Hadis* and fundamental Islamic books to the people.

The meeting was also informed that the permanent Hajj camp built up at a cost of Tk 40 crore will be used by the Hajj pilgrims during Hajj season and as Imam Training Centre in other time.

Committee member Md Hafez Ruhul Amin (Madani) and Panchana Biswas attended the meeting.

Cultural activists chanted slogans demanding exemplary punishment to those responsible for the incidents from the procession.

The procession began from TSC of the Dhaka University and paraded different thoroughfares of the city.

The Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL), the student wing of the ruling Awami League also brought out a procession and had a rally at the *Aparajeo Bangla* protesting the incidents.

The BCL rally was addressed, among others, by Enamul Haque Shamim, Ishaque Ali Khan Panna, Abu Syed Al Mahmud Swapon, Bahadur Bepari and Ajoy Kor Kokhon.

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