

Police Efficiency

Home Minister Rafiqul Islam has done well to ask Officers-in-Charge of all police stations in the metropolises to open files on those who lobby for release of persons accused in various cases. As a logical conclusion to this directive they are also required to send such records to higher authorities for necessary action at their end. The home minister would seem to have felled two birds with one stone. He has responded to the complaints almost routinely voiced by police officers that they are often hamstrung by undue requests made by influential persons to let go with offenders. Now they can report such persons to higher authorities. Secondly, a signal is being sent out to godfathers, jacks, influence-wielders or what have you, that they must henceforth refrain from poking their nose into police work to avoid what we would like to be a public exposure. So now the calculation perhaps is that they would shy away from doing it anymore.

On the face of it, the directive seems to have hit the nail on its head but on a reality check, it could sound rather simplistic and inadequate, too. First of all not all the undue requests for leniency to offenders are directly made to the OCs, even though they are the end-points to be receiving them. Our logical suggestion would be that taking a cue from the home minister's directive to the OCs, officers of higher echelons need also to take guard against interference from any quarters. They, on their part, through an extended mechanism, ought to be able to resist intrusive impingements on their junior colleagues' right to professional work.

It is common knowledge that *tadbirs* are seldom made with personal approach to the thana headquarters nor is the influence peddled in writing; these are almost invariably made through phone calls. For lack of evidence, as it is understood in normal parlance of law, it might be difficult, if not impossible, to pin down those who lobby for release of offenders. Obstructing police work should certainly be liable for legal action.

All said and done, at the operative level, it is the thana officers who can shore up law enforcement more than most in the police department. *Tadbir* relates to cases on the file, but what about the allegations of genuine complains not being taken up at the police stations. There has to be a powerful internal mechanism within the police force to make it truly accountable. Police reform, availability of more policemen for law and order and their re-equipment constitute crying needs of the day.

Menace of Drug Abuse

A front page visual of The Daily Star last Thursday was an eloquent summary of the situation. Also only the other day a national Bangla daily dwelt graphically on the rise of fatal attraction to drugs. How bad the drug abuse situation in Bangladesh is?

Well, it may still sound as a distant rumble of dread but the present air of insouciance prevailing, it looks firmly poised to be one of our major worries in the next century. Consciousness about that frightening possibility has not quite sunk. We are yet far too disorganised to be up in arms in a crusade against drug abuse. A UN sponsored seminar recently brought the Bangladesh scenario under a sharp focus and in our consideration left a few important directional tips for the authorities to build their defences on.

Bangladesh's problem with drug abuse, as it is probably the case with other countries as well, is that the youth section of its population is the most vulnerable group. With the socio-economic factors serving more as abetting than deterring agents, abuse of drug both as an escape and fad starts as a natural winner in this land. The fact of having such close geographical proximity with the infamous Golden Triangle only serves to take the underpinnings away from an effective combat. But these are realities we cannot help and any strategy to fight the spread of drug abuse has to be formulated in the light of these problems. Although government's record in sensitising people about the adverse impact of drug abuse through media has been far more impressive than its credentials in any other field of social problem we feel there is a precious lot it can do by playing a more pro-active role.

There have been suggestions to tighten the laws. We don't think tightening law is the only answer. In our socio-political-economic milieu law enforcement remains the single most powerful challenge. We believe social resistance following the fusion of forces can facilitate that to a great extent. For its part government has to match its words with actions. As one representative of the narcotics department confessed at the moment they are ill equipped logistically. Won't the government sound more sincere about its commitment to the fight against drug with its relevant department in full strength?

We Owe Them a Living

We have an urban demographic disaster on our hands going by some latest statistics on slum proliferation in Dhaka city. A recently-released report of the Bangladesh Habitat Council serves as an eye-opener to what lies ahead, say, by the year 2020. Urban population in Dhaka has been increasing at an alarming rate of 5 per cent per annum compared with 3.8 per cent in developing countries and the world average of 2.6 per cent. What really sends the hackles up is that the number of slum-dwellers is soaring at a faster rate than the overall urban population. While 20 lakh people today live in the city's shanties amidst an urban population of 90 lakh, it is likely to reach one crore mark by 2020 in a projected urban population of two crore at that point in time. In other words, if the current trend is not reversed slum population in a little more than two decades from now will be 50 per cent of the urban population.

Natural increase in the urban population and the unnatural migratory guests for *El Dorado* from the rural areas make for such horrendous grand totals. What compounds the matter is the baby boom among the floating people.

A comprehensive answer to the potential demographic disaster lies in a two-pronged strategy. First, there ought to be numerous tertiary growth centres springing up all over the country in order that migration to the cities can be checkmated. Not only that, it could even effect a reverse migration to the countryside.

Simultaneously, we owe minimum living standards to the slum-dwellers who have been doing yeoman's job for us in so many ways. Let all the shanty upgradation projects bear fruit sooner than later.

Planned Development, Painful Failures

Oath bound as we are to adhere to the Constitutional provisions, there is no reason as to why planned development efforts should fail so painfully.

To pull the economy out of a stage of abject poverty, Bangladesh has been following the course of planned development since 1973. The First Five-Year Plan was launched in July 73, under the guidance of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. In the background of world-wide inflation and uncertainties, a Two-Year Plan took place (1978-80). The plan framework was reinstated in 1980 and the nation experienced implementation of three plans in succession. Again, planned development paused for a while since no Five-Year Plan was taken up immediately after the expiry of the fourth one (1990-95). Thus the country observed a 'Plan holiday' during 1995-97. The Fifth Five-Year Plan (1997-2000) saw the light very recently, possibly on time, and with promises to fulfil the dreams of Bangabandhu — the architect of the First Plan.

The experiences with and the consequences of planned development in Bangladesh — to say, a constitutional mandate — are well-known. The trivial successes that planned development hitherto brought forth could be in evidence travelling to rural areas or visiting urban slums. By and large, no Plan could touch its targets. For example, every Plan targeted an annual growth rate of 5 per cent but in reality achieved a bare 4 per cent. Even large inflow of foreign aid — to supplement domestic savings — failed to free the economy from low growth trap Bangladesh is entangled in. Bangladesh continues

to be a member of the club of the poorest countries of the world with a per capita income of US\$ 240. Approximately 53 per cent of the people are illiterate, 60 per cent of the children suffer from moderate to severe malnutrition, life expectancy of people is 58 years. About one-half of the population cannot contribute to the country's development efforts, even if they desire to do so. The dismal performance dragged the dream of a Sonar Bangla — the dream that ignited people to fight for a separate homeland.

The Fifth Plan document attempts to reason for the failures and iron out the pitfalls. At the top of the factors adducible to failures, was the political instability that loomed large over most of the years since independence. There was a 'semblance' of an elected government but the camouflage could not fetch off the political turmoil adversely affecting development process. The absence of a truly representative government helped banish public accountability but indiscriminately, bred private agenda. Arguably, this added to fail projects but 'gift horses failed to earn their hay'. Secondly, the development efforts were also adversely affected by an unsteady flow of aid and changes in its modality. Thirdly, frequent occurrences of natural hazards took heavy tolls in terms of pre-empting scarce resources for relief works

thus, sapped the country's savings and investment habits. All these factors compounded to frustrate planned development with shortfalls in investment and output.

Articles 9, 10, 15, 16, 19, 20(2), 22, 21(2) of the Constitution of the Republic provides clear directives as to the role of the state and planned development. For example, Article 15 articulates that the state should provide: (a) basic necessities of life to citizens e. g. food, clothing, shelter, medical care etc.; (b) right to work at reasonable

public service system. To us, the basic causes of the failures of planned development efforts lay in non-adherence to the Articles 9 and 7. What we want to mean is that past efforts at invigorating local government institutions and injecting good governance through separation judiciary from executive and establishment of a pro-people public service system have miserably failed. A display of respect to Articles 7 and 9 of the Constitution could at least ensure people's active participation at local

levels and free the society from the clutches of the criminals. And, in fact, the present government headed by Sheikh Hasina pledged to properly address these two issues. Of courses, some progress is being witnessed with respect to local government institutions. That again, basically relates to elections held or to be held. But to make the scheme effective and biting, local level institutions need to be developed with more power — financial or others. Plans should originate from there — from the roots. We

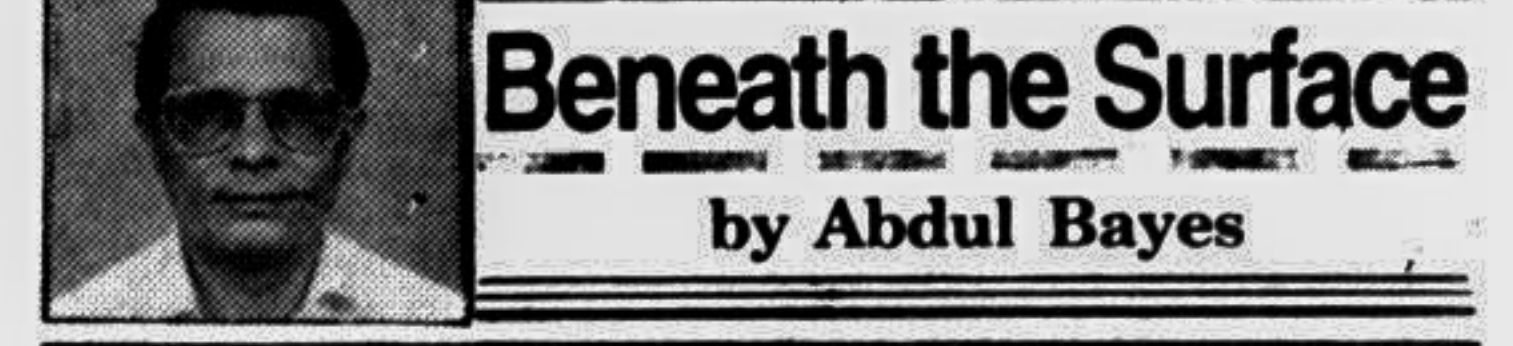
are not sure, how much of the Fifth Plan document could claim — during formulation and implementation — a real participation of the people the whole exercise is meant for. We therefore strongly recommend that let local government institutions grow up with muscles, not with only bones. Let them feel that development would be at door steps if and only they can generate resources, use up resources subject to a sustainable environment. Mere holding of elections is just the first step of the rump. So much more needs to be done.

Since independence till today, good governance and its constituents — as espoused by the Constitution — have just been 'linguishing'. The cumulative total of achievements is at best little better than hellish. The most recent episodes gleaned from newspapers with respect to extortions, police harassment, *masrani*, hijacking, killing — all speak of an inexpressible decay in the realm of public service. Bureaucracy, allegedly, still hold the key to decision making, even though a truly elected government is at the helms of management of the country.

By any standard of judgement, the Fifth Plan embodies a promise to leap fast and catch the train towards the 21st century. The critics would like to call the targets as ambitious. We tend to disagree at least with respect to the target growth rates.

For the last two successive fiscal years, the GDP increased at a rate of average 5.6 per cent. Without entering into the debate as to the sources of growth, one needs only to note that a marginal improvement in (a) infrastructure facilities (on time and at reasonable price); (b) law and order situation to arrest people's fear to invest; (c) judicial system to ensure property rights and justice; (d) regular monitoring of development projects and (e) consensus building relating to disposition of loss accumulating state-owned enterprises could go a long way in elevating growth rate by few more percentage points.

The fix, therefore, lies not merely in scarcity of resources but mostly in the rational use of existing resources. The constitution clearly directs the state to pursue such policies as would ensure those rational uses. Oath bound as we are to adhere to the Constitutional provisions, there is no reason as to why planned development efforts should fail so painfully. The fate of the Fifth Plan also hangs around following constitutional commitments. That might require an unconventional route in exercising powers, delivering services to the people, exploiting resources. There is no way, we think, that an average growth rate of 7 per cent per annum could be achieved unless we invest in a new frame of mind. Think big, work big and attain big. Otherwise, as in the past, planned development efforts will face a plain failure.



Beneath the Surface by Abdul Bayes

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Multistoried Slums?

Bad News for Petty-producers

by Dr Shayer Ghafur

How far is that situation when we would not require any rehabilitation in the first place? To achieve that aim, interventions definitely have to take place to mitigate the 'causes', and not to smoothen, the 'symptoms' of the problems.

HELTER situation of the poor, often depicted as slum dwellers, has been quite depressing lately. Leaving aside morbid statistics, we are familiar with headings like 'project faces setback', 'fund shortage', 'project for slum dwellers uncertain', 'slum dwellers fading smiles' etc. However, there is one exception. ECNEC had recently approved a multistoried slum rehabilitation project. We were told that 16,000 families would benefit from this project. The estimated project cost is more than Tk 347 crore (The Daily Star 25.5.98). A refreshing news indeed, and unique too, followed an editorial too (DS 26.5.98). Now I would like to review the conceptual merit of this project. What follows next is a critical account of this review.

Housing, Urbanism and Development

Housing in developing countries, especially in urban low-income context, is no longer seen as formal 'shelter provision', guided by a 'shelter deficit' number. By now, most developing countries have been known to fail in achieving this elusive goal. The paradigm in practice has been 'housing without houses'. Moreover, some core development issues, e.g. employment generation, gender needs, and human rights, have been progressively placed at the forefront of housing policies and strategies. In addition to their previous 'shelter' emphasis, the point is, UNCHS observes, 'People, habitat, and development are parts of an indivisible whole'. This holistic integration is now a widely held consensus, reiterated in recent global agendas and policy documents. This consensus also recognises an emerging 'urbanism'.

Urbanism, Louis Wirth noted, can be seen as a way of life. In the context of the contemporary urbanism in developing countries, 'income' and 'housing' are the two key areas where the urban poor have been affected severely in the following ways:

- A decline in household income, accompanied by changes in the composition of earning of income in the households.
- A decline in wage sector employment with a corresponding increase in informal labour.
- A decline in home-ownership and an increase in rental (and shared) housing.

A strong decline in the access to and quality of urban services.

The dynamics of urbanism, in a given space and time, is complex and suggested to be a product of culture, city and technology. This paper, in spirit, is a critique of that attitude which wants to promote a quick-fix urbanism: urbanism borne out of a draughting-table by negating existing way of life. For example, an out-of-context theory (from the West) prefers a separation between the place of living and place of work. In reality, in contrast to this formal view, the urban poor way of living is unique: shelter besides being a living space is also a work place. They try to earn, and/or supplement their income by working at home. Whatever small income they may earn, it is considered crucial for their day-to-day survival.

The key question asked is not whether there will be scopes for income generation in the newly conceived multistoried housing. The question is addressed at a more basic level: is multistory housing a good idea for the urban poor? In other words, is this a responsive solution from the perspective of their way of living? This is an open question. Before full project implementation, and post-occupancy evaluation we are less confident to answer it affirmatively. One thing we can be confident of saying: Housing is good for income generation. Let me explain.

Shelter for Income Generation

A considerable interest is shown, on the one hand, in employment and income generation arising from the physical development of low-income settlements: various employment or income generation opportunities that may be created by the provision of, or giving access to the components of shelter, land and services in low-income settlements. On the other hand, income generation from shelter can either be 'passive' (e.g. renting) or 'active' i.e.

various production, retail and service activities carried out from home and by the members of the household. In designing and planning for shelter or land development, considerations for both these types of income generation include: First, that there is adequate land excluding shelter to carry out income generation activities. Second, that there is enough land for shelter so that dwellers can self-built extra rooms for renting — a process known as 'transformation'. It is clear that there is no structural ground to consider these points in the case of multistory flats.

We are uncertain whether prospective multistory dwellers will be given any role in the construction process. It is hard to imagine that people from different parts of the Dhaka city started living in Bhasan Tek (the alleged site for rehabilitation) even before the completion of the project and take part in the construction of their own habitat. Even if they could manage living in the surrounding area, then why building? On the other hand, it is also quite unlikely that dwellers in multistory block will have any real chance to practice any of the active or passive earning options. Against all odds, it still may be possible for some type of income earning activities taking place e.g. stitching, embroidery works. But a highly congested and economised space would definitely deprive them from choosing a more profitable option. It is important to remember that options for variety would endanger safety and health factors for the multistory dwellers. On morale grounds, the authorities might not give more than required space to allow sub-letting, and thereby restricting their earnings by passive means.

Limits of Discourse

The concept of 'space' as a tangible three-dimensional entity constitutes an existential foothold as well as referential framework for our day-to-day activities. In the housing discourse, micro-scale of this space is where we live, work, struggle and procreate. To emancipate poor households from poverty, various social, physical, and economic inputs (within an integrated intervention or not) are provided at this micro-scale of space, and for people who live in it. This provision contributes to the household production-reproduction nexus. It appears unfortunate that the prevailing wisdom is ready to ignore the fact that spatial setting for production activities for income generation i.e. 'economic space' overlaps with 'life space' i.e. spatial setting required for day-to-day reproductive works (e.g. sleeping, cooking, child caring, or socialisation) of households. My conceptual view is that the very concept to rehabilitate slum dwellers in multistory blocks is the latest manifestation of this ignorance. This apparent ignorance has to be understood in relation to the specific 'positivist' nature of the discourse that produces it.

What is the positivist approach in methods of inquiry? In the other sectors of the society have to play second fiddle to the politicians. What has happened in the arena of the other thinkers out there the profession of politics? Why they are not respected or make their presence felt? Why they do not have their own base and assert themselves independently? Can't do it? They are not nincompoops, dancing at the other end of the string! It is not their weakness. The ordinance (in an economically deprived society) are looking for more practical outputs than rich and noble ideas. They are naturally looking for economic gains — and quick over to that.

There is no time to think, to plan, to develop infrastructures for the greatest good for the greatest number. Self-security comes first (it is human nature), and there is no time for reflection thinking. After self-security, one can help others.

Politicians are vendors offering some good goodies. The public are in a mood to buy those favours, by compromising on tested principles of ethics and morality. Therefore the principle of short-cuts are applied in both the camps. Short-cuts means short-circuiting, and the latter means troubles. Fuses blow out frequently, there are fires and damages (both sides), and the poor remain poor. Resisting temptation is a

discourse that produces it. What is the positivist approach in methods of inquiry? In the other sectors of the society have to play second fiddle to the politicians. What has happened in the arena of the other thinkers out there the profession of politics? Why they are not respected or make their presence felt? Why they do not have their own base and assert themselves independently? Can't do it? They are not nincompoops, dancing at the other end of the string! It is not their weakness. The ordinance (in an economically deprived society) are looking for more practical outputs than rich and noble ideas. They are naturally looking for economic gains — and quick over to that.

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Reconstructed Discourse

We need a conceptual shift of focus from problems to potentials: a focus on what poor do

strong pillar of character building. The society is now turned to cosmetic effects only. Can a nation survive on skin-deep therapy? The branches, the fruits and the flowers can be seen, as these are at the eye level. The roots are hidden inside the earth. One is reminded of the motion picture 'The Good Easter' from a great novel by Pearl S Buck (if I recall correctly).

PSC and Psychology

Sir, The 20th BCS is advertised in the newspapers where 26 posts are for BCS (Economic) Research Officers. Subjects required for this post are mathematics, applied mathematics, physics, applied physics, chemistry, applied chemistry, statistics, economics, geology, botany, zoology, history, Islamic history and culture, anthropology, sociology, social welfare & social work etc.

Most of these subjects are not research-oriented. But we, the students of psychology have 400, for statistics, 350 for practical, 200 for field research (project) and 50 for internship (honours and masters) which is totally research-oriented.

in a nutshell, positivist approach is understood to be objective, value free and politically neutral: pre-conditions that contribute to continue existing social system and perpetuate its survival. It is also known to emphasize the descriptive role of quantitative approach, and the mechanical way in which it could predict a set of prescriptions within existing (social) orders. What implication does this positivist method has in the urban poverty-housing nexus?

In dealing with urban poverty in Bangladesh, existing discourse is more concerned with what space is? What has rarely been addressed is what space does? In particular, what role local space plays in the day-to-day survival of the urban poor households? In the former case, urban poverty discourse has been seen as a historical, uncritical, and self-referential. Leaving aside occasional rhetoric, these studies fail to appreciate the productive and creative nature of urban poor households. Not surprisingly, poor households have been depicted as an apparently homogenous group of people infested with problems — which asked to be solved, preferably by means of aids or finances of foreign origins.

Conclusion

We know by now, any slum eviction without rehabilitation is a good recipe for political disaster. Above all, it is immoral. We like to see rehabilitation of a group of urban destitute takes place for their own good, and for the greater interest of Dhaka. Space is a commodity; it is important that space, released in this process, is not appropriated by a few profit-hungry opportunists. What we least like to see is that destitute are dumped in the name of rehabilitation without due attention to their overall well being. We have to be cautious in our approach as we do not know yet what intangible costs the slum dwellers' have to bear in social, psychological, and economic terms.

How far is that situation when we would not require any rehabilitation in the first place? To achieve that aim, interventions definitely have to take place to mitigate the 'causes', and not to smoothen the 'symptoms' of the problems.

Bank loan for educational institutions

Sir, With reference to the editorial dated 27 May, 1998 in the DS I would like to add a few lines about social security and progress out of the benefits of the Academic Industry in our country. One should accept the truth that education unites and not divides So, we want the Government to take up the issue of bank loan for establishing more educational institutions all over the country under the care of genuine educators at the private level.

Abul Ashraf Noor, Uttara, Dhaka.

Mad Liakat Ali, Abul Hai, Abdur Rahim, Department of Psychology, University of Dhaka.

To the Editor...

Overbridge needed at Uttara

Sir, Uttara is the largest residential area in Bangladesh and its population is increasing rapidly. But what is lacking here is civic facilities like footpath, community centre, most of the roads go under-water after a moderate rainfall and most badly needed an over bridge at the crossing point of popularly known Rajlaxmi Shopping Complex.

Crossing the road from one end to other in front of Rajlaxmi Complex has become very dangerous as the number of vehicles have traffic are being increased to a great extent. It is known to the area dwellers that there are two significant busiest crossing/approaching points at Uttara — one is at Azampur and the other is Rajlaxmi. Thousands of residents cross these crossing points daily taking their lives at risk. It is appreciable that City Corporation has undertaken a massive programme in order to construct over-bridges/underpasses at various busy points of the city so as to city-dwellers can cross the roads safely. Subsequently it is also helping the movements of traffic. Simultaneously the Corporation should also consider the necessity of an over-bridge at Rajlaxmi crossing be-

lore opening of Jamuna Multipurpose Bridge, as a number of people have already lost their lives at this crossing.

Abul Khair, House-9, Road-10, Sector-4, Uttara, Dhaka-1230

Minors' smoking

Sir, The theme for this year's observance of World No Tobacco Day is 'Growing up without tobacco', highlighting the need to prevent minors from smoking. As you may be aware, British American Tobacco Bangladesh is a responsible company maintaining the highest ethical and moral standards in running its business. In keeping with these standards we would like to put forward our company position on smoking by minors. We hope that you will take this into cognizance as you prepare to cover the events of World No Tobacco Day, for information of your esteemed readers.

1. We believe and are committed to the principle that smoking is an adult choice and that minors should not smoke. Our market is adult smokers. We define adults as those who are 18 years of age or older.

2. We ensure through company policy and practice that

our advertising and marketing for tobacco products are directed to adult smokers. Advertising is an important communication tool to inform smokers about our products. It is designed to maintain brand loyalty and to encourage smokers to switch from competitor brands to our brands.

3. We support the strict enforcement of laws preventing the sale of tobacco to persons under the legal age to purchase tobacco and would support initiatives to realise this goal.

4. A survey conducted by the Consumers Association of Bangladesh last year, revealed that the two most important influences on juvenile smoking initiation are peer pressure or family and sibling influences. Internationally, the overwhelming amount of studies suggest that these influences are true in other countries as well.

Mahmudur Rahman, Head of Consumer & Regulatory Affairs, BAT, Dhaka.

Abnormalities in the society

Sir, The political leaders have become the guardians of our society, as the latter have exaggerated expectations from them; with the result the lead-

It is the only department at Dhaka University which includes vast statistics courses after statistics department. We strongly believe that we are able to be research officers for our pragmatic experience.

We request the PSC to include this subject for that post (research officer) and give us a chance to prove ourselves.

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