

# Poverty Alleviation: A Critical Review

by Md Asadullah Khan

*The success of poverty alleviation programme vis-a-vis development of the country lies in mobilising domestic resources and formulating pragmatic strategies. To attract global market, the entrepreneurs in the country should now go for product diversification... But evidently the growth of domestic industries and export capability of a nation depends on the consensus of the main political parties on vital national issues.*

THE pre-budget meeting held on May 12 last in Dhaka under the auspices of Bangladesh AID Club now named Bangladesh Development Forum and participated by 15 member states and 10 international donor agencies identified poverty as the most formidable challenge facing the nation. Donor agencies' report revealed that Bangladesh in its war against poverty since 1980s could hardly make any appreciable dent to break the cycle. Rural poverty still stands at 44 per cent vis-a-vis 43 per cent in 1992 and the corresponding figure for urban poverty stand at 14 per cent. The meeting organised in an effort to monitor correct appraisal of the economic situation in the country before formulating the next budget stressed the need for accelerating growth, promoting education, targeting public expenditure programmes that would reach the poorest segments of society.

But the most shocking aspect of the economic rejuvenation and structural reforms that has moved at a snail's pace is that while higher growth rates have contributed to decline in poverty, rising inequality in income distribution has reduced the overall rate of poverty reduction. Regardless of the means resorted to for attaining growth, experts believe that 20-30 per cent of potential poverty reduction from growth has been lost due to rising inequality.

Faster growth is needed if poverty is to be reduced faster. The World Bank report, stressed on the need for additional efforts to limit rising inequality. Understandably, the growth in the agriculture sector has the highest impact when it comes to poverty reduction and limiting inequality. Moreover, the gains from education, health-care and other social indicators needed to be pursued more vigorously in combating poverty. Education and land ownership, precisely known to all, remain key determinants of living standards.

The performance of public services has remained notoriously bad till now despite so much emphasis attached to these time and again. Procrastination in implementing projects, inefficiency, incompetence, corruption, delivery quality and poor access of the common run to such services remain shockingly beyond rectification. Could we not after passage of 27 years of liberation of the country invoke a comparison between our country's economic record and that of countries of east Asia. They had done better because they had followed wiser economic policies, they placed country above self, party and politics; they improved efficiency and curtailed red-tapism.

Of course one pertinent difference between us and them was that we were a democracy at least for the last seven years and some of them most certainly were not. But most certainly democracy must be counted as our strength and not our weakness. Political leaders may have difficulty in admitting that it was they who kept

the country on the wrong road for more than 27 years. Advancing further, we have to ask ourselves the most pertinent question, "If democracy is the reason why 40 per cent of the population in the country still live below the poverty line?" At a time when we were celebrating our Silver Jubilee, there's no greater shame than the fact that nearly half our people in villages live in such appalling misery. What prevented us in making investments in roads, bridges, electricity, cottage industries and sort of agro-industries that would have created jobs in rural areas? Job scarcity and absence of land ownership in the rural areas have forced these people to move to the pavements and slums of our cities.

In almost every part of the country, rural people possess craftsman's and artisan's skill and traditions that could produce goods and services which the consumers especially in cities, not to mention foreigners, could buy if the villagers had access to roads, public transport and markets. Roads, telephones and electricity are the essential tools to meet the challenges of the 21st century. The construction work of Bangabandhu Jamuna Bridge now over, a long cherished dream of the people of Bangladesh, especially of the northern part of the country has now come true. The economic and the physical gap or more truly the disparities between the two parts of Bangladesh is likely to be bridged. The free flow of agricultural produce and other goods will bring about adequate economic returns. Many of those who did not participate in economic activities because of physical constraints may not find further excuse to refrain from. Trade and commerce will be boosting bringing about an economic rejuvenation. As transportation of resources and commodities becomes easier, industrialisation and economic activities in the north-eastern region will get a spurt. Prospect of a viable export Processing Zone in the north and a bright opportunity for privatisation of the traditionally sick sugar mills will help reduce the poverty level in the region.

This emphasizes the fact that the construction of much talked of Padma bridge linking Aricha and Daulatdia should get upper most in the mind of the economic planners of the country. The task however daunting and the cost whatsoever forbidding—if accomplishing would bring about a surge of economic activities between the north-eastern and south-western part of the country. The forest, fisheries and agricultural resources of the south western part of the country till now re-

main far from being properly exploited for want of a speedy, smooth and hurdle-free means of communication.

Presumably, if the defaulted loan to the tune of 13,000 crore taka could be recovered, the country could have at least three such bridges. What prevented the previous governments to take up projects in these sectors? Surely, it is some of our people, our high-sounding charismatic leaders and not the system stood in the way to improve roads and they only perpetuated the system of stagnation to achieve their selfish ends without any thought for the country.

Land reforms programme that aims at reducing inequality of income distribution in rural areas was not at all touched by the previous governments and the present government's action or move in such important direction is yet to be apparent. Poverty alleviation programme as discussed earlier is different media and for a decade so profusely that not even 30 paise of every taka spent actually reached the people it was meant for.

Literacy will be the key to jobs in the 21st century. An appraisal of the present situation in this vital sector only indicates that almost half of the population will be denied such access. Literacy drive programme is still very much in conceptual stage. All initiatives taken by the government are getting shattered by the bureaucratic snags and corruption done out by the Finance Ministry in the pre-budget meeting with the Bangladesh Development Forum to elevate the literacy rate to 70 per cent from the present figure of 40 per cent in the next five "Five Year Plan" period would remain a pious wish unless the infrastructural weaknesses like dilapidated buildings, inadequate seating provision, poor inputs, teacher training etc. are substantially overcome.

Reports quoting D G of the sub-formal education programme circulated in a section of the press on May 15 last indicated that adult education programme in the Gopalganj district, the Prime Minister's home district, at a cost of Taka 2 crore that was launched in early '97 had collapsed just within three months after its inauguration by the Prime Minister "due to corruption, bungling, neglect, irregularities and lack of transparency in expenditures. One particular aspect of such lack of transparency is an expenditure of Taka 35 thousand on Torch-light procession", sub-project where no money was at all spent, the report suggested.

Visibly annoyed and angered after ascertaining such loop-

holes and dismal fate of the project the only action Prime Minister could take was to transfer the Deputy Commissioner who was squarely responsible for such bungs. In the industrial sector, the situation is equally grim. Reports circulated in a section of the press on May 15, last indicated that in Pabna BSB (Bangladesh Shilpa Bank) is burdened with a defaulted loan of about Taka 63 crore out of Taka 75 crore disbursed. Reports revealed that 15 out of 22 projects have collapsed and would never see the light of the day because of favouritism, nepotism and lack of proper inspection or inventory made at the time of sanctioning loans.

In consequence of such appalling picture, Pabna-based BSB has stopped issuing any fresh loans for industrial projects. All these may not be the doings of the present AL government, but definitely the present government has inherited the legacy, they cannot take appropriate measures against the loan defaulters because of the lacunae in the legal system.

Some people in the administration these days are out to reap harvest by harping on the "Bangabandhu" and naming everything after Bangabandhu without doing tangible work they are meant to do. Because when it comes to economics or freedom from hunger, poverty, secularism and equal opportunities for all, they all revere or remember Bangabandhu as the emancipator or the great helmsman. But unfortunately they indulge in actions that negate the philosophy and ideology Bangabandhu wanted to enshrine in the people. We don't know if even after passage of two years in the driver's seat, AL is thinking hard enough about the mistakes committed earlier. True, the present government's sincere effort of running a government of consensus has not worked. Because the

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# We Can Explode H-bomb in Days

- Qadeer Khan

An Exclusive Interview by Muhammad Najeeb in Islamabad

*"Why should we consider it an Islamic bomb? To give it any name would be discriminatory and mischievous...No one had ever said that there is a Hindu bomb, a Christian bomb or a Jewish bomb. This is our, Pakistani, bomb."*

ISLAMABAD, June 8 - Pakistani top nuclear scientist Qadeer Khan has said that his country can test a hydrogen bomb "within days" if the political leadership wants it and that the series of tests last month has generated enough data for computer simulated testing.

He also said Pakistan will not have any more nuclear test explosions "in the near future" and claimed that the Indian tests had used dated knowhow. The series of six tests by Pakistan on May 28 and 30 "has been a successful nuclear explosion by all definitions. It was exactly as we had planned and the results were as good as we were hoping," he stated.

Khan said the Pakistani tests were all fission devices, but the country could also explode a thermonuclear bomb if the government decided. "We can test a thermonuclear device within days. We are merely waiting for the government's orders," Khan told IANS in an interview.

"We tested five devices on May 28," he said. "They were all boosted fission devices using uranium 235. We have been manufacturing this at Kahuta for almost 18 to 19 years," he said.

"The first enrichment was done on April 4, 1978. The plant was made operational in 1979 and by 1981 we were producing substantial quantities of uranium," Khan said.

Speaking at his residence in Islamabad Khan also disclosed little known facts about Pakistan's nuclear and missile programme. He revealed that the Ghauri missile was successfully test-flown over Pakistani cities. "This shows the reliability of the Ghauri missile," he said.

"We have quite efficient, reliable, accurate missiles," he said, pointing out how India had conducted three tests of 1,000 km-range missiles which were not accurate.

Khan said Pakistan is planning more missile tests and concentrating on enhancing uranium enrichment to use its fuel for lightwater reactors.

To a question if Pakistan ever exploded a nuclear device in China, Khan said: "No. Never. We did not need to test a device in China...We had done cold tests in 1983 and 1984."

Khan disputed claims by Western governments that Pakistan had actually tested only two nuclear devices. He said the Americans had said the same thing about the Indian tests. "The difficulty for them

to monitor is that if you detonate simultaneously then it will give the impression that only one test has been conducted," he said.

Khan said one of the devices tested on May 28 was a "big bomb" with a yield of between 30 and 35 kilotonnes—twice as big as the one dropped on Hiroshima. The other four were small tactical weapons of low yield," he said.

Comparing Pakistan's nuclear technology with that of India, Khan said that Indians have used the old technology of plutonium from spent fuel whereas Pakistan has used enriched uranium, which is much more sophisticated. "Devices made from plutonium have a worse fallout, but the process is much safer," he said.

About the difference between a plutonium and a uranium-based explosion, Khan said, "Both are fission materials but the technologies are different. Plutonium needs a more arduous and hazardous procedure. It is a cumbersome and expensive process. Uranium is more difficult but safe. Very few countries have this technology."

Of the environmental fallout of the tests, he said there was no danger to the people of the Chagai area in Baluchistan province where the tests were conducted.

He declined to mention how much fissile material Pakistan used for the tests, saying "Let us talk something more important."

Khan said that nuclear weapons research is a continuous process. "There is always a new target...You can reduce the size of the weapon, increase its yield and the storage life. We can make them more effective," he explained.

He rejected the charge that Pakistan's nuclear programme would not have been possible without Chinese help. "Don't you think that Pakistani scientists can do it? This is 100 per cent indigenous. We are also foreign qualified from the same institutions where the Western scientists study...Why do you want to give our credit to others?" he asserted.

Asked how he felt as the creator of weapons of mass destruction, Khan said: "I am one of the kindest persons. I feed birds, ants and monkeys that I am keeping in my house...nuclear weapon is a peace guarantor. It gave peace to Europe, it gave peace to us."

He asserted that the Indian nuclear tests were not provoked by Pakistan. Instead, the Indians, he claimed, made belliger-

ent statements threatening Pakistan.

"We had the capability... We could do it any moment, but we did not start the arms race. So many years the government did not do anything. But all of a sudden five tests only 50 km from our borders were conducted...So there was no other option for us," he said.

"And now they (Indians) tried to call Pakistan's bluff by exploding its devices but we have given them an appropriate response," he added.

To a question if Pakistan has given the Islamic world its first bomb, Khan said: "Why should we consider it an Islamic bomb? To give any name would be discriminatory and mischievous...No one had ever said that there is a Hindu bomb, a Christian bomb or a Jewish bomb. This is our, Pakistani, bomb."

Khan said that all Pakistani governments had remained steadfast in their commitment to the nuclear programme. "It is a national project and no government ever caused any obstacle," he said.

The greatest progress was made during General Zia ul-Haq's tenure, which was the longest. "We made greater progress during his government. We achieved our goals." Former Prime Minister Mohammed Khan Junejo extended full support, while Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif also supported the programme fully as did Benazir Bhutto. "Each government considered it a national priority," Khan said.

Khan learnt his nuclear science at the top atomic establishments in the world. A graduate from the Dutch Technical University of Delft, he has been associated with various European institutes of nuclear research including the Urenco Uranium Enrichment Plant in the Netherlands. He returned to Pakistan in 1976 and offered his services to then Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto who had decided to match India's first nuclear test explosion in May 1974. In 1981, President Zia named the Kahuta nuclear research laboratory after Khan in honour of his services.

Khan, with his team of scientists, has manufactured long anti-missile range missiles for Pakistan's armed forces, including the 1,500 km range Ghauri missile and Hatf-1 and Hatf-2 series of missiles besides anti-tank guided missiles, anti-aircraft guns and laser range finder.

— India Abroad News Service

# Kosovo: "Ethnic Cleansing" against Muslims?

*It is an admitted fact that a reign of terror has descended on Albanian Muslims in Kosovo because of an unjust and counter-productive policy of the Yugoslav leadership.*

*This is the Balkans where the mistakes of history have been learned so well that everyone seems able to repeat them exactly.*

by Barrister Harun ur Rashid

Kosovo's Albanian majority leader Dr. Fehmi Agani on the issue of granting greater autonomy to Kosovo.

## Historical Background

During the 13th century when Spain expelled Muslims and Jews, the Muslims took refuge in the Balkan area. The year 1389 is very momentous for the Serbs, as on June 28th in 1389, Serbia lost its independence in the Kosovo war to the Muslim Turks who gradually ruled almost all the areas of Balkan peninsula till the late 19th century. At the beginning of this century Turkey became weak and in 1912, a Balkan League was formed involving Greece, Serbia and Montenegro with the aim of expelling the Turks from Europe. They went to war and this was devastating for Turkey. A new country Albania with Kosovo as its part was created out of the Turkish empire. After the First World War Serbia annexed Kosovo from Albania on the ground of "historical claims and ties" disregarding the wishes of Albanian majority Muslims. It may be noted that the Albanian Muslims have nothing in common with Serbs either in race or in language.

Balkan peninsula has always been a volatile area. People of different races and religions live in this part of the world. There remains a tension among the people religiously divide—Catholics, Orthodox Christians and Muslims. It witnessed ethnic war in the past and now it is witnessing another war. Historically, Serbia wanted to dominate this area with the expansion of its territory.

After the Second World War, Yugoslavia consisted of six republics and two autonomous provinces. One of the provinces is Kosovo. During Marshall Tito's time, the republics and autonomous units were granted autonomy. After his death in 1981, Kosovo wanted to assume republic status but this demand from Kosovo Albanians was ruthlessly suppressed by the strong Yugoslav army dominated by Serbs.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, the constituent units of Yugoslavia—

Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Macedonia became independent. Only Montenegro, Kosovo and Serbia remained with the Federation of Yugoslavia. From late 80s the then Serbian President Mr. Milosevic could not hide his ambition of creating a bigger Serbia, swallowing Serb-populated territories from Bosnia, Bosnian Serbs Dr. Radovan Karadzic, the army General Ratko Mladic supported the idea and pursued the goal of merging a part of Bosnian territory with Serbia. A bitter fight ensued but it failed to fulfil their dream and the territories of Bosnia and Herzegovina remain intact.

## The Present Crisis

The Kosovo Albanians have not been granted genuine autonomy, after the death of Tito. Since the Kosovo Albanians have felt that their distinct identity was in danger and feared they would be dominated by the Serbs in such a manner that their culture and traditions would gradually disappear. They were deprived of learning even their own language in schools. They wanted to be independent from Serbs' domination. Confronted with this situation, the young people of Kosovo (the Muslims) formed the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) to meet with any violent attacks of Serbian forces.

The Yugoslav authority did not pay any heed to their demands of greater autonomy. The desperation of Kosovo Albanians finally led to the demand of independence from Serbia and the Federation of Yugoslavia and this brought a swift and violent reaction from the Yugoslav leadership. Instead of setting up a dialogue to address their grievances, President Milosevic ordered Serbian police and army to attack the Albanians and they were conveniently labelled as "terrorists"—the result being grimly familiar images of death, starvation, refugees walking with their belongings to Albania and Montenegro regions for safety.

The more ruthless the Serbs are, the more resolute are the young people and the members of KLA of Kosovo. One young man of KLA told a western

journalist: "It sounds strange but everything they do makes us stronger. It is not a question when we will die, but will we win our liberty...We can never live with the Serbs again." This sums up eloquently the nationalistic sentiments of the young people of Kosovo.

It may be recalled that EU was grossly negligent in preventing "ethnic cleansing" during 1992-95 Bosnian war. It appears that this time EU is unlikely to ignore what is happening in Kosovo. It appears that NATO is getting tough and considering all options including military ones. Under pressure from the EU and the US, it is reported last Monday (8th June) that Yugoslav President Milosevic agreed to allow foreign diplomatic observers to enter into Kosovo. The report said that the US Ambassador Christopher Hill to Macedonia would be allowed to escort the ethnic Albanian majority leader Dr Fehmi Agani to view areas where the Serbian military and police have been operating.

## Conclusion

It is an admitted fact that a reign of terror has descended on Albanian Muslims in Kosovo because of an unjust and counter-productive policy of the Yugoslav leadership. This has resulted in a provocative situation in the area. The neighbouring Albania is very uneasy about this situation and may involve itself in a war with Yugoslavia which may even spread to other European countries.

Those who value a sense of decency and justice should press President Milosevic to sit down with the representatives of Kosovo for amicable political settlement and not to pursue a military solution. The Good Friday Agreement on Northern Ireland and our Chittagong Hill Tracts Peace Agreement are shining examples in point. The sooner the Yugoslav leadership realises the futility of violence and armed attacks the better is the future for the Balkan area.

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To recall the genesis of Kosovo crisis, it may be stated that, following the death of Marshal Tito who managed to keep the inter-ethnic tension in Yugoslavia under the lid, the tension surfaced in a bloody burst in Kosovo as in other parts of Yugoslavia. The Serbians claim that the land of Kosovo belongs to them as they were uprooted by the conquering Ottoman Turks and supplanted with an Albanian population of Turkish origin, mostly Muslims. Hence they are all aliens, unauthorised occupiers of their land.

The Serbs launched their bloody campaign of terror and killing since February last against 92 per cent of the population of Kosovo that is Albanian Muslims. The Serb reaction was patently savage. The wanton killing of the ethnic Albanians in Kosovo drew worldwide condemnation. The six-nation contact group comprising Britain, Germany, Russia, Italy, France and the US told Serbia that it must not do to Kosovo's Albanians what it did to Bosnia's Muslims just a few years ago "we don't want a repeat of 1991 when the international community did not react with sufficient vigour and force," said Madeleine Albright, America's Secretary of State. During a fractious Contact Group meeting in London, she managed to persuade European allies to join in harsh measures against Serbia although Russia agreed to only two of the group's four proposed punitive sanctions.

The Kosovo massacre hurt Serbia in two ways. First, it put off the day when the West will remove the "outer wall" of economic sanctions against Serbia. Secondly, Serbian President Milosevic is said to have pushed Yugoslavia to wards disintegration. Even before the violence unleashed against Kosovo, it opted in favour of outright independence from Serbia.

According to international observers, the low-level war that Serbian President Milosevic began against separatists in Kosovo seemed to be getting worse. Serbs in some parts of Kosovo are said to be fleeing

their homes, prompted either by the presence of guerrillas from the Kosovo Liberation Army or by Serb police preparing for offensive. The Kosovo crisis has other aspects. The Serbian president had declared that the local elections in 1992 won by a vast majority in ethnic Albanians were null and void and thereafter carried out rampant arrest of nationalists. But the Albanian nationalists, ignoring the government ban, elected Dr Ibrahim Rugova as their President of a self-proclaimed Republic of Kosovo which triggered a severe conflict with the Serbian government of Belgrade.

In the opinion of impartial observers, the Serbian authorities have shown an uncanny genius—since the Croatian and Bosnian wars—to dub ethnic self-defence and articulation of demand in this respect as acts of terrorism, provoking the most brutal action conceivable in the military dictionary. Hoping to stamp out the sparks of Kosovo before they ignite a conflagration like Bosnia's, the US and the European Union resolved to act more forcefully to try to bring peace to the Balkans.

The six-nation Contact Group, which lately met in Rome amid the prospect of an escalating Kosovo crisis, slapped new sanctions on Belgrade and gave it 10 days till May 9 to open dialogue with ethnic Albanian leaders in Kosovo or risk tougher penalties.

Discontent would be likely to grow if the Contact Group did tighten sanctions. Already Serbia's economy is on the verge of free fall. The long heralded economic reforms have become a bad joke. Milosevic, however, seemed to be inviting further hardship. He earlier ignored the Contact Group's request to withdraw special-ministry police from Kosovo. He rebuffed urgings that foreigners should mediate in talks with Kosovo's separatists.

Warning of the danger of a wider war in the Balkans, two top American envoys Richard Holbrooke and Robert Gelbard had a surprise visit to Yugoslav

President Milosevic and increased the pressure to negotiate an end to the turmoil in the restive Kosovo province. Milosevic had so far refused independent and rejected foreign mediation for any talks with the Albanians.

In view of the ultimatum given by the Contact Group and the pressure exerted by the US envoys, Yugoslav President Milosevic agreed to meet Kosovo's independent-minded ethnic Albanian leader Ibrahim Rugova. Rugova met for the first time with the Yugoslav president on April 15 in an attempt to resolve the crisis.

The next day thousands of ethnic Albanians demonstrated in Kosovo's capital Pristina against the Serbian government's harsh rule. Rugova, head of the strongest ethnic Albanian political party in Kosovo, advocates a peaceful road to independence. On the other hand, Milosevic and his leftist-nationalist alliance gave no signs they would make any concession to the demands of the ethnic Albanians. It took intense diplomatic activities by the top US envoys to the Balkans to get Rugova and Milosevic to meet each other. This meeting was expected to be followed up subsequently with a series of meetings in Kosovo's capital. Meanwhile, there has been no let-up in the trouble there.

The all-important point in the Kosovo crisis is not to miss out the essence of ethnic grievance of the Albanians. Real progress would require Milosevic who rose to power by whipping up hatred against Kosovo's Albanians, to treat them decently even though Kosovo's angry young men replenish the ranks of the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA), giving him excuses for further brutality.

According to an astute international observer, this is the Balkans where the mistakes of history have been learned so well that everyone seems able to repeat them exactly. Everyone agreed it would be folly to continue the fighting; yet, as one government official in Pristina put it: "We're Serbs, they're Albanians—anything could happen."

There are other aspects of Milosevic's predicament. Confrontation with the west is sharpening old Balkan enmities and creating new ones for Milosevic. Milo Djukanovic, president of another constituent of the federation, namely, Montenegro, who ousted a Milosevic crony in an election in October last, is growing more hostile. Milosevic has apparently decided to fight his Montenegrin rival rather than win him over. Milosevic's other new fight with Dodi in Bosnia's Serb Republic could also be dangerous.

At some point Milosevic's lengthening list of enemies could threaten the survival of rump Yugoslavia itself. The man who started their bloodiest European war in three generations, is once again tearing at the fragile fabric of Balkan peace. Once again it is hard to tell whether Milosevic is shoring up his position or unwittingly plotting his own destruction.

In subsequent developments, scheduled talks between the Albanian leader Ibrahim Rugova and the Serbian President Milosevic on the future of Kosovo province were postponed due to the visit to Washington of the Albanian leader. The United States hopes that the visit of the Albanian leader will encourage his fellow Kosovo Albanians to pursue non-violence in their struggle with Serbia. It is also hoped by the US that the visit will not only reinforce Albanian leader Rugova's stature with Milosevic but also among his fellow Albanians, including those sympathetic to the KLA.

Meanwhile the situation in Kosovo took a serious turn when Serbian artillery began a full-scale offensive in some villages bordering Albania, sending thousands of Kosovo refugees across Albanian borders to escape Serbian attack.

At the same time NATO stepped up plans for a possible troop deployment in Albania as the heavy rush of Kosovo refugees further intensified.

The Albanian government made an impassioned appeal to the world to intervene immediately to halt alleged cleansing of Albanians in Kosovo.