

## Healthcare Package

The Essential Service Package, a Tk 123 crore primary healthcare programme, is a well-intentioned idea, if only somewhat ambitious. The well-chosen words used to describe it tug at our heart-strings — "based on the needs of the poor, particularly women and children and will ensure quality and client-focused service." Any programme taken up by the government hits the set target only partially. The tangible aspects of a programme may take a shape not very unlike what was in the plan. But what the buildings and other facilities are designed to give — service — comes, in both quality and quantity, far less than planned. Recently, however, there have been some great successes, exactly in the service area — in the arena of child health. The successive immunisation programmes have done very well, by any standard. These proud achievements encourage us to be optimistic about the ESP.

The guiding spirit of service and that which has upheld it against a myriad odds over all history — professionalism — seems to be available here only microscopically. It is at this professional and human point that all endeavours and enterprise in the health sector come almost to naught. The ESP programme is to build about 14,000 'community clinics' at the union and thana levels offering a package of 'child healthcare, reproductive healthcare, communicable disease control and limited curative care.' Who will do this? About 15 thousand doctors' quarters would be built to house at least as many doctors.

There will be great difficulty in finding doctors going to the villages willingly. They are now being forced to go there. Even when they relent and go, their mind stays in the cities. If most of our doctors were professional enough with a sense of service in their heart, this problem would not be there. Thousands of communities in god-forsaken villages would have been electrified into dynamic social entities by the social leadership the doctors could give.

While the doctors grope for the right road, how will these CCs or community clinics work? We have a suggestion to make here. Why cannot we go for an amalgam of nursing and paramedic training raised very near to the LMF level? Cannot we try sub-doctors not as substitutes but as helps who can attend to run-of-the-mill cases and take a cool decision when faced with a serious patient?

We feel very encouraged by the ESP programme, so much that we want to expect results from it.

## First Glitch

We are relieved to know Sunday's emergency landing of an Air Parabat plane at a Savar jute field did not cause any irreparable loss. The two passengers and the crew are all safe though the aircraft has been badly damaged and is reportedly awaiting major repair work abroad.

Taking a decision in mid air about something which not only has to do with life and death but also involves so many 'if' factors is certainly not the easiest of jobs. One must commend the pilots for gliding the aircraft safely and 'picking the right spot' to land. We congratulate the pilots for their decisiveness and swiftness of action.

Although emergency landing is nothing new in our experience, a Biman aircraft having managed almost a miraculous escape through emergency landing at an open space near Sylhet Medical College some months ago, Sunday's one is the first recorded incident of glitch in an aircraft run by the private sector. An enquiry committee has been formed and we hope its findings will not simply deal with the immediate cause and effect relationship of the mishap but will help take a stock of things in general. Everything starting from the condition of the aircraft to maintenance should be taken into consideration. Maintenance is the most glaringly missed aspect in Biman, the state managed national flag carrier. We don't know how well that factor has been taken care of by the private owners. This could and should be a great opportunity to take a detailed look at things in private sector airline management.

## Torture in Madrasa

Congratulations to the intrepid three — Liton, 12, Mishqat, 8, and Marum Billah, 11. The three heroes of a great escapade dragged themselves to the Sabhar Bazar to cut the chains they were in. But for their ingenuity and determination the concentration camp at Kurgaon, adjacent to the National Mausoleum, would carry on its deception of a madrasa indefinitely into the future. They fled from a so-called residential Hafezia Madrasa. Scores of children are there, subjected to constant torture by fake teachers of the fake madrasa.

Set on the hunt by the intrepid three, Sabhar police raided the place, rescued other children in chains and arrested two of the fake teachers.

This is not the first time children in chains have been rescued from dungeons run apparently by religious venerables. The biggest case came to light in Chittagong. And what happened to those misanthropes and frauds? The more important question is, how many of such dungeons operate beyond the eye of the law? And how many children are being traumatised there for life? And why has it to be a religious garb under which to run the inhuman trade? The business could be better run without the tortures. Then why? Can it be that the guardians are impressed by the strict discipline these tortures supposedly guarantee? But such inhumanity can only breed criminals.

The Kurgaon, Sabhar madrasa is not a registered or recognised one. How many are there of this kind? It is time the government took a close look at all the residential madrasas and came out with a public statement on their state of affairs.

# Jobless Growth in the Public Sector

Creating jobs is no problem. Wages are low. So jobs can be created by engaging millions to dig up holes one day and fill them up the next day. There will be full employment overnight; but at what cost?

A new World Bank loan would first imply a new office for project implementation and creation of new jobs. However, a project is a time bound phenomenon: it must have a beginning and an end. With completion of the project, both the office and the jobs should stand abolished. But it never happens that way. As implementation proceeds, the first objective of the project staff is to ensure continuation of the project, as if the project should never end. Projects are therefore not completed on time. There will be new phases of the same project.

Ultimately when loan funds are exhausted, the project staff may be already under employment for 10 or 12 years. Where they would go? No where. The staff will be transferred to a new project account so that salary bills are not affected. If that fails, the ultimate job security is the government revenue budget. No body loses job in the government of Bangladesh. It is the biggest employment-welfare agency in the world.

The sector corporations of the government have also emerged as highly employment responsive organizations, specialized in offering jobs often without involving any work. Functions of BADC have been largely privatized. The huge rationing system of the Food Department has been abolished. Yet the organizations with their glorious manpower have all survived. They have no work. But in the Government, it does not mean that they will not get their salaries at the end of the month. I have heard stories to the effect that employees of jute mills who have been given golden handshakes have all come back as new recruits after receiving handsome returns.

The profit and loss account of a state-owned enterprise (SOE) may not have any relationship with the number of persons employed. A simple telephone call from a high up may create a job. In spite of heavy losses, bonus may be paid or promotions given to employees regardless of competence, on the basis of seniority and/or influence only. According to an estimate published in the newspapers, total cumulative losses of SOEs now amount to a staggering figure of Tk. 42,000 crore. I am sure the level of employment did not come down as a consequence. Perhaps 420,000 fresh appointments have been made (since there were retirements) — one for each taka one million loss.

Creating jobs is no problem. Wages are low. So jobs can be created by engaging millions to dig up holes one day and fill them up the next day. There will be full employment overnight; but at what cost? The huge expenditure of the government primarily end up as payments of salaries and wages and if there is no corresponding contribution in terms of addition to GDP, then such transfer payments lead to inflation which in turn has a negative influence on growth and development. Therefore, jobless growth in the public sector will be an extremely meaningful public policy initiative.

The first step in this direction will be to get rid of SOEs — as many and as soon as possible. The latest newspaper advertisement from the Privatization Board is an ideal example in this respect showing the picture of card playing employees of a government textile mill next to a similar private factory where it is all work and no play. I know of a private textile dyeing and finishing plant which works two shifts a day, 12 hours each shift and 365 days a year. It closed for two hours only on the Eid day. Perhaps the overwork of the private factory is compensating for the no work of a corresponding SOE.

No doubt, there is exploitation of labour in the private mills but it is not inevitable. If we have to win the competitive battle at this initial stage of our industrialization? The growth of that dyeing and finishing plant must be borne in mind. In six years time, the entrepreneur has expanded his business 300 per cent. This is how private sector must expand — as fast as possible. Only then, there will be plenty of jobs, as a result of which wage rates would inevitably go up along with productivity.

There is no such scope of growth and development within the public sector. Therefore cut down public employment through privatization and that is the only way to seek reform and redemption of the economy. This is the context of jobless growth and the public sector in Bangladesh today.

## To the Editor...

### The poor always pay

Sir, I went to Mallibagh Bazar on Saturday last to buy vegetables and found the vendors sitting there with placards. The corporation police is threatening to evict them from the Bazar so that they can beautify the Bazar area. I found that many of the vendors have been carrying on with their business there for the last two generations. They do not know any other business, nor do they have anywhere else to go.

In Bangladesh, we so easily sacrifice the poor in the name of development! Earlier there was a valid demand for beautifying Gulistan area street and making it a pedestrian-plaza. But the corporation did not act since the shopkeepers protested. The plans to beautify Dhaka vanished.

But here the poor vendors are threatened, and the corporation does not seem to care. It wants to go ahead with its plans of beautification.

Is there any one to listen to these poor traders?

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### Owes of farmers

Sir, According to a recent press report, farmers in five thanas of Gopalganj district are reluctant to sell paddy, rice to the LSD godowns due to high rate of carrying cost. Some growers have reportedly complained about the government's procurement rate which according to them is not remunerative for the growers.

Transportation of agricultural products from farm house to the marketplace is one of the major agricultural marketing problems in our country. Due to high carrying cost and shortage of modern storage facilities, farmers are being deprived of getting fair prices of their produce.

Apart from public enterprises, government itself through its various organizations, in particular project-related activities, has a tremendous propensity to seek new employees. Government has the established Public Works Department through which it is supposed to carry out all its construction activities. However, each Ministry tends to create its own public works department and all major donor agencies play a conniving role in such an expansionist policy. The Ministry of Education has even bifurcated itself to carry out the huge primary education development scheme. The Agriculture Ministry does the same in-house expansion for agriculture extension work while the Ministry itself is reduced to crop agriculture only and other important components of agriculture are spread over other Ministries. Perhaps the Government may be thinking of creating yet another Ministry called Ministry of Agriculture coordination.

Consolidation of government work, for example, into a meaningful Ministry of construction, or an integrated Ministry of Agriculture would not only contribute to reduction of employment but more efficient functioning of all sorts of development work. Another important reform for jobless growth as I would call it would be to decentralize. The District Councils and Thana Parishads should be immediately set up and local works undertaken by these local entities through their own appointed firms. Planning and design, preparation of estimates, ten-



## Window on Asia

Shahed Latif

der documents, supervision of works need not be carried out by either central or local government staff. Specialized consulting firms can do the job better and as a consequence, new consulting business will flourish — obviating the need for extra government manpower whenever a new project is taken up for implementation.

Many projects from the very inception can be the domain of the private sector. Development of fishery, forestry and livestock can be carried out by private entrepreneurs as well as NGOs. The non-government sector has shown its vitality and NGOs in particular constitute a development segment which cannot be ignored as a marginal contributor to economic growth and poverty alleviation.

The national budget and the annual development programme should in future take a broader view and for the sake of public sector jobless growth increasingly rely on entities other than the national bureaucracy for development. Since jobs cannot be curtailed in the short run, the policy should be to institute accelerated retirement programmes and create attractive opportunities for retirees in the private sector. Thus through the process of attrition, size of the government may be cut down. Obviously there should not be new recruitment and alternative private sector opportunities would provide higher returns and automatically reduce pressure on the government.

The new budget sharply reflected on the crisis of revenue shortfall, primarily for the purpose of meeting the enormous yet ever-expanding salary bill. This is negative development. If the purpose of a project is to protect the jobs first, and then deliver outputs of development, then indeed, we are lost in a massive wilderness. We have to reverse our thinking about development. It has been done even in socialist economies. The role of government should be primarily that of a facilitator and steadfastly encourage private sector to play its due role. The government has to ensure that there is a level-playing field so that there is free and fair competition among private parties.

Unfortunately, the new tenets on the role of government is not appreciated by the bureaucrats. Private sector should remain the minor partner and government continue to play the dominant role — this seems to be the prevailing thinking of the technocrats of the country, particularly, in the revenue earning organizations of the government. If so, then we better bid farewell to foreign investment in spite of the government position that we offer the best opportunities in Asia to such investment.

A foreign investor after four hours waiting for an appointment in a Government office told me: "Bangladesh is the killing field of development." Obviously he was frustrated, but there was a hard grain of truth in what he said.

I think the government should undertake a pragmatic programme for improving the agricultural marketing system of the country. At the same time some subsidy should be given for reducing the carrying cost so that the growers could bring and sell rice or paddy to the government godowns.

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### Mysterious strokes

Sir, As a regular reader of the DS, it is encouraging to find that some of the investigative reporting are bearing fruit. Indirectly it might indicate that the PM is not being properly briefed. Sychophants should be handled with care, as cases of backfiring are common.

Why 2-stroke autorickshaws are being imported is a mystery — unless it is presumed that our politicians are not 4-stroke, hence smoke a lot, and pollute the atmosphere; at the same time create a lot of noise (noise is not signal, and have no message in it).

Our politicians waste a lot of time harping on the poor and under-developed past. Most of the time they should discuss the present and the future, and downplay rituals and never-ending anniversaries. It is a paranoid mentality.

Let us have some more probing reports, for the thick-skinned.

A Zabr  
Dhaka

### A dustbin, indeed?

Sir, There exists an open and almost demolished dustbin just beside the eastern gate of Jagannath Hall in DU residential area. Though this gate is closed for the time being, we are to pass through the stinking path to the university. Waste materials and garbage from adjacent

# The Bangabandhu Bridge Some Random Thoughts

On the morning of June 23, 1998, the inauguration day of the Bangabandhu bridge, when one gazed at the majestic sweep of the curve from one side of the Jamuna to the other, one palpably felt the clasp of a nation bonded together.

If one were to ask a randomly selected continental audience as to what provides more security to their respective peoples — India and Pakistan going nuclear, or Bangladesh's billion dollar bridge; most of the Indians and Pakistanis among them will scarcely know what bridge one is talking about.

The nuclear bombs of India and Pakistan took two and a half decades in coming, as did the Bangabandhu bridge over Jamuna. Yet, whereas the bombs came with bangs heard the world over, the bridge hardly created a regional whimper. Still, any serious answer to the question posed above must favour the bridge. By impacting the north-western region of Bangladesh with the eastern region, the bridge enhances the sense of economic security among the people living in these two hitherto separated parts of Bangladesh, and much more.

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Sheikh Hasina, during her recent trip to New Delhi, just preceding the inauguration of the bridge, and that to Islamabad, following it, must have pointed out to her two counterparts that in impoverished developing countries, the installation of infrastructures like bridges is intrinsically more powerful than the detonation of destructive nuclear devices.

One hopes one is not being presumptuous here, but diplomatic, rhetoric aside the purpose of the two trips was surely to underscore this point. Whether her advice fell into deaf ears is a valid question. The realistic assumption is that it would have. But Bangladesh, as a good friend of both the countries and now as the principal non-nuclear regional power, must persist on this argument.

Was it not Gokhale, a non-Bengali, who had said, "What Bengal thinks today, the rest of India thinks tomorrow". One can only hope that in this case at least, Gokhale will be proved right. The nuclear genie, it is true, cannot be put back into the bottle, but India and Pakistan must be persuaded to abandon this expensive and self-inflicting madness of a nuclear rivalry.

Now, returning to the inauguration day of the Bangabandhu bridge, one could not, for long, remain in a self-congratulatory vein. Transporting the invited guests from Dhaka to the inauguration site, 120 kilometers away, was a well-conceived and indeed well-executed idea of the Jamuna Bridge Authority. Allowing thousands of guests to travel in their private cars would have created insurmountable logistic problems.

However travelling on the narrow potholed roads and dangerously rickety ancient bridges, one's faith in our efficiency in planning receives severe jolts. One is told that the renovation and expansion work of the road leading to the Bangabandhu bridge has been taken on hand and that it will take three years to complete. One wonders why this was not thought of and accom-

plished earlier. The traffic on this road is now expected to increase manifold. After all, the Bangabandhu bridge connects Teknaf, the south-eastern-most part of Bangladesh with Tetulia, the northern-most.

As a result, this supposed highway, with the usual Bangladeshi mix of high speed killer trucks and buses, slower-moving vehicles of all descriptions, uninitiated pedestrians and un-concerned animals is likely to turn into a veritable death trap. In fact what actually has happened is that a modern four-lane 4.8 kilometers long bridge has been imposed on an old worn out road system that will hardly be able to bear the increased pressure of traffic. The joy of having the eleventh longest bridge in the world is therefore largely likely to be marred.

At the same time, while travelling from Dhaka to the inauguration site of the bridge, one hardly saw any readiness on the part of the authorities to deal with the situation. No police patrol car was visible, no road signs worth the name, and in short no preparation whatsoever to impose discipline on a road on which there is bound to be a dramatic increase in traffic flow.

The authorities must realise that posses of rifle toting indifferent policemen, standing in knots by the roadside, do not necessarily enhance road safety. Immediate steps should be taken to raise and train up proper highway police force. The improvement of road communications in the country must be accompanied by capacity building in traffic management. The Jamuna Bridge Authority seems reasonably alive to the likely demands on the bridge itself. But making just the bridge a stretch of safety on an uncaired for national road network, will be largely pointless.

In this country we have a penchant for fighting over dreams and there is a controversy as to who had actually dreamt of the bridge first. There could not possibly be any individual dreamer of the bridge. And even if there was one, he would probably be, way back in time, a North Bengal farmer hoping for a better price for his produce or a traveller caught up in a storm while crossing the Jamuna in a country boat! The bridge was the felt need of a population, that had found expression even in pre-Bangladeshi days.

The Bangabandhu Bridge is the result of efforts made by the governments headed by all the three political parties in the country that have been in power, the Awami League, the BNP and the Jatiya Party. The bridge is the result of a national consensus and of a team work by successive Bangladeshi governments.

In these World Cup days a soccer metaphor that I had used while writing about the bridge some time ago comes to mind. A good throw in and a dribble, a short pass, foul, free kick and a long pass — and the ball aloft has now been headed into the goal. Let everyone take credit for this team game. The Bangabandhu bridge, a good, impressive and useful gift of this generation to the posterity has been built. Let us not spoil it for them by petty squabbles.

## OPINION

# India's N-Test — Bane or Boon?

Mohammad Mujibur Rahman

It is very surprising that the American intelligence failed to detect the Indians' preparedness for N-tests although the BJP had made the option to introduce nuclear weapons a key plank of its platform in the last spring elections of India. Reacting to the India's nuclear testing, President Bill Clinton imposed tough sanctions on India, including freezing all but humanitarian aid and opposing loans to it from International Monetary Fund and the World Bank.

On the other hand, the United States asked Pakistan to refrain from conducting nuclear tests, suggesting Islamabad would be rewarded if it abstained, otherwise, there was the possibility of imposing sanctions against Pakistan by the United States. This is rather unfortunate, as it is almost against moral as well as ethical values. Under criminal laws, if anybody commits a murder, he may be awarded capital punishment, but if one kills anybody in self defence, (as the police often do), he commits no crime and is awarded no punishment. So if Pakistan conducted a nuclear test in response to that of India for its own security, why should US impose the same sanction on Pakistan as it had imposed on India? The reason is not far to seek. They never want that any Muslim country should possess nuclear bomb.

It is no wonder that Pakistan did not succumb to the threat of sanctions and conducted nuclear tests. Since India, its arch-enemy, with whom it fought three wars, has produced the big bomb it must possess nuclear weapons to counter India's nuclear capability, otherwise its very existence will be in jeopardy. Indian Home Minister Lal Krishna Advani warned Pakistan that India would deal firmly in the disputed region of Kashmir, and that extending terrorist activities by Pakistan in Kashmir valley "shall be dealt with in pro-active manner". But after successful completion of six nuclear tests by Pakistan, Indian premier employed a more conciliatory tone after days of bellicose statements and agreed to hold talks with Islamabad on

a pact for "no first use" of nuclear weapons!

By conducting the nuclear tests, the over ambitious BJP leaders have unwittingly brought forth an opportunity to Pakistan to conduct the same and possess the weapons of mass destruction. The Clinton administration is in the soup as it cannot now compel Pakistan and for that matter Iran or any other Muslim country to stop their nuclear programmes nor can it impose on them more sanctions than those imposed on India. Israel has already warned that Indian nuclear testing will encourage Iran to develop A-Bomb. It may be noted in this connection that in June, 1981 Israeli war-planes destroyed the Osirak nuclear plant of Iraq without provocation but now it is unlikely to do so as Iran's nuclear programme is scattered in different universities and plants. Pakistan and Iran may produce A-Bombs and spread nuclear technology and weapons to the rich Muslim states like Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Algeria, Libya, Malaysia, etc and make good profits to counter any economic sanctions against them by the US, Japan and others. The Muslim countries may extend moral and financial supports to Pakistan and Iran for the purpose. (It may be noted that now that Pakistan has A-Bomb, this will ensure peace in the subcontinent as "India will think 10 times before attacking Pakistan", said Dr Abdul Qader Khan, the founding father of Pakistan's nuclear programme. "Muslims in the Middle East long had worried about Israel's nuclear capability. Now they are confident, because a fellow Islamic nation possesses the know-how to built nuclear weapons... Over the world Muslims are happy that Pakistan has this capability," said Iranian Foreign Secretary Kamal Kharrazi. "The Pakistani nuclear bomb is the beginning of the resurgence of Islamic power" said Sheikh Hayyan Idrisi while delivering sermon at Jerusalem's Al-Aqsa Mosque).

It is needless to say that the Christian conquerors in the past were rather intolerant of other religions. For example, the Christian rulers of New-foundland castrated all male members of Muslim settlers there in the 18th century for totally extirpating the Muslim population! On many occasions, they annihilated the civilizations of the occupied countries. The destruction of the well-developed Inca civilization in South America by the Spaniards is a typical example.

On the other hand the Arab conquerors treated their subjects well. Landholders were allowed to keep their lands and permitted the non-Muslims to worship as they wished. According to great historians Arther E R Boak, Preston W Slosson, Haward, R Anderson and Hall Barlett, "The great service of the Arabs was in gathering the best ideas from earlier civilizations, and making them available not only throughout, the Muslim world, but also to other people everywhere. This was particularly true in the field of science. Arab scholars translated nearly all the Greek works on natural science... and made important new contributions to scientific knowledge".

The Awami League government's reaction to India's nuclear testing was very disappointing. In the face of countrywide severe criticism it made an announcement on May 13, 1998 but failed to condemn the action. It advised all South Asian countries to refrain from further escalation of nuclear arms race, thus instigating that Pakistan should not conduct such test. Although the Awami League successfully gave leadership to the people of the then East Pakistan to fight Pak army for independence, Awami League government have been persistently following both in the past and at present an appeasing policy towards India.

In the last OIC conference held in Tehran in 1997 Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina did not mention anything about the atrocities committed by the Indian Army in the held Kashmir although she raised her voice against the oppressions on Muslim minorities in Bosnia, Palestine, Lebanon etc.

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