

The NID Success

The fifth National Immunisation Day (NID) finally got off the ground yesterday, after the floods had forced a shift in the original date, from Nov 8 to Dec 14. Government agencies were entrusted with carrying out preparations for the NID and partners such as the WHO, Unicef, Rotary International, CDC of Atlanta and the government of Japan remained well on course to press home with the task at hand.

The NIDs are designed to eradicate polio through vaccination of all under-5 children on a single day, twice within the space of a month. Given that over a million children are infected with the virus every year in Bangladesh, and 15,000 are paralysed from the disease, the importance of the eradication programme can hardly be overestimated.

The next challenge is to ensure that all cases of acute flaccid paralysis (AFP), the disease caused by polio, are reported accurately. This would enable the health system to take curative action rapidly, and identify pockets where the polio virus may still be active.

The government is committed to making Bangladesh polio-free by the year 2000, and we may well be on course to meet the target. Community participation, in the form of volunteers and co-operation of all segments of society, and support from development partners, particularly the government of Japan, have been crucial in ensuring the success of the NIDs.

Move Forward in CHT?

It can hardly be exaggerated that the settlement of land disputes is central to the implementation of the CHT peace accord. That's why one feels relieved at the news that the government on December 6 put the much-awaited Land Commission in place. The nine-member commission headed by Justice Anwarul Haque Chowdhury will work for three years to sort out the land problems, thereby laying strong and stable foundations for the peace accord to materialise in full.

But the working of the Land Commission is linked to the functioning of the Interim Regional Council and the appointment of chiefs to the Mong Circle and Bomang Circle. The Land Commission cannot get fully formed, far less start working, unless the chairman of the RC and the chiefs of the Mong and Bomang circles co-opt to it as members along with six others who are to sit in the commission.

We do not know whether he has relented on that point in his latest talks with the government. Secondly, there is a court injunction on the activities of the Mong and Bomang circle chiefs. That threshold has also to be crossed before the Land Commission can get down to business.

It is nice to exchange pleasantries after a round or two of talks between the government and the PCJSS, but for a proper appreciation of where we exactly stand in terms of speeding up the accord's implementation certainly concrete details need to be furnished.

Deportation, CMP-Style

There was a time when police occasionally picked up 'naughty boys', specially students, from demonstration, took them outside the city limits and dropped them off. In the absence of transports they had to walk back to the town. This was the lighter side of punishment meted out to the 'offenders'. Times have changed, so have the types of crimes and number of criminals. But the attitude remains unchanged.

Strangely, in 20 years no attempt was made to properly read and interpret the ordinance to bring it up to-date. This provision of the ordinance resembles such laws prevalent in the subcontinent during the British Raj. Who is going to guarantee that these criminals will not forage in other areas or return to the city itself? Can there be any surety that they will not start their profession in their new places of domicile? It will be like helping in the proliferation of crimes in areas other than Chittagong, all being parts of the same country.

We feel this is no solution to the problem. If the police know the criminals, why can't they arrest them and send them for trial? There must be loopholes through which they eventually get out and that is where we need to do the plugging rather than pass on a given responsibility.

Foreign Aid: What to Expect in the Coming Years

by Syed Akhtar Mahmood

As donors struggle to make aid more effective, we are likely to see them becoming more selective, more knowledge-based and better coordinated. We may also see them becoming more self-critical and continually asking questions such as: why do we do what we do?

DOES foreign aid help development or does it hinder it? It depends... It is a just-published World Bank report on the effectiveness of aid. That by itself is not a profound finding. Although some diehard critics of foreign aid believe that foreign aid, everywhere and always, harms development, most people have taken a more balanced view of the effectiveness of foreign aid.

The authors of "Assessing Aid: what works, what does not and why?" suggest three reasons. First, the world has changed. Two major developments, i.e., the end of the cold war and surge in private capital flows to the developing world have prompted many to ask if there is any rationale left for foreign aid.

The last half a century has seen about a trillion dollar worth of foreign aid flowing into the developing world. A lot of this was inspired by a genuine desire to alleviate poverty and lay the basis for sustainable development. But some was driven by less altruistic motives, e.g., in the words of the report, "to promote the short-term political and strategic interests of donors".

The Changing World

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The Kurds of Turkey received particularly unsympathetic treatment at the hands of government, which tried to deprive them of their Kurdish identity. The Turkish government suppressed Kurdish political agitation in the eastern provinces and encouraged the migration of Kurds to the urbanised western portion of Turkey, thus diluting the concentration of Kurdish population in the uplands.

when these flows peaked before reversing in the wake of the East Asia crisis — \$250 billion of private capital went to the developing world. This was three times what bilateral donors and the multilateral institutions disbursed that year — a significant change from the 1970s and 1980s when private and official flows were roughly of the same magnitude.

Nonetheless, it is also clear that donors cannot afford to be as generous as before. Beset by fiscal problems, OECD countries have already reduced their aid, from an average of about 0.40 per cent of GNP in 1990 to under 0.22 per cent in 1997.

The evolution in development thought over the past couple of decades is also going to influence the nature of foreign aid in the coming years. Foreign aid needs to be viewed in the context of the overall development agenda and strategy of a country. On these, there has been considerable rethinking in the past two decades.

state and allowing market forces a free hand became the mantra of the day. Now, on the eve of the new millennium, the pendulum has swung again before settling on a more moderate stance. There is now emerging consensus that both markets and governments have pervasive failures and that more nuanced approaches recognizing the complementary roles of both market and state are required.

The evolution in thought about development strategy and the concurrent broadening of the development agenda moving from a narrow focus on per capita income growth to the broader goal of human development and sustainable growth — has catalyzed a new development strategy. As the report puts it, the new strategy is two-pronged — put in place growth-enhancing, market-oriented policies (stable macroeconomic environment, effective law and order, trade liberalization etc.)

The report has several important conclusions, many based on findings of recent empirical studies of aid. Some of the most important of these are the following:

Aid makes a difference in countries which have sound economic management but not elsewhere. Sound economic management — a phrase mentioned repeatedly in the report — means good policies, such as those which lower inflation, maintain external balance and promote investment, and sound institutions, such as high quality public bureaucracy and a judicial system which enforces the rule of law and property rights.

tries in this category actually experienced negative growth for extended periods. For countries with poor economic management, aid makes no difference.

Differences are also found in project performance. A study of World Bank projects found that "in countries with sound management, projects were 86 per cent successful, with much higher rates of return; in countries with weak policies and institutions, the corresponding figure is a measly 48 per cent".

Other findings: aid not only promotes growth in countries with sound management but also reduces poverty faster, and crowds in private investment. Previous studies which did not find a significant relationship between aid and growth seem to have done so because they had not included the economic management variable.

Foreign aid catalyzes foreign investment in countries with sound economic management: Does foreign aid crowd out private investment? It does but only where the environment is distorted. Where economic management is sound, aid actually catalyzes private investment by increasing confidence of the private sector and by supporting important public services.

The Kurdish Issue Continues to Trouble Turkey

by A S M Nurunnabi

The extradition of Ocalan has become a major political headache for Italy. The incident has highlighted the Turkish problem and it could be used as a catalyst for a major solution between Turkey and Kurdish guerrillas of PKK, provided there is good will among the parties concerned.

THE history of the Kurdish people is embedded in hoary past. Most of the Kurds live in contiguous areas of Iran, Iraq and Turkey, a region generally referred to as Kurdistan. The Kurds are thought to number more than 15 million. Despite their long-standing occupation of a particular region of the world, the Kurds never achieved nation-state status.

Lately there was an unhappy chapter of relations between Turkey and Syria. In Turkey's perception, Syria allows Kurdish rebel bases in its territory. The Kurdish rebels seek to have more autonomy in the area of southeastern Turkey and their demands date back to 1994. The Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) supporters use both Syrian and Iraqi territories to carry on guerrilla attacks against Turkey.

longer ready to suffer from Kurdish incursions.

In view of the growing crisis, Syria took the stand that the situation could be dealt with diplomatically and not through confrontation or threats. The situation became so serious that Ankara asserted that it was prepared to send forces across the border to eradicate Kurdish guerrilla bases in Syria.

Another thorny issue relates to the existing sour relation between Turkey and Greece over jurisdiction over the Aegean Sea. Because of the unresolved questions over the Aegean, there is a potential threat of a rise of unintended and undesirable events that could escalate into a serious confrontation.

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tive use of the additional aid. This is a powerful statistic; enough to inspire many donors to be more selective in providing aid.

If sound institutions and good policies are so critical, the role of development assistance may go beyond providing just finance. A judicious combination of money and ideas will be needed, with the balance between the two being dictated by country circumstances. For countries with distorted policies and weak institutions and services delivery, the report argues that government-to-government aid is not likely to be very effective but there might be "champions of local or sectoral reform" who deserve support.

An active civil society increases the effectiveness of foreign aid: In project after project, active participation by stakeholders in design and implementation is proving to be a major contributor to project effectiveness. This is particularly true in some sectors, such as infrastructure, education and health, but in other areas too, there is now growing evidence about the potentially enhancing role of civil society in enhancing aid-effectiveness.

Implications for Future Foreign Aid

What does this rethinking on aid imply about the future nature of aid flows? For countries such as Bangladesh the answer may have far-reaching consequences. There is good chance that, in the future, there will be much greater selectivity in the provision of aid. The report presents an interesting calculation about what might happen to poverty across the globe if aid is increased by 10 billion dollars. If this \$10 billion increase is directed only at countries with sound economic management, 25 million people will be lifted out of poverty each year.

The author is with the Private Sector Development Department of the World Bank. The views expressed here are his own.

To the Editor...

Letters for publication in these columns should be addressed to the Editor and legibly written or typed with double space. For reasons of space, short letters are preferred, and all are subject to editing and cuts. Pseudonyms are accepted. However, all communications must bear the writer's real name, signature and address.

The magic word!

Sir, Nowadays, frequently-interrupted telephone lines have become the source of tribulation and agitation in Dhaka city. If your telephone goes out of order for one day you are in great trouble for both getting the telephone repaired in time and in satisfying the telephone operators.

language i.e. the language of money. I whispered in their ears that I would "offer" which was a magic word. When the operators heard it, they became dizzy with pleasure. It really worked. Finally, they completed the task within a short period with their cordial efforts.

What I like to point out is that my only qualm is for the abuse of this particular service sector by some shrewd officials. As we are regular taxpayers, it is our natural right to expect proper service from the authorities. In this regard, I would like to urge the T&T authorities to be more concerned and sensitive.

Yusuf Ali Khan, Uttara, Dhaka

The country belongs to the people

Sir, The PM has made an 'unconditional' call to stop hartal, saying that in future the AL will never call on hartal when they will be in the opposition.

Unfortunately, she has been steadfastly defending her actions, (hartal, blockade etc) of the past, saying that there was an 'issue' at that time but there is none at present. Well, I am sorry to say that she is becoming too naive not to understand that her assertion is incorrect. And this attitude of our PM has made the whole statement of her some sort of a political stunt. Will she be bold enough to say that hartal is harmful for the country — be it of the past, present or future?

And for Begum Khaleda Zia, I would like to say that she should take the advantage of this 'offer' giving up her usual stance of uncompromising attitude. The country belongs to everybody.

K A Latif, Dhaka

Tiring to cross

Sir, Recently, I've read in the DS that "The government is going to build five bridges over the busy crossings for the pedestrians in the city." May I request the authority not to build the overbridges any more for reasons:

to build the overbridges, then please do not build the stairs too high — make the walk up and walk down slopes like the ones in BIRDEM building.

Mazhar Haq, Road#28, House# 52, Gulshan, Dhaka.

New telephones: unrealistic development

Sir, The UNB report on BTTS (DS Dec 7) makes dismal reading — the non-transparent development policy and complete lack of urgency displayed in meeting the projected demands for new telephone connections in Dhaka and other major cities.

Now excuses are being sought in delays in implementing the existing projects. Since project delays are not a new phenomenon in Bangladesh, how come the administration is caught napping time and again? There are not enough new telephones in the pipelines (demand, visible and invisible), and the work is going on too slowly to make any public impact as far as closing the huge gap in the waiting list is concerned. Then there is another hurdle: extremely high installation charges; in fact, the highest in the world? What Bangladesh is trying to prove?

There is beating about the bush regarding core policy on telephone development: the di-

Rickshaw drive at night

Sir, Are the authorities concerned — DCC and DMP — aware of the growing number of road accidents, hitting and wounds of the passengers due to reckless, rash and indiscreet rickshaw drive at night?

For a considerably long time after sun-set when most of the public roads and streets are plunged into darkness due to constant power failure and loadshedding (thousands of rickshaws ply the public thoroughfares without any light fitted on their vehicles in gross violation of traffic rules).

Very often while the pedestrians cross the road or the rickshaws take a right or left turn in the darkness the rickshaws collide, hurt and injure pedestrians.

We wonder why thousands of rickshaws are plying the roads at night without any light fitted on the rickshaws in gross violation of traffic rules and what are the DCC and DMP doing?

Would DCC and DMP kindly take appropriate action and enforce compulsory use/fitting of light on the rickshaws at night for the safety and security of the travelling people?

O. H. Kabir, 6, Hare Street, Wari, Dhaka-1203.