

## Economic Incongruity

THE IIRI-BIDS study to analyse capital-centred "changes in socio-economic conditions, food scarcity and access to urban services since 1991" has come up with a few intriguing micro-economic quotients, portraying overall a grim picture. That wealth of the rich—five per cent of the Dhaka population—has almost doubled in less than eight years could itself have been a positive bit of information, had it not meant that people at the other end of the scale have gone poorer. Although per capita income of slum-dwellers in general has increased from 165 US dollars to 250, on the whole "the income share of the bottom 40 per cent on the per capita income scale has declined from 17 to 11 per cent." The study also reveals an increasing 'rural-urban migration' that poses a Herculean demographic challenge for the city-planners. If this unbridled influx continues at its current pace, demographers fear, "Dhaka will become the fifth most populous city in the world by 2015 with a population of 19.5 million." With the capital already bursting at its seams, the scenario speaks of a potential demographic disaster.

Economic implications aside which require policy redressal, the study report underscores the dire need for measures towards dispersal of the booming capital population. Centripetal nature of the country's economic activities is indeed the primary reason behind the rural-urban migration, causing immense strain on the urban services. Therefore, first and foremost, there is the need of centrifugal distribution of employment through creation of economic epicentres away from the capital. At the same time, efforts must be made to improve communication between the capital and its peripheries. In our view, that would ease up the city's housing problems since more people will opt for residence in the suburban area at a much cheaper cost. While encouraging suburban development, it would also enhance individual savings, thereby indirectly bringing about a positive trend in the economy. The planners, to that end, should contemplate setting up of railway lines on the embankments encircling the capital and also launching of shuttle trains to facilitate commuting at affordable costs.

Unlike other major metropolises of the world, we have not been able to promote suburban housing primarily because of a poor communications system. Investment of time and money in that area would definitely lead to proper demographic distribution, reducing the pressure on the capital. On the other hand, creation of economic epicentres would result in increased income generation that will energise the country's economy in the long term.

## A Meeting at Last!

THE coordination committee formed in October, 1996 for synchronised action in the public service sector of the metropolis has suddenly surprised its members by coming out of hibernation after nine months of its last meeting. Reports have it that the chairman of the committee

LGRD Minister Zillur Rahman and co-chairman Mayor Mohammad Hanif, despite being elite members of the powerful ruling party do not see eye to eye on many subjects and their cold attitude towards each other is responsible for this committee going into a limbo for such a long time. Nobody knows why this important body, set up after Mayor's proposal for a 'Metropolitan Government', was kept in a state of suspended animation to the misery of the taxpaying millions of this bulging metropolis. Since some of the decisions of the committee were not effectively carried out by the relevant authority, the members felt it useless to spend time on this committee.

Harsh criticism in the national press about the callousness of the DCC and other utility providers has been cited as the main reason for the Mayor to call a meeting of the Committee last Thursday. Dhakaites are somewhat familiar with the tug-of-war between the LGRD minister and the Mayor of Dhaka. But they never could imagine that this would lead to such a massive inattention to the problems of Dhaka City. Minister Zillur Rahman's assurances to the people of Dhaka to turn this town into 'tilottoma' (a paragon of beauty) by March 1997 have long gone by default. Instead it has become a large garbage can—for all to see.

Rather than talking loud and hollow concentrate on the job you are entrusted with. The people want action, not the rhetoric.

## Let's Do It Here

THE smile on the faces of six acid-burn victims — Ruma, Jyotsna, Nomita, Monira, Khadija and Nurunnahar — make us grateful to Corporation Darmoestatica of Spain. Supported by the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) and the British High Commission, the Spanish corporation financially contributed in carrying out surgery on the ill-starred girls, who were sent to Spain for treatment in November last year. Given the grim fact that acid-throwing remains a social scourge in the country, there is a large number of victims of it waiting to be treated. They are passing through a tunnel of pain and anguish with their mutilated faces to the barbaric act of their tormentors.

At this juncture, our conscience becomes overcast with shame that it's always a foreign philanthropist who rises to the occasion in helping the victims to be socially rehabilitated. Similar gesture from our elite is badly awaited. A ray of hope, however, can be seen; for, reportedly, one of the privately-run hospitals in Dhaka is trying its best to treat acid-burn victims. Wishing their initiative all success, we want this to be replicated by others. We urge the health and welfare ministries to work out a mechanism for bringing in foreign experts to train up local hands to handle the acid victims independently. Then the native philanthropists should come forward to lend a hand.

ALL roads lead to Dhaka. Dhaka is the capital city, the pinnacle of power and the port of progress. All the central government headquarters are housed in Dhaka. It's the nerve centre of trade, commerce and industry. So, people from all around and of all walks of life tend to flock to Dhaka in search of bread and butter. In 1995, Dhaka with a population of 8.5 million was the 23rd largest city in the world. By 2015, Dhaka is expected to grow as the 5th largest city with a population of 19.5 million.

How are the people of Dhaka doing in terms of their socio-economic parameters? Has fortune favoured the settlers' rank and file? Well, not much of research on this score seems to be in evidence excepting a recent attempt by Mahabub Hossain (IRRI, Manila), Rita Afsar (BIDS) and M. A. Lal Bose (IRRI, Dhaka) to look at the changes over time. Using a multi-stage random sampling method the researchers reached 800 households of different economic strata to assess the situation. The periods compared were 1991 and 1998 — a difference of seven years.

One could be happy to note that the per capita income of Dhaka City residents has almost doubled within a period of seven years! The annual growth rate of income is estimated to be at a robust 10.6 per cent per annum. The average per capita income is estimated to be Tk. 40,500 (or USD 843) at the current exchange rate. But the per capita income for households in slums and squatters is esti-

**Dhaka Displays Dismal Disparity**  
*While urbanization goes hand in hand with economic development, the nature and pace of urbanization should be in tandem with available facilities ... Devolution of power base from the centre to the local level is a must to arrest the rural migration to urban Dhaka.*

ated to be USD 253 — only 23 per cent of the income of households residing in non-slum settlements. The incomes for residents of slum and squatter areas in the city are similar to the income for all rural households in Bangladesh implying, perhaps, that migration could hardly mitigate their economic sufferings. The findings further show that in 1998, nearly 39 per cent of the income of the people in Dhaka originated from trade and business, 33 per cent from services, 14 per cent from renting out properties and 5 per cent from remittances. The annual growth rate of income was the highest for property owners (22 per cent) and it was the lowest for households engaged in services. The 1998 survey shows a highly skewed distribution of urban income. For example, the bottom 40 per cent of the households own only 11 per cent of the total income while the top 10 per cent own 42 per cent and the top 5 per cent own 31 per cent. The Gini ratio for the concentration of per capita income was estimated to be at 0.53 for the sample which is considered extremely high compared with the concentration of rural income (Gini ratio 0.42 for 1995).

The researchers noticed a drastic deterioration in the distribution of urban income for 1991 through 1998. "The share of income for the bottom 40 per cent in the per capita in-

come scale declined from 17 to 11 per cent over the period, while the income share of the top 5 per cent increased from 17 to 31 per cent. Even the income share of the middle 40 per cent declined from 40 to 31 per cent". In search of the reason as they were, the researchers observed that income from trade and business contributed to nearly half of the income in unequal-

per cent was a meagre 2 per cent. Although the human capital is less unequally distributed than the ownership of financial capital, the inequality has been growing as shown by the higher concentration ratio for the current investment in the education of children than the degree of inequality in the level of working members. Unless positive action is taken to reverse

them out from rural areas. The perception of the households about the change in well being was reported in the draft report. The perceptions of the respondents themselves suggest faster improvement in the poverty situation in Dhaka compared with rural areas despite inequality in urban income.

Wealthy Dhaka does not seem to accommodate a healthy population. In another survey undertaken in 1995 for rural households, 88 per cent of the rural population reported to be healthy but the survey in 1998 in Dhaka found that only 34 per cent of non-slum and 18 per cent of slum dwellers reported to be healthy. Occasional illness was reported to be a phenomenon by nearly two-thirds of urban and 16 per cent of rural population.

From expenditure side, the researchers attempted to look at the inequality. In the consumption of cereals, there is hardly any inequality. For example, bottom 40 per cent shares 39 per cent of total expenses on cereals while the top 10 per cent, 10 per cent. In fact, the inequality in cereal consumption has declined over the period. Similarly, inequality in expenditure on non-cereal consumption also shows a declining trend. Another important observation is that, be it the poor or the non-poor, the income elasticity of demand for cereals has been declining while that of

non-cereal food has been increasing. This suggests possibly that more emphasis on crop diversification is called for as agricultural growth strategy. However, serious concerns could loom large on account of pervasive inequality in education. For example, the bottom 40 per cent of the sample shares 8 per cent of the total expenses (improved marginally from 5 per cent in 1991) but the top 10 per cent shares 38 per cent (increased from 21 per cent in 1991). Similar inequality could be observed in the case of health care and housing and the situation has been worsening. This means that the present inequality in education, health and housing would fuel further inequality in the future since these elements of basic needs are important determinants of inequality in income and productivity growth.

While urbanization goes hand in hand with economic development, the nature and pace of urbanization should be in tandem with available facilities. The policy implications from the findings tend to suggest that devolution of power base from the centre to the local level is a must to arrest migration to Dhaka. Quite obviously, development of transport and telecommunication infrastructure between rural and urban areas appear as a precondition for promoting incentives to live in rural areas. Again, development of educational facilities for children in poor households with focus on technical education is needed to allow a better return to investment for high school and college dropouts.



## Beneath the Surface

by Abdul Bayes

income from properties 26 per cent and the income from service derived from human capital, 29 per cent. Thus about three-fourths of the differences could be added to have originated from those activities which are not very much labour intensive to moderate the differences. Admittedly, these sources require education and financial capital that the rich generally have more access to than the poor. That the ownership of capital is becoming further skewed is indicated by an even higher degree of inequality in current investment. The share of the top 5 per cent of the households in investments made in 1991-98 was 55 per cent while the share of the bottom 40

the situation by providing better access to capital and education for the lower income groups, the income inequality will further worsen".

The study, however, observed a substantial improvement in the poverty situation. For example, in 1998, only 19 per cent of the urban population could be considered as poor and 11 per cent as hardcore poor. This compares with, respectively, 42 per cent and 27 per cent of 1991. Among the poor nearly 87 per cent lived in slums and squatter areas and these groups of settlers are those landless and marginal ones who migrated from rural to urban areas to eke out a better livelihood. Ample economic incentives pulled

## Of Nepotism and Favouritism

*Can we expect the administration to be completely free from nepotism and corruption? However much we would like to see that, the reality is, given the current socio-economic and cultural environment in Bangladesh, political nepotism and corruption will continue. But we can at least make a good faith effort to start a process for reducing the political favours that are enjoyed by a selected few.*

in charge of Works', he scrapped the old list and made up a new one. When the names in the final list came out in the print media, it looked like a who's who in the Awami League administration.

Following the publication of the list, an uproar broke out among the general public. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, sensing the general mood, did the right thing. She cancelled the allocation of plots and ordered Rajuk to draw up a new list. She deserves credit for at least implicitly acknowledging the irregularities involved in the initial allocation.

Nepotism is nothing new in Bangladesh politics. Previous administrations had also tried to take care of their own. Stories of how the cabinet members in the Ershad administration used public funds to develop areas in the Gulshan lake and then distribute the land among themselves had circulated in the political circles for years. Similar stories can also be heard about the BNP regime. However, what differentiated this particular incident from the previous ones is the extent and magnitude of nepotism. The blatant nature of nepotism



## Connecting the Dots

Dr. A. R. Chowdhury

and the naked act within the ruling circle of looking for each other's interest has surpassed the previous regimes'.

The most unsettling part of the whole episode is the arrogance and insensitivity of Engineer Mosharraf Hossain. It appears that "conflict of interest" is not a term found in his dictionary. As the Minister concerned under whose directive Rajuk distributed the plots, it was his responsibility to see that allotment is done fairly. What does he do? He starts with an allotment in his own name. When asked about it later, he says that he got it as a freedom fighter and not as a minister. C'mon, give us a break!

In recent memory, I have had to come across an incident involving misuse of public trust by a cabinet member. In any other country, the minister would be out of his job by now. But in Bangladesh, he might

even be rewarded for looking after his party stalwarts. I remember when Sheikh Hasina sacked Afsaruddin Ahmed from the cabinet for evicting slum dwellers. If that incident of eviction calls for the sacking of a cabinet member, let the readers decide what this incident of plot allocation deserves.

If you step back and think about the whole episode, you will realise that Engineer Mosharraf Hossain did more harm to Awami League and its reputation than what the BNP had succeeded in doing through its agitations and long marches. With supporters and cabinet colleagues like this, Sheikh Hasina doesn't need any help from BNP in hastening a no-confidence in her government's popularity.

Our prime minister talks about fairness and transparency in policy making. However, the secrecy in which

governmental policies are being made and implemented are sure to raise some eyebrows. In this context, the issue surrounding the purchase of MIG-29s from Russia and allocation of blocks to foreign companies for oil exploration comes to mind.

What should be done now in order to control the damage and ensure that something of this nature doesn't happen in the future? As I had mentioned earlier, the prime minister showed sharp political acumen in scrapping the allotment list and starting afresh. However, only this step may not bode well with the general public in order to demonstrate the willingness and sincerity of the administration in getting at the bottom

of the whole plot allocation process, it needs to be investigated how this entire scheme was perpetrated. Reports suggest that junior officers in the prime minister's office designed the scheme. If that is true, she has to put her own office in order first. If necessary, heads should roll!

Can we expect the administration to be completely free from nepotism and corruption? However much we would like to see that, the reality is, given the current socio-economic and cultural environment in Bangladesh, political nepotism and corruption will continue. But we can at least make a good faith effort to start a process for reducing the political favours that are enjoyed by a selected few.

Sheikh Hasina can use the plot allocation episode as a lightning rod for demanding accountability in her administration. By doing so, she would serve both her own legacy as well as the nation.

## OPINION

### Greenidge and BCB

Gulam Mustafa

In The Daily Star almost everyday letters have been published on the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) action against Gordon Greenidge. It is very sad to find the way BCB has treated a renowned cricketer like him. The BCB has completely failed to appreciate his contribution towards making Bangladesh cricket team a fighting force. We are really an unpredictable nation. I feel very much relieved to see that the general public, the press in particular, have openly lauded Greenidge's role and criticised BCB for its mishandling of the whole affair.

The BCB president and general secretary started the mud-slinging against Greenidge about a year back. Greenidge hit back while talking to The Daily Star on his return from the tour of the British Isles in 1998. After winning the ICC trophy, the BCB did absolutely nothing to develop the country's domestic cricket. Nothing new in introduction of two-day league matches was also nothing new. No age-group squad was formed and given to Greenidge for coaching. He was given only an under-19 squad in 1997 since World Youth Championship was held in Hong Kong and South Africa. A hurriedly prepared under-13 squad was given to Greenidge for coaching, that too for only four or five days in early March 1998. In 1998-99 season, no under-13, 16, and 19 coaching camp was arranged. "A" team, a must for every cricket-playing nation was not raised, either.

The BCB did not even take any step to implement the coaching programme planned by Greenidge, as we understand. The BCB officials, as we found, were only interested in arranging cricket tournaments where only foreign countries only participated. These commercial ventures, so to speak, might have had some value but with the hosts not participating our cricketers could not get the benefit.

This year the board created a 'funny' post of a co-ordinator in order to accommodate one of its joint secretaries, who is a former national football player, in the World Cup squad. When he was inducted in the team management, we knew Greenidge would have a tough time on the tour. Everyone in the cricket circle knows that the said joint secretary does not like Greenidge at all, for reasons best known to him. When we learnt that towards the end Greenidge didn't participate in the team meeting we were sure he could not bear the undue pressure applied by those unscrupulous people in the team selection process. The rumour is that Greenidge once even asked the BCB president to go

out of such a meeting when he along with his two joint secretaries were interfering with the selection process.

Although some board people are complaining against Greenidge it is surprising that none of senior cricketers with the exception of Nannu, for obvious reasons) has said anything against him. On the contrary, senior players including the skipper himself spoke highly of his contribution. The reason that Aminul Islam didn't mention Greenidge in his speech at the public reception may have been because of the fact that the speech was prepared by the BCB. We are surprised to read the press statement given by the BCB president where he said that he had sought opinions from the captain and his deputy before sacking Greenidge. This act on the part of the president is totally uncalled for. In such cases opinions of the captain or the vice-captain is never sought. It seems by dragging the captain and the vice-captain into this matter, the BCB president wanted to share the blame with people who would not contradict his statement. The final nail in the coffin was driven by the famous BCB vice-president and the manager, who went so low as to say something derogatory about Greenidge's family.

It is surprising that nobody raised the question as to why the president and the general secretary engaged a reputed player like Greenidge in coaching of Bangladesh team without knowing fully well about his coaching capabilities. Was it a stunt for public consumption? The government should constitute an inquiry committee to find out in what circumstances an honorary citizen like Greenidge has been dishonoured.

Following should be answered:

a) Why did the president and the general secretary of the BCB engaged Greenidge as coach without fully assessing his coaching abilities in the first place?  
b) Why was Greenidge not engaged to impart coaching on regular and planned manner under his three-year tenure?  
c) What did the Board do during the last two years (since ICC victory) to develop domestic cricket with a completely new outlook, and to develop sufficient cricket grounds, before asking for Test status?  
d) Why was the post of a 'co-ordinator' created for the Bangladesh squad?  
e) How can the BCB ask for Test status when it do not even have a single stadium where this country exclusively for cricketers and in absence of a regular three-day or four-day domestic cricket format?

## To the Editor...

### Containing prostitution

Sir, Efforts are being made to politically solve the age-old social problem of the (Tan) Bazar prostitution trade, with disastrous spill-overs. The 'damage-control' (a military term) is out of control!

This trade is as old as civilization itself, and no country could eliminate it — a biological urge which seeks outlet regardless of administrative, political and social elimination measures. Regulation and control, yes; but how?

Any regime in power should not try to be original and inventive. The realities have to be faced, and what cannot be done should not be tried officially. There are also local human weaknesses, for example, rent-seeking or land-grabbing opportunities by some of those who are secretly keen to misuse power and influence (some names appeared in the press). There is vast amount of literature on the subject, and no fresh research and no development is necessary. There are a host of options to choose from, as tried in other countries for centuries, suitable for every type of culture (morality and real truth are independent of culture).

The public expect the authorities to finalize practical schemes in phases, and implement the same, without getting emotional about the trade which cannot be wished away.

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### Learn from India

Sir, As an industrialist, I would like to bring the following points to the government's notice for taking appropriate steps to save the country's industrial sector.

The first step I'd like to suggest is to stop discouraging import of consumer product (finished goods). Today all kinds of low quality consumer items from India have flooded the local markets. In contrast, India discourages imports from Bangladesh by imposing the so-called counter-vailing tax even though they're a signatory to WTO as well as SAPTA agreement. Their customs officials also try as much as possible to discourage imports into India. Though India waived restriction and reduced

customs duty from most of the items, one needs special permission from New Delhi to execute the import. Whereas our government simply opened its market and consequently, we suffer.

What are our National Board of Revenue and Tariff Commission doing? Where is our counter-vailing tax on the import of Indian consumer products or the anti-dumping law?

I would request the government to impose some restrictions or impose heavy custom duties to discourage imports of consumer goods until 2005 like India. Duties on basic industrial raw materials should be completely waived so that industries can grow and prepare for the new economic world order.

An industrialist takes great pains to set up an industry. There seems to be some sort of conspiracy to crush the industrial base by certain departments of the government. A CIB report from Bangladesh Bank is required for an investor for smooth transaction with any financial institution. An investor might have five industries, and say one is not operating well and have an overdue loan. But the annual renewal limits of the other four companies are stopped also. Why this classification and obstruction?

To save the situation and to face the new world economic order of 2005, our Finance Ministry and bureaucrats need to wake-up. The industrialists should not be harassed by the government and bank officials concerned. Rather they are expected to be helpful and cooperative.

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### DCC and DMP violating rules?

Sir, DCC have placed many dustbins/garbage tanks on the main roads and streets which block the movement of traffic and create traffic jam. Moreover heaps of garbage are piled up surrounding the dustbins/garbage tanks for days together and sometimes those are set on fire by the municipal employees which emit heavy smoke and bad smell and make it very obnoxious and dangerous for the pedestrians as well as for different vehicles to pass by. Due to loadshedding and

frequent electricity failure many roads and streets are plunged into darkness after sunset. It then becomes very difficult and risky to move from one place to another and cross the roads. Moreover, most of the time, the rickshaws ply on the roads and streets carelessly and recklessly without any lamp or light fitted on the body of the vehicles causing innumerable accidents, hitting, striking and injuring pedestrians and passengers but neither the DCC nor the DMP take any action against it.

There are thousands of rickshaws plying on the city roads and streets using different number plates of various organisations other than those issued by DCC. But neither the DCC nor the DMP catch hold of the rickshaws using such fictitious numberplates.

Aren't DCC and DMP by not performing their duties and responsibilities efficiently and honestly violating rules themselves?

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### Building materials

Sir, This letter refers to the DS news item dated 31.5.99 captioned "Concrete Building Materials can save Tk 1000 or a year".

First of all we would like to state that concrete blocks and clay blocks, are totally different building materials. The insulation properties of concrete block, is poor, and the water absorption is not suitable for humid climatic conditions.

The insulation property of concrete block being poor compared to clay blocks, the Middle Eastern countries have also started using clay blocks because during summer, the buildings and houses used to get very hot, and in winter, very cold thereby increasing the power consumption and affecting the health of the inhabitants living in those buildings.

For ecological balance, for making bricks or blocks of clay, the matter can be solved by using fuel efficient kilns, and for conservation of forest region. Fuel other than wood can be used. We at Mirpur Ceramics are therefore practicing the same.

Regarding the usage of land mass, disturbing agriculture, we have to say that 99 per cent of hand moulding brick manufacturers use silt, clay, thereby ensuring that silt formation is reduced in river beds for easy flow of water, otherwise in areas other than cities, where low-lying areas are also filled with silt during floods, it would have become dangerous by now. Whereas cement, being one of the elements of concrete block, is also imported.

Because of the high cost of production of clay products, and of its other beneficial properties, it is costlier than any type of concrete products. Moreover coloured concrete products gradually lose their colour after two years.

Western countries also use concrete blocks as an alternate construction material because of its low cost. But an insulation membrane is also added along with the blocks, which in any case is quite costly thereby using of concrete block increases, and the insulation membrane has a fixed life span, which starts deteriorating after 7 years.

Hares Ahmed Chowdhury  
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### Stamp it out

Sir, What's wrong with the traditional Postal Department in providing the normal routine services expected when visiting any post office? According to the data collected personally by me, two-taka stamps are in short supply the majority of the time I visited the post office in my area.

The second finding is that the 'normal' Tk 2 stamps are not available all the time, because special anniversary stamps are being issued too frequently (it is not cheap to produce these in small quantities at the security printing press; and rarity of a stamp has its collection value for the stamp collector).

Why the average annual requirement of stamps of different denominations cannot be calculated for planned management of a public service? This very question is redundant, and should not be asked!

A Zabr  
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