

Lesson Not Learned

LAST year's pervasive and prolonged flood, the worst of the century in the country's annals, should have left the government machinery wiser. General expectations were that inadequacy highlighted during the devastating deluge would be effectively addressed. Also, damaged protection embankments across the country were expected to be renovated and the unscathed ones strengthened in time to ward off the impact of this seasonal onslaught. As the late-monsoon deluge continues in full vigour, the Flood Forecasting and Warning Centre (FFWC) forecasts inundation of more areas, and reports flow in on protection and irrigation dams either collapsing or developing cracks, one cruel truth surfaces: the administration has once again been caught off-guard.

Already the Tk 80 crore Chandpur and Tk 100 crore Meghna-Dhanagoda irrigation project dams are reported to have developed cracks while the Chandpur town protection embankment has been partially submerged. Similar is the case with different embankments across the country. The Dhaka-Narayanganj-Demra (DND) protection embankment also appears extremely vulnerable with water reportedly seeping through it at places. Against this grim backdrop, one can only wish that the earlier FFWC projection that a major flood is unlikely this year proves right. Because, it does not seem the protection embankments we have would be able to sustain another onslaught of last year's magnitude.

Monsoon this year has been enigmatic, so to speak, although not quite unprecedented. The country has already experienced two stints, albeit brief, of flash floods. The damage these caused may not have been colossal but substantial nevertheless. The Gumbi bank collapse had vast areas in Comilla submerged for days together, and the Dhaka-Chittagong road-link was also snapped for hours. At that time, too, this paper expressed concern at the government's slow-go attitude towards renovating and strengthening the embankments. Also, we pointed out that despite the prime minister's directive for construction of a 114-square kilometre embankment to protect the capital's eastern region, the project had been a non starter. Unfortunately, there has not quite been the activism we thought our reminder would generate.

Reproach for a job not done at this point of time is inconsequential; however, we would like to reiterate our previous plea to the government that once the water subsides it invests its time and money in renovating, restoring and consolidating the embankments. We may not get another opportunity.

Road Encroachment

CONSTRUCTION boom in the metropolis has given birth to many problems for the city-dwellers; one of them being the regular encroachment on public thoroughfares by builders of shopping complexes and high-rise buildings. Despite clear rules and laws to the contrary, the violators have a field-day and the agencies responsible for pressing those laws into operation seldom perform their duties. The result is obviously a massive sufferance for the citizens.

There have been cases where influential people in connivance with the Dhaka City Corporation and the law enforcing agencies stockpiled construction materials on busy roads much to the discomfort of pedestrians and vehicle operators alike. All attempts by the press to get the situation rectified went in vain because when makers of law break them with impunity the sufferers are left with only option which is to wait for natural justice.

But as members of a civilized society in a free and democratic country we should not float in inaction and wait for the nature to intervene. We must exercise our rights and privileges and effectively oppose all such illegal activities.

The Daily Star photograph and report on Thursday focused on the despicable act of a developer in Dhanmondi area. He has had his construction materials block nearly half of a public road despite private appeals and official notices to remove the pile from there. The owner has, however, agreed to remove it 'very shortly' only after he was contacted by The Daily Star staffer.

But the good side of the story is that the authorities are taking into cognizance such offences and have issued directives in this behalf. The citizens have also a duty to inform such matters of public interest to the DCC or the relevant Ward Commissioner's office or the nearest police station so that quick action can be taken to rid the roads of any encroachment. The relevant authorities must attend to such complaints without losing any time.

Lynching Must Stop

TWO grim incidents of mob rage led to fatalities on Wednesday. These have certainly left stains on the prevailing law and order situation. In the first incident, two muggers were caught when a lady in city's Jatrabari area was way-laid by them. They were lynched. In the second one, the entire Shahbagh area was disturbed when flower traders resorted to vandalism after suffering loss of ten outlets to toll collecting goons. Physicians had to count two dead-bodies and law enforcing people put three offenders behind the bar.

Increasingly the people are taking the law into their own hands. This is where our concern, coupled with ominous signs, lies. The administration needs to probe why the man in the street is showing an inclination towards lynching and related activities in the form of "mass edict". This an expression of frustration over criminals going scot free. The law enforcers apparently have kept themselves busy with so-called "big issues" while number of these casualties mount out of 'petty causes'.

This must not go on. As the law enforcers send "mobile teams" to rescue one or two from public wrath, it is the patrol police or the posse around that has to wake up from their slumber. We want the home ministry to act on this urgently.

Infrastructure and the Changing Face of Poverty

BANGLADESH is one of the poorest countries in the world with a per capita GNP of USD 220-230 per annum. More than four-fifths of her total population lives in rural areas and the agricultural sector still continues to be the largest in terms of employment generation and value addition. About half of the total population is reported to be groaning under poverty. Alleviation of poverty is one of the principal objectives of the government of Bangladesh.

Before one embarks on any programme of poverty alleviation, one needs to have clear ideas about the determinants of poverty and the deterrents to poverty alleviation. Not much empirical evidence is at hand to this effect. However, the researchers appear to argue that the principal determinants of rural income in Bangladesh are: (a) ownership of land; (b) supply of labour in the household; (c) education level and (d) infrastructural development in and around the households. Available evidence from BIDS and other studies found that land is a statistically significant variable affecting the income of both poor and non-poor households but it is less important for the latter group. The elasticity of income with respect to land ownership is 0.14 for poor household, compared to 0.20 for the non-poor. The poor are reported to bank more on tenancy market for earning income. Access to electricity is reported to have positive im-

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impact on income even after dissecting the effect of other variables. Income of the poor households having access to electricity is found to be higher than those without such facilities. Likewise, number of workers and the level of education are also found to have positive impact on the level of income of households.

An important constraint to the increased income in rural Bangladesh is the shortage of land. While the population has been growing at around 2.5 per cent per annum over the last two decades or so, the amount of cultivated land remained more or less constant at 22 million acres. The farmers of Bangladesh have been trying to ease the land constraint through adopting HYV technology and irrigation. Research documents found that irrigation contributes substantially to the reduction of poverty. According to a particular investigation, the proportion of "hard core" poor are less in households having access to irrigation compared to the households having no access to irrigation. The estimates for moderate poverty also speak of a better situation for households having access to electricity. Availability of irrigation facilities helps reduce poverty through generation of employ-

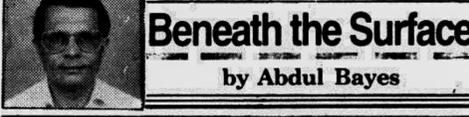
ment for the poor households. It has been observed that adoption of modern technology-based crops tends to raise employment level more than that with local variety crops. And since landless, functionally landless and marginal farmers provide the larger chunk of the rural agricultural labour force, needless to mention, the greatest beneficiaries of irrigation is the poor segment of the households whose poverty is reduced via rise in income.

mainly through generation of employment in non-farm activities. Likewise, the proportion of poor population (both extreme and moderate) is found to be lower in villages with relatively developed transport network than in less developed ones. For example, in less developed village, the proportion of "hard core" tends to fall while that in under-developed villages it tends to rise. There are mainly two ways through which availability of good

income varies with the level of education. The impact of primary education is found positive on poor households while secondary education has positive impact on non-poor households. By and large, it has been observed that education appears as a more powerful factor when mixed with land and capital. Given the empirical evidence that availability of access to infrastructure helps reduce poverty, Bangladesh needs to invest more on the growth and development of infrastructural facilities if it has to make a dent to rural poverty situation. The policy options are quite clear: First, adoption and expansion of new technology should be encouraged through a proper mix of pricing, subsidy, credit and extension policies.

farm sectors such as trade and services. Third, spread of education is an important determinant of poverty reduction. It is however, important to note that there is the need for changes in existing curriculum and the urgency to make education more production oriented so that education can help labour mobility from less productive to more productive works. Knowledge about modern agricultural practices and their practical applications should be taught in schools so that parents find their children useful in raising farm incomes.

The most serious challenge to poverty situation should, however, come from the growth of the economy. An economy that grows on average, by a feeble 5 per cent per year, can hardly expect to make a dent to the pervasive poverty level. And to raise the growth rate to six or seven per cent per annum, an investment rate of 18-20 per cent is directly needed. Such a high level of investment would be a function of appropriate policies, conducive business environment and a prolonged political stability. Growth and development of infrastructure, both social and physical, hold the key to the journey towards poverty alleviation. Sufficient resources should be mobilized from within to finance those productive activities. Inefficiency and wastage should immediately be abandoned and contained.



Beneath the Surface

by Abdul Bayes

The impact of electrification on rural poverty alleviation is found to be positive. Empirically, it could be observed that the share of poor people in villages with electricity in the "hard core" poor segment is lower compared to that of villages without such electricity facilities. From the observations it could, perhaps, also be concluded that the extreme poor benefit more from rural electrification than the moderate poor. How does electricity help in reduction of poverty? It is

transport facilities helps in reduction of poverty levels. First, "the development of transport facilities increases income of the farmers by lowering input prices, raising output prices and enabling them to produce more perishable but profitable crops." Second, availability of transport facilities appears as a boon to landless households through generation of employment in rural non-farm sector and raising wage rates by enhancing labour mobility. The impact of education or

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In Search of National Pride

by M. A. Bari

Bangladesh is in dire need of a clear direction. Her people need to be anchored to a deep-rooted national pride that will raise them above their self-interest. What else than her historic heritage can create this direction and pride in them?

IN the hey days of British colonialism, the new found energy and vigour of British nationalism catapulted its citizens to the four corners of the globe. In her search for wealth and prestige British merchant ships sailed to India, China, Australia and many other places. The renaissance unleashed European potential and created a passion in them to attain supremacy in all walks of life. The British had to compete with her European neighbours, notably France, for international domination. Story goes that when the British were looking for business opportunities in India and China they were greeted in contrasted ways. In India, the degenerated Muslim rulers received the British with simple-mindedness, and traditional Muslim hospitality. Sweet words and valuable gifts from the British monarch overwhelmed the Nawab's court. The British got what they wanted. In China, the emperor looked at the British contingent, read the message in their eyes and said to them, "No, thanks. What happened next in India and China is now history."

In India, the British were cunning enough to comprehend that the Bengal's ruling class contained elements who were short-sighted and susceptible to intrigue. That prompted them to start their conquest from the farthest territory, the eastern flank of the Mughal empire. Once they got foothold in the soft Bengal soil, the British traders lost no time in implementing their design to secure and expand their stay in the land. Ironically, some in the ruling circle fell in deadly love with them which, at the end, cost the whole India her independence. Ever since Bengal was taken over by the British, it

was subjected to social and economic mutilation. Within just three quarters of a century the ruling class, mainly Muslims, were reduced to perpetual underdogs in their own country. W. W. Hunter's account of the situation is too vivid for the students of history. Toward the end of the British rule, the East Bengal was made an economic hinterland of the territory's roller-coaster relationship with the west Pakistan did little to elevate her condition. Now after 28 years of Bangladesh's independence she is once again facing the grim prospect of a socio-economic downturn and a psychological war of attrition with her powerful neighbour. The odds are too many now.

As a nation, the people of Bangladesh should ask themselves why they are in this present mess? Should they, as usual, point their fingers to the external 'enemies' - the British, Pakistan and now India? A historic land of wealth and prosperity, that attracted world famous travellers - like Ibn Batuta - now lacks the appeal of the past because of its vicious circle of political instability, economic subservience and social disorientation. Education, the backbone for any nation, is in tatters as a result of rote learning and campus violence, orchestrated by political opportunists. Alas! The nation's talents are drifting away only to get undisturbed education in neighbouring countries and

elsewhere. Apart from the country losing its foreign currency, many of these talents are bringing with them the alien cultures, hostile to our national identity. Economically, Bangladeshi entrepreneurship is at its low as it lacks encouragement and required support from the government. Commercial and financial activities are marred by narrow and short term objectives. In the virtual absence of a meaningful infrastructure, Bangladesh is rapidly turning into an economic underdog.

Hated, vengeance and jealousy emanating from the tunnel-vision are having poisonous effects against any social cohesion. There is too much political commotion in the country. The whole nation is fragmented into various camps. Moderation looks absent from public life. The question is, while the countries right across her border, are rapidly shaping themselves to catch the developed countries in the world, why Bangladesh is taking so long to sort out her internal mess? Why Bangladesh is still so divided and unable to find her credible national identity yet?

Historically, the Bangladeshi people had shown their immense potential on many occasions. From architecture to poetry and physics to zoology, many Bangladeshis had shown their genius in the world. It is true that they, on certain issues, get carried away by emotion and biased down with short-term idealism. But

they have many other qualities that outshine their weaknesses. What is putting the nation down and preventing her from moving ahead is the monumental lack of group-quality, the term used by Ibn Khaldun long ago. Social fragmentation originating from the lack of statesman-like national leadership is making her, once again, the breeding ground for intrigue and manipulation by foreign powers. As long as the people of this small delta fail to overcome this social disharmony and find a common aspiration, the danger will always hang above her.

The world today is like a global village where the big brothers are trying to dictate and shape it in their own fashion. They have the three powerful tools in their arsenal, the 3Ms - Money, Media and Muscle. What matters to them is their national interest. They have their own yard-stick of justice, value system and way of life to impose on others. A nation, weak in herself, has little choice of her own. After the collapse of Communism, the new world order has become more unjust and ruthlessly immoral. It is now clear that many multi-billion dollar projects (only CIA's annual declared budget is to the tune of tens of billions of dollars), that were once used to bring down Communism, are now aimed to tame the others, apparently now the Muslim world. This makes the situation of the problem-ridden countries more precarious. Few can withstand the onslaught of the neo-imperialism. But history tells us that small is not always weak. The tiny Israel state in Palestine is one example today. A country's vulnerability is more to do with her internal disharmony than foreign capitulation.

est overrides national interest it brings misfortune for many, often all, in the country.

Bangladesh has a historic past. It has tremendous human and material potential to develop. But her position as an isolated Muslim country, surrounded by a vast neighbour, is being threatened by many factors. May be the neo-East India Companies are trying to have a re-run of their agenda, but with more subtleties this time. Bangladesh's poverty, caused by the cumulative political and economic mismanagement by its successive governments, has resulted in the influx of numerous international charity organisations. Some of them are overtly missionaries and do care little about the local value system. Government policies to tie down their excesses, if any, were virtually non-existent. As a result, some of these 'charities' often appear to have grown more powerful than the administration. The short-sighted political and opportunistic intellectual leaderships of the country have proved disastrous in the last 50 years. Now in Bangladesh there are leaders who consider themselves superior to the parties and party-interest higher than the nation. People in authority are superbly efficient in avoiding responsibilities and blaming others. This vicious circle is gradually crippling the national confidence.

Bangladesh is in dire need of a clear direction. Her people need to be anchored to a deep-rooted national pride that will raise them above their self-interest. What else than her historic heritage can create this direction and pride in them? A country's prosperity depends on her dedicated people and Bangladesh does not lack them. The question is, who is going to awaken the nation's dormant energy?

The writer is with the Centre for Policy Development in London.

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.

Slum dwellers' right

Sir, The poor people of our country are being deprived of their basic needs like food and shelter. So many of them come to the city to look for work so that they can live. As because there is no other place for them to stay they take shelter in the slums. Now the government is accusing them for polluting the city environment and for crimes. So they are being kicked out of the slums without any proper rehabilitation.

One morning they woke up and saw police surrounding their small sheds and telling them that they had only two to three hours to leave but not showing them where to go. Before even they could decide anything, they saw fire all over their place, bulldozers breaking down the shanties where they lived. They cried and shouted and those who protested were beaten up. A 65-year-old guy called Shona Mia who could hardly walking in his whole life except that time, stood there and saw it being destroyed. Anowara Begum with six daughters also did not know how safe it was to spend the night in the open. None of them knew about their destiny.

Now why it is being done? Our government told in reply they wanted to make our city look clean. Not only that, they think that would cut down crime. In one day, but you cannot cut down crime just by bulldozing the slums only. We agree that there are crime zones around some of the slums but our crime zones are too many and university halls are not excluded. So if you are serious about cutting down the crime rate, I would say start from the slums and get hold of the so-called go-fathers. This is not the way of doing things. If a government, the provider for the people. As such you cannot evict a dweller, of whatever sort, without making any ar-

Call hartal on Friday

Sir, I have read the letter on Tuesday, 24th August in 'The Daily Star' under the above caption written by Mrs Luise Ralique from Khulna. I would like to inform her some information that are known by most of the countrymen and at the same time I would like to protest her unacceptable challenge towards the opposition as well as the citizens.

According to the law of a democratic country, in Bangladesh, everyone has the right to practice his religious duties and the oppositions have the right to protest against the government for any significant matter. Moreover, there is a specific timetable written in the law of Bangladesh for calling hartal on working days. So, it would be better if you blame these laws of the country.

Secondly, I would like to say that Friday and Saturday are the government holidays of our country. Fridays are the holy days for Muslim. Living in a Muslim country and considering the above two matters, how could one challenge the oppositions to call hartal on Fridays?

SK Md Obaidul Islam, Dhaka.

Development in the northern region

Sir, With the opening of BJMB, the main hurdle of

communication to the north of Bangladesh has been removed. The government has taken up programme to take gas facility and to enhance the power generation in the northern region. The PM in her many speeches urged the importance of developing northern Bangladesh by setting up agro-based industries. The people of the region have no industrial orientation and not aware of any facilities including bank loans.

The establishment of a complete separate specialised bank like Rajshahi Krishi Union Bank may create some enthusiasm in the matter. Rajshahi Krishi Union Bank has already played a vital role in developing agriculture in the area. A full fledged industrial development bank having its headquarter somewhere in the northern Bengal should be established. The loan facility at the door step of the people may make them aware of industrialisation. The bank may also impart orientation course to willing sponsors. Since all industrial loans are sanctioned from the head offices of different banks and DFIs, the people do not feel comfortable to undergo a long journey to Dhaka and take loans for setting up industries. The North has not been developed right from the days of Pakistan. The communication barrier has been removed. The area of gas got immense agricultural product. Besides lifting of coal at Bara Pukuria and hardrock at Mutha Fara is in process. Both the mineral items can be used in the project and industrial units. A financial house both in private or public sectors may expedite the process.

Mahbubul Haque Chowdhury, 153 Lake Circus, Kalabaghgan, Dhaka.

Who is sovereign?

Sir, Recently a certain quarter is trying to create a new issue namely the sovereignty issue. In my opinion, I feel that our parliament is not sovereign enough in the sense that they may enact any law they want disregarding the constitution. In this connection, I would like to quote from a book on constitution where the writer,

an eminent Indian scholar writes:

"The 'Constitution' is amended and altered by a procedure different from that required in amending a statutory or ordinary law. The statutory law must be consistent with the letter and the spirit of the Constitution, otherwise it is unconstitutional or ultra vires, as soon as a court has an opportunity to review it."

Anxious citizen, Dhaka.

Construction of monuments

Sir, It is that the Ministry of Cultural Affairs has taken a decision to build eight monuments at the liberation war killing grounds.

In our War of Liberation, a good number of Indian soldiers who were deputed to help soldiers got killed. I think we should build monument as well to recognize their contribution to our independence.

I know if this is done then the opposition political parties will term the step as appeasement policy towards India but this should be done to express our gratitude.

Gulam Kabir, Juarshahara, Dhaka-1229.

Origin of Rx

Sir, In a DS report of August 14, it is mentioned that a local Islamic group says that it is a serious sin for a Muslim to write Rx at the beginning of a medical prescription. The reason is its alleged association with a Babylonian god. Unfortunately, the scholarly word disagrees. Rx (as can be verified in any good dictionary) is an abbreviation for the Latin word recipe (pronounced ray-chee) and the imperative form of the verb recipere (to take receive). Religion and truth should always walk hand-in-hand.

Father Timm, Commission for Justice & Peace, Dhaka.

OPINION Accumulated Negligence

Dr. Quazi Mohd. Mahtab-uz-Zaman

DHAKA City is a source of multiple job opportunities similar to any major cities around the world, which usually pulls people from other rural and urban sub-centers. The migration to the capital city is usually a one way journey for most of the rural and suburban people. This is due to the fact that there are many informal/formal sector jobs available in Dhaka compared to the stigmatised rural areas. Living spaces (slums) are available at little or no cost. There are virtually no restrictions, regulation and monitoring systems devised by any government to manage these huge slums at the outset of their formation. Moreover, during each political rejuvenation period, these transient groups of people are found easy to exploit by dominant politicians.

One of the most critical sources of urban attraction is the growth of medium-skilled labour-intensive manufacturing industries in the city centres, all of which are by-products of miscalculated and immature formulae of zoning and land use exercises by the policy makers. Those who do not get their intended job become jobless urban parasites. These residual rural migrants might be the source of urban blights becoming 'miscreants'. These problems are difficult to tackle in an amicable way because the initial cause of slum formation is a hidden truth usually left unchecked from the beginning. Now the critical question is that, which land use should come under eviction or rehabilitation: slums or spaces that are occupied by informal job sources? If these two land uses are inter-dependable, then the problem is severe. The factors of cheap labour, subsidized manufacturing cost, and low-price finished goods cannot be ignored.

Majority of slum dwellers emerged from primary sector economic activities (agriculture, fishing, weaving etc.), which are no longer a profitable and attractive due to the natural calamities and low productivity. This problem gets intensified due to the lack of interest from government to formulate incentive packages to formalise these primary sector economic activities. Government has never identified actual causal factors: sources of attractions in the urban polarity and sources of repelling factors in the rural polarity, both of which collectively produce slum settlement. One obvious reason is the formal and informal jobs in the city centre, which has no equivalent opportunities at the rural polarity.

Urban slum formation is an age-old phenomenon that can be blamed partly on the outdated economic framework; disjointed planning and policies on land use; lack of alternative and decentralized job opportunities in rural/suburban areas; and the ability of the decision makers to combine all these problems to generate careful and holistic solutions. Major cities are continuously subjected to new socio-economic and political manipulations. Therefore, the need for refurbishing mindsets of decision-makers is essential. In reality, no one can stop the free flow of rural-urban migration, since this socio-economic displacement has many inter-connected factors, which require careful identification and brainstorming before any action is taken. No drastic and blindfold approach would usher benefit. The persistent slum problem requires a careful solution that should come from the brainpower and not the muscle power.

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