

Sad Tale of Failed Administrative Reforms

At a recent meeting, cross section of people representing various professional groups expressed their views in favour of creating a permanent arrangement for implementing recommendations and going ahead with reform measures. According to experts, the issues of good governance and development are closely related with administrative reforms.

by M Z Rahman

IN its quest for reforming the public administration experts have produced a plenty of reports. But action on the reports has been in short supply. The voluminous reports are often seen to have been shelved as secret documents and buried unceremoniously half way to implementation.

After the country's independence in 1971, a good number of reports have been prepared by various commissions for the attention of successive governments. But the attempts to carry out the suggested reforms have faltered. Since 1972 about 18 commissions and committees were formed at different periods which dealt wholly or partially with issues of administrative reforms. The latest one—the Public Administration Reform Commission (PARC)—was constituted in December 1996 and is still in operation.

In the past, several reform attempts were made during both the 1947 to 1971 period and the period since independence. But most of them failed because the reforms proposals were not made public.

As many as 14 reports on Public Service Commission were prepared during the British period since 1886. Some 28 reports were also made on administrative reforms when Bangladesh was part of Pakistan. Successive governments in Bangladesh also attempted many reforms by appointing committees/commissions for reorganisation and reform of services as well as revision of pay, besides incorporating many modifications to the existing structure and systems in ad hoc manners from time to time.

The News Network, a national news-feature agency, has recently conducted a study on the issue and tried to find out the reasons behind non-implementation of the reform proposals. Based on review of previous studies and pertinent documents, the report covers a whole range of basic issues and problems in the field of administrative management and has tried to find out the lapses that affect the efficiency adversely.

Soon after independence in 1971, the then provincial services took over the responsibility of public administration with a large public sector of enterprises left by the Pakistanis.

After the independence the need to invigorate the civil service of the new country was severely felt. Since then attempts have been made by successive governments to bring about desirable changes in the administrative system and dif-

ferent governments instituted various reform measures and introduced many modifications from time to time. Several commissions and committees have been formed, and a number of studies have been carried out to review administrative systems, operations, pay, personnel and management systems. But lack of implementation has been the common feature for most of the recommendations except those in the areas of pay and services.

Some recent studies, supported by USAID, UNDP, World Bank and ODA have identified critical areas of weakness in administrative performance and accountability system, and recommended upstream measures for rationalising ministries with clear mission and goals.

Since independence the size of government has virtually doubled in terms of ministries, departments and officials. The large number of civil servants at the clerical and messenger level not only has a negative effect on efficiency, but also contributed to the problem of salary compression. "said a World Bank study. To make the government effective and efficient, the Enam Committee (1982) recommended the reduction of ministries from 44 to 19 and number of divisions from 60 to 42 and cutting staff mostly at the lower levels. The Nurnabi Committee also identified some 47,019 officials surplus and recommended abolishment of the posts. None of the recommendations was implemented. Instead, the government is still becoming fat.

The reports prepared from 1972-1987 were mostly initiated by the government and the emphasis and concentration was on structural reforms, procedural improvement, pay adjustments, promotion opportunity and delegation of powers and functions to local bodies.

In the past decade, commissions and committees have been largely initiated with donor support and reports have reflected mostly current reform agenda covering privatisation, contracting out, reduced level of government, control of corruption and devolution.

Apparently, the nature of changes taking place in countries undertaking reforms and challenges of global and open market economy have influenced the new direction of reform concepts.

The high attrition rate in the implementation process led scholars/reform experts to devise two ways: 1) to identify and analyse those factors and situa-

tions which prevent the implementation of reforms, 2) to devise strategies for facilitating the process of implementation.

Of late, many countries in the world—developed as well as developing—adopted a mechanism/strategy i.e. creation of a permanent institutional arrangement for facilitating implementation of administrative reforms. "Because of non-existence of such institutional arrangement recommendations of preceding 18 commissions/committees have not been implemented" said an official of PARC who preferred not to be identified. No permanent or regular institutional mechanism either at the political level or elsewhere exists in Bangladesh to conceive, initiate, operationalise and implement administrative reforms.

Unlike developed countries, most of the political parties have rarely formulated any agenda for comprehensive administrative reforms in their election manifesto. It is not surprising, therefore that most of the reports and recommendations have been implemented only partially or not implemented at all.

Like in the past, the recommendations prepared by the PARC, except a few, were not followed up with implementation. Of the 19 recommendations, only three have been approved by the cabinet—the first two and 11th recommendation on "One Stop Utility Bill Payment System". The cabinet, however, instructed the relevant ministries/agencies to take necessary steps to implement them as early as possible.

The 5th recommendation on "simplification of payment of travel tax" has also been in use since last year. With regard to the appointment of the Ombudsman, the government is searching for a person to hold the exalted office. Other formalities are almost completed in this regard.

Some of the recommendations are also sent to relevant ministries/divisions for comments/views. Other recommendations will also be placed in the cabinet for consideration of the phases. The recommendations are now being discussed, debated, studied and reported on with much intensity among policy makers, donors, professionals and all other concerned sections of society with a view to coming out with some concrete suggestions," said a high official of the PARC.

At a recent meeting, cross section of people representing various professional groups expressed their views in favour

of creating a permanent arrangement for implementing recommendations and going ahead with reform measures.

According to experts, the issues of good governance and development are closely related with administrative reforms. Good governance basically means rule of law, efficiency, effectiveness, transparency and accountability of administration.

All papers and proposals regarding "Institutional arrangement for implementation of administrative reform" were discussed in most of the meetings of the PARC. The discussions revealed a gloomy picture of implementation. The lack of an institutional structure is blamed for the failure. PARC has devised a modality for implementing the interim recommendations so far made. This includes gradual placement of these recommendations in the cabinet meeting for approval. It will soon submit a proposal to the cabinet on formation of a permanent institution to oversee the implementation of suggested reforms.

This institution will function like a consultative/advisory body—an institution of professionals beyond bureaucratic and class structure. And the nature and method of its work should be always advisory/consultative. The institution is proposed to be called Public Administrative Reforms Monitoring Commission (PARMOC), the tenure of which will be about three years.

Like PARC, the proposed PARMOC may be constituted with members/representatives of different sectors. In the light of the experiences from other countries of the world, a member from the training institution and civil society may be inducted in the commission. The commission shall consist of 16 members of which three should be full-time members, including the member-secretary and the remaining 13 should be part-time members. A core group of six middle rank officers of government shall act as the process facilitators. The facilitators will provide direct advice/directives to two officers nominated from the ministry/division/corporation with regard to the implementation of concerned recommendations.

The structure and function of the PARMOC may be finalised subject to discussion with the Ministry of Establishment and the Ministry of Finance.

—News Network

Drought, Despair and Desperation

The very important issue regarding water is to get it in such a way that it is neither less nor more with respect to our requirement. And here lies the very important and vital question of water control, preservation and management.

by Mohammad Kamal Nasser

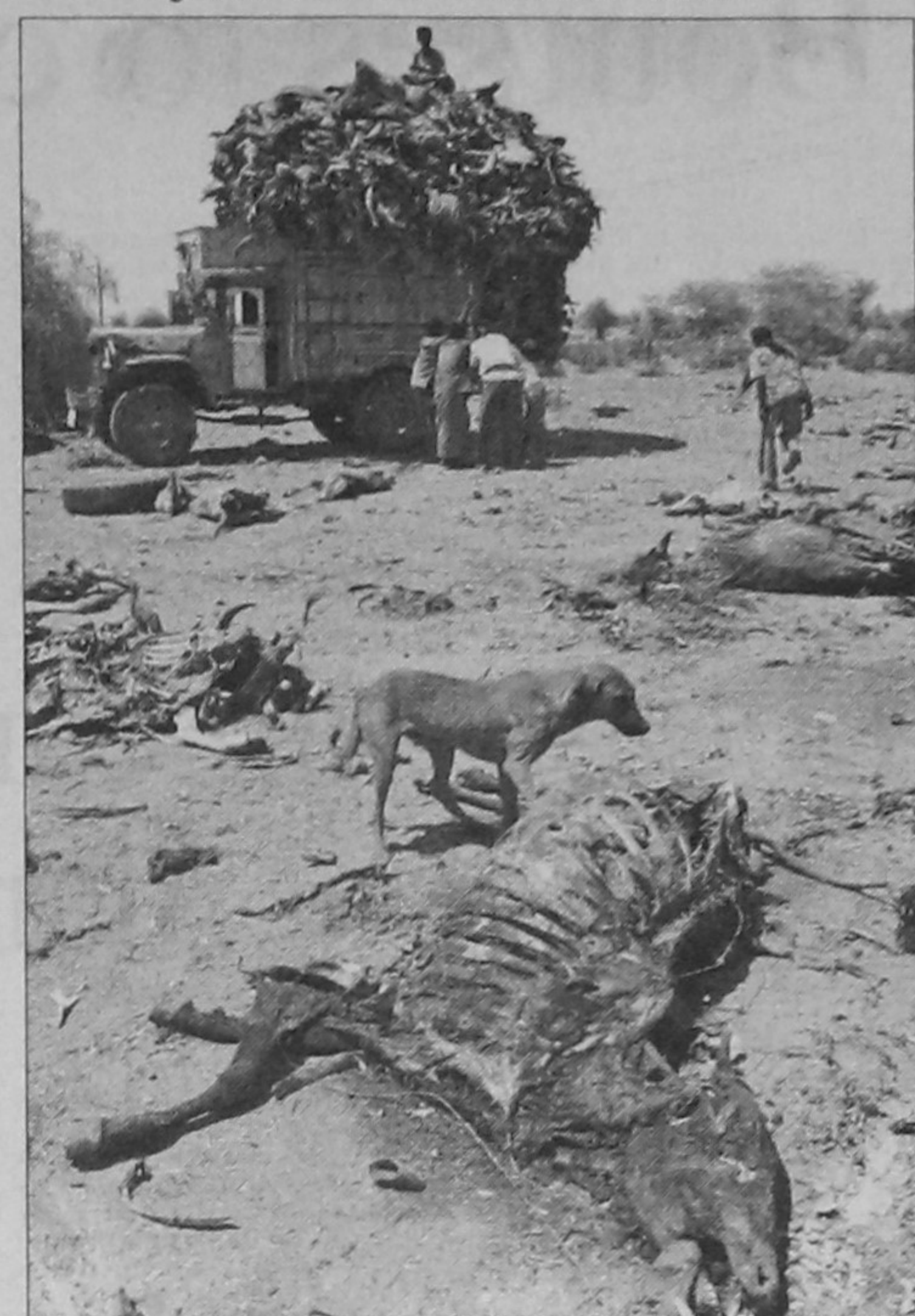
IT'S not a matter of mere anxiety—rather a matter to be scared of, now. Earlier different dailies published the news item under such headline as 'the war will be for water in the coming century' with due prominence and in bold letters. One cannot but be perturbed when a news item regarding the crisis of such an essential item as water, without which we just cannot think of our existence, sounds so ominous. Is it that the prediction and caution by water experts and environmentalists are becoming true so soon? Perhaps it is—at least the recent crisis of water turned into severe drought in the western part of the subcontinent appears to be the manifestation of that prediction.

The drought situation, severest in the recent history, is spreading fast. It has engulfed Rajasthan, Gujarat in India and parts of neighbouring Pakistan and Afghanistan. May be for geographical position we, in Bangladesh, may avert it for the time being. But who can say we are totally out of danger? Reportedly an Indian state Orissa, nearer to us, is also experiencing a drought like situation.

The people of Gujarat have kept themselves engaged in a relentless fight against acute crisis of water—in the severest drought they have ever seen. Almost all the wells—one of the main sources of water—have already dried up. Only a few people have the financial capacity to buy water. A desperate bid is there to fetch even two pitchers of water from the places, say, two kilometres away. Most of the people have been compelled to drink impure and dirty water. As a result, a lot of people have been suffering from dysentery and other water-borne diseases. Government tanker, truck supply water every ten days, which is too inadequate to meet the huge demand. Apart from this one is to undergo untold sufferings to fetch the water so supplied.

Nearly nine thousand villages of Gujarat have been declared 'drought affected area'. This amounts to more than half of the human population of this state is nearly four crore. Inadequate rain last year has been identified as one of the main reasons for this situation. According to weathermen, the temperature crosses even 45 degrees Celsius. As a result the water crisis only doubles. Hundreds of 'tankers' everyday cannot even meet a partial requirement.

Private sellers are ferrying water in carts. Two hundred litres cost 100 rupees. This is out of reach of most of the people. Riot, violence etc., are regu-



Animal carcasses being loaded on trucks in hundreds for disposal in the drought hit Rajasthan and Gujarat in western India.

lar affairs in the drought-hit areas. As many as three farmers have been shot dead by police in such an incident of violence. Police used batons time and again to disperse the agitating mob demanding water. The central government, meanwhile, has allocated a sum of 200 crore rupees for the drought-hit people of Rajasthan and Gujarat. Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee, in a nationwide speech over radio and television asked all to help the distressed irrespective of caste and creed and burying differences in opinion and ideology.

The consequences of water crisis and drought will not be confined to present alone. It far-reaching consequence. It may be said that the aftermath will be worse. It has already been predicted that the output of foodgrains will fall by 30 per cent while production of oil seeds will reduce just to half.

Ferrying water by trains is on while the government ordered the Navy to supply eight thousand tons of pure drinking water to Gujarat port. The suffering of the people due to drought thrice in a year has reached an intolerable height. As per statistics of federal government nearly 262 million people of Rajasthan have become the victims of this natural calamity, while the number of affected village is 23,406. A crisis of fodder has rendered about 34 lakh cattle to suffer, many of them dying.

Regarding the drought situation in Gujarat, it has been told in a statistic that about 25 million people of 19,421 villages have been victims of the severe drought. In Andhra Pradesh, nearly 36.4 million people in 17,431 villages have been affected by the drought.

It has gripped the neighbouring countries as well. As many as four lakh people in Afghanistan have become victims of drought. The Taliban authorities, to meet the situation, are sending food by helicopter in the remote villages of the provinces of Helmand, Nimshen, Herat, Kandahar and

Jabal. Quite a large area of Baluchistan of Pakistan is also facing drought. The day places, it has already taken the proportion of mass exodus. The famous lions in Gir forest in Saurashtra area in Gujarat are also leaving in search of water and food.

Meanwhile in the affected Indian states, thousands of people are moving to other places. It has already taken the proportion of mass exodus. The famous lions in Gir forest in Saurashtra area in Gujarat are also leaving in search of water and food.

According to weather experts in India, there is no possibility of any rain at least within the next six weeks. They also forecast less rain with respect to that of last year's. They are of the view that less rain during the last few years has caused this drought. The possibility of change in the situation is slim, they opined.

The aftermath of any sort of natural calamity is generally found to be more serious a situation than during the calamity. Experts have already predicted, famine in drought hit areas. Outbreak of various diseases causing many deaths cannot be ruled out. So, it is wise to be more serious and to get oneself prepared to face the situation after the calamity. And it applies to both the already affected and those waiting their turn.

Water, the gift of nature is such a unique and extraordinary thing, the excess or less than required quantity of which causes suffering and danger to life. Flood and tidal surges can be cited as examples beside this drought situation. So the very important issue regarding water is to get it in such a way that it is neither less nor more with respect to our requirement. And here lies the very important and vital question of water control, preservation and management.

In the context of bare necessity, we should be very careful regarding its use and thus to avert any sort of misuse. We should all, therefore, be very particular about the sources from which we get the supply. Besides rational exploitation of underground source, we shall have to be very much careful towards averting wanton filling of pools, ponds, canals etc., in the name of human settlements and all our efforts should be directed towards finding out alternative and sustainable sources of water 'the sooner the better'.

LAND FOR THE POOR

Pressure Groups Can Play Significant Role

by Md Abdul Kader and Sohel Ibn Ali

LAND activities—reform or administration—are very complicated issues in Bangladesh. A considerable number of total disputes arise out of claims by the opposing party through falsified registration, erroneous record of titles, measurement problems, wrong identification and ownership of government khas land. The problem is widespread in the rural areas. A very strong vested interest group including many government officials involved in land transfer, registration and record keeping are behind the mismanagement in land. Government's khas land distribution programme are always hampered due to such bureaucratic corruption and mismanagement.

A few NGOs in Bangladesh have been working on 'Khas or Government Land Distribution Programme'. This is being done as per the 1987 National Agricultural Khas Land Distribution Policy formulated by the government. These NGOs have been reasonably successful in the past years in learning the entire process of land distribution and have actually transferred some land to landless families. However, compared to the total khas land in the country, that is 4.2 million acres according to CS record and 2.1 million acres according to SA record, that redistributed so far is just about 5,000 acres. It has been calculated that if the entire 2.1 million acres can be redistributed, it will benefit 17 per cent of the total population of Bangladesh. Theoretically, this benefit should reach most of the hard-core poor families. The khas land distribution ap-

ples primarily to the poorest (about 20% of families are in this hard-core poor category). This can be the only way of directly reaching the hard-core poor people in Bangladesh for effective poverty alleviation.

One of the NGOs engaged in khas land recovery and distribution programme, and probably most prominent as such, is Samata. The NGO and its ideological network LAND have been jointly doing some soft mass mobilisation activities in order to make the government institutions pro-poor, accountable and transparent and establish good governance at all levels. It is believed that this will be very helpful for a constructive and good land and agriculture reform.

Their experience has shown that in the field where there is a strong pressure group some achievements can be accomplished. A strong pressure group can play the role of a watchdog. Intense lobbying and advocacy at all levels and creating strong pressure groups for the purpose are very important to ensure the success of Khas Land Distribution Programme. From its inception, the NGO has created pressure groups through mobilizing people at all levels including journalists, civil society members and other professionals and pressed home their case for action to the local administration through organising different demonstrations, mass rallies, meetings, seminars, workshops etc. and submitting memoranda. As a first step, it raises awareness among the landless poor about their rights including land and water



NGO workers and the landless poor of different thanas of Pabna district brought out processions on April 19 demanding distribution of khas lands.

right, gender right, democratic right etc. and forms different male and female groups for their unity and solidarity. These groups are playing active role also to strengthen the local government.

The NGO is committed and ultimately accountable to its grassroots samities (informal village groups). It has always argued that it is not giving organisational responses to problems posed by 'needy clients', instead it seeks to operate as a platform, where the demands of the landless poor find public expression and are effectively represented. The efforts put into group formation, together with its organisational structure ensure that this form

of 'representation' actually reflects the needs and aspirations of the members themselves. The unity, solidarity and collective action of the samities have already produced tangible results as the poor secure more real influence over the process, structures and relationships in which they are integrated.

Earlier, in November 1998, Samata organised landless people who submitted 3,000 applications and LAND (a network of 44 local NGOs who are working at the grassroots level mainly on land issues) submitted 6,677 applications to the 'Thana Agricultural Khas Land Management Committee' for leasing out agricultural khas land as permanent settlement.



After completion of the selection of the landless incumbents and other primary works, the cases still remain pending for a long time at the District Commissioner's office for final approval. The delay in implementation is due to the complicated bureaucratic process and lack of firm commitment of the political parties to the cause.

This time, as a first step to the mobilisation process, Samata and LAND organised training on mass mobilisation for their staff from all levels on December 05, 1999. More than fifteen hundred staff from different member organisations participated in it. After that till March 31, 2000, they have worked to raise awareness

among the landless people and to help forge their unity and solidarity in order to strengthen their voice and influence in the locality. They are trying to mobilise the masses, to play a supportive role in pro-poor activities, especially khas land distribution as well as land and agriculture reform. They are hoping that some day civil society will pressurise all the political parties as well as the government to implement these pro-poor policies. The government already has a clear-cut policy and district and thana based committees for khas land distribution among the landless poor. The NGOs are trying to expedite the process of and ensure fairness

in the khas land distribution programme.

Samata and LAND have jointly organised a meeting and chalked out an elaborate programme to create pressure on the Land Administration for immediate distribution of khas land and khas water bodies. The chalked out programmes are: 1. Organising area based meeting in different areas; 2. Organising peaceful mass rally at all the upazilla headquarters in its working area and submitting memorandum; 3. Organising human chain in all the districts in North Bengal; 4. Organising padayatra (march) for khas land and water bodies.

Earlier, the landless poor beneficiaries had jointly organised several area based meetings to demand immediate distribution of khas land and khas water bodies among the real landless poor and fishermen. After that, on April 19, 2000, about one lakh landless people brought out processions in different thanas of Pabna district demanding immediate distribution of khas lands, char lands and khas water bodies among them as per existing rules and policies. Later memorandum were submitted to the Upazilla Nirbahi Officers (UNOs) of all the upazillas for immediate action. Demands in the memorandum are: recovery of all khas lands, water bodies and char land from illegal occupants and land grabbers, punishment of terrorists and land grabbers, dyara survey for char land and change in the not so effective policy for distribution among the landless poor, changing the classification for

those lands that have already been cultivated, annulment of all the false fishermen's cooperative societies, putting an immediate stop to police harassment and disposal of all the false court cases pending against landless poor and fishermen.

The main objective of organising peaceful mass rallies is to make a public demand and to press home the demand for immediate action. It also helps the government or for that matter the ruling party to implement their election manifestos. Khas land distribution was one of the major agenda of the present ruling party's last election manifesto. It is high time the government effected immediate distribution of khas land and water bodies and also change the policy for charland distribution.

This type of mobilisation activities that the NGOs like Samata and LAND do are necessary to organise the landless poor all over the country. However, they do not have sufficient capacity (fund, organised people etc.) to carry out such wide range activities. Presently, the former has been implementing its activities in small areas of Pabna, Sirajganj, Natore and Rajbari districts, and in collaboration with the latter, in total nine districts of North Bengal. They are always trying to work with the government to implement their pro-poor development activities, towards poverty alleviation.

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TOM & JERRY



By Hanna-Barbera

James Bond

