

Real Test Ahead

THE decision of the International Cricket Council (ICC) in London on Monday to elevate Bangladesh from associate to Test match status is like a dream come true. We have been waiting for a long time to be able to make our mark in a discipline of sport which has been played and practised for more than a century in this part of the world. We now have the opportunity to do that. This is perhaps one of the very few good pieces of news since the Victory Day in 1971 that gives us a leap of the mind. Today we join the nation in celebrating this historic occasion, fully aware of the onerous tasks that lie ahead in upgrading our standards to compete with other cricketing nations with honour.

It is time for the government to take a bow; feel genuinely proud and happy for an achievement unmatched in the sporting annals of this proud nation. The Ministry of Youth and Sports and the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) deserve all praise for their dogged perseverance and untiring efforts in following the only goal of achieving a place for Bangladesh in the supreme body of ICC as a full-member. The vigorous lobbying, that was initiated since the rejection of application by the ICC in 1999, has finally paid off as all the members unanimously supported Bangladesh's application for full membership.

As we rejoice in the outcome today, we remember those players and organisers who had given their best times of life for this game and did the brick-building job slowly but steadily for the Test status we have gained today. The game owes much to this dedicated band of players and organisers many of whom did not have the opportunity to see this day.

But this is not the end. This is only the beginning. In the years to come this recognition, achieved after so much of efforts, must be turned into excellence in the game itself. It is hard truth that we do not have a proper, exclusive ground for cricket. The infrastructure for the game has to be immensely improved, the format for the domestic cricket has to be radically changed, first class tournaments have to be introduced and playing centres have to be developed. And all these must be done methodically but quickly. Along with these the welfare of the players has to be given due importance. After all, they will be the people to bring cricketing accolade to us.

Once again we offer our hearty felicitations to the cricketers and the organisers and urge them to live up to the playing status we have been accorded in the world arena.

Chief Whip and Two Questions

CHIEF Whip of the Jatiya Sangsad Abul Hasnat Abdullah made some astounding remarks in the Parliament on Saturday raising a question mark on his sense of propriety. There have been media reports about his youngest son Ashique Abdullah allegedly kidnapping a schoolboy and demanding ransom for his release. Previously, his eldest son Sadeq was accused of having forcibly occupied a flat in a city building. Apparently rattled by these, the Chief Whip delivered the ultimate ruse to defend the name of his family. He implored the Speaker to form a parliamentary committee to probe the allegations against his sons, somewhat out of steps with the general discussion over the budget he was taking part in.

Why should a parliamentary committee be formed for the sole purpose of investigating his sons' reported involvements in criminal activities? The principle of equality before law demands that they be proceeded against just as any other person accused of similar offences would have been. Why does he think the law owes a special treatment to his sons? We would have said the same thing even if he had demanded the parliamentary committee with an open, neutral mind. But he thinks there has been a conspiracy to defame his family and that a section of the media resorted to 'false and misleading report' which all the more warrants that the matter be gone into according to standard procedures.

Our second pointer is towards his startling disclosure that he was offered crores of taka by ISI — what for — he really has not divulged it in precise terms. The most pertinent question to ask here is: what did you do after being approached by the ISI with the monetary offer? Did you tell the intelligence agencies like the DGFI or NSI about it as a matter of obligation to national security concerns? It was no joking matter that a ruling party high-up was purportedly approached.

If intelligence operatives of other countries can operate like that and have such easy access to a government leader assigned with a particular task of national importance we better find out where it is going wrong. What did the chief whip do with all that he knew?

The Book of Life

DECODING of the genetic blueprint for a human being is, as British Prime Minister Tony Blair put it, indeed the "first technological triumph of the 21st Century". Success of the Human Genome Project (HGP), which involved an international group of public-sector scientists, opens up an avenue to tremendous medical advancements. The knowledge stemming from the "book of life" could eventually help scientists find a cure for cancer and other fatal diseases and even lead to a means for longer life. The otherwise rosy picture is, however, tinged with "sombre moral concerns", concerns on how we would handle the phenomenal achievement.

Ground-breaking discovery such as the deciphering and sequential assembling of human genetic code places a tremendous responsibility on the architects, purveyors and protagonists of the feat. Mankind's track-record in responsible application of technological wonders has not been reassuring, to say the least. Nuclear bomb is a poignant proof of abuse of scientific prowess. There are more. Biological warfare, chemical weapons, the list could go on and on.

This time, man's progress has been inward, deep into the secret of his own existence. If prudently and properly applied, the knowledge would lead us to longer, happier lives. If not, we might end up disturbing the intricate balance and harmony of nature. In that case, our very existence would be on the balance.

With the "book of life", some profit-mongering minds may fall for the money game. Our congratulations to the scientists on the HGP goes with a note of caution: stay away from these crooked, commercial clutches.

The NAM Summit

Have We Done Our Cost-Benefit Calculations?

by Wahiduddin Mahmud

I have had some apprehensions about our capacity and affordability for holding the NAM summit in Dhaka in the autumn of 2001. My apprehensions have deepened further after I read Mr. Faruq Chowdhury's column dealing with this topic in The Daily Star of June 25. The commendable and successful movement of the civil society to change the venue of the NAM conference centre has taken our attention away from this more basic issue. One can only hope that our policy-makers in the foreign office have a well thought-out plan of action, which they should now make public to allay the concerns raised.

Mr. Chowdhury has emphasised the huge scale of preparations, in terms of expertise and logistics, required for holding such an event. Meeting the deadline seems to be a stupendous task. May be, at the end, many of those 113 heads of state will decide not to participate, anticipating our lack of preparation, thus making the event more manageable, but also, at the same time, making it an event of lesser significance.

Moreover, how fair will it be to burden the next Caretaker Government with all this, particularly since the approaching summit will then make the time-table for these preparations increasingly inflexible? And how congenial will be the domestic political environment at the very time of holding the summit? If history is any guide (in this case, we certainly hope not), it is most likely that either one of our major two political parties will be launching a fresh agitation around that time in protest of an allegedly rigged general election!

On the benefit side, it is for the experts in international relations to judge how far the summit will help enhancing the prestige and clout of Bangladesh among the country of nations. I am more concerned with the economic costs and

benefits, if any. One can argue that the international attention generated by such an event can help Bangladesh attract foreign investment or can give the country an enhanced status as a player in global economic negotiations. There are grounds to be skeptical about such imagined economic benefits coming out of what is essentially an event of conventional diplomacy and involves only the developing countries. Also, the international image factor can work either way, depending on how well we can manage the show and package ourselves for media scrutiny.

The estimated total costs for holding the summit, if at all such an estimate has been made, is not in public knowledge. The costs will include those for building a large number of luxury apartments, buying a fleet of luxury cars, constructing the conference centre and paying for an array of logistic support services. Most of the construction costs are met from suppliers' credit, but the information on such credit is missing in the budget documents for it is?). In terms of social and economic returns, there is not much justification for financing such unproductive investments by foreign borrowing (at what are effectively the commercial rates of interest). In a city already suffering from the worst levels of pollution and environmental degradation, there are obviously many priority areas of public spending, if we are at all to go for increased spending by borrowing from abroad. The worst possible scenario is that we will have already incurred a large part of the costs before we find ourselves in a situation that we cannot afford all the hold the summit. These issues should have been raised and discussed at the time when we decided to go into this commitment. But, even now, it may be worthwhile to examine our options, including whether we should go for an agreed postponement of the summit.

To the Editor

Taste of Test

Sir, It is indeed a time to rejoice that from now on Bangladesh will be considered as one of the respectable members of the cricket arena. I would like to congratulate the whole nation on its great achievement — Test status.

However it is to remember that Bangladesh's ascent into the Test family has not only opened the door to great honour but also increases the responsibility.

We do believe and pray that our cricket team will live up to the expectation and carry out the responsibility most successfully.

Pradip Kumar Deb
School of Physics
The University of Melbourne,
Australia

* * *

Sir, Now that we are Test-playing nation, serious thoughts should be given towards the development of the game. The first and foremost necessity is a proper and permanent cricket ground, Bangabandhu National Stadium is only a make-shift one.

In this regard I would like to suggest that the corner plot of Bijoy Sarani and Sangsads' western road, at present housing a museum should be converted into National Cricket Ground with coaching facilities.

MAH
Dhaka

* * *

Sir, Well everyone is rejoicing that Bangladesh has achieved Test status but I don't consider it a big deal for I don't at all support the idea of getting Test status so early.

While expressing his reaction on this achievement Mr Ashrafia Huq, the General Secretary of BCB has said that New Zealand had won a Test match 26 years after getting Test status. This is indeed a fact but at the same time we have to consider the infrastructure of cricket in those countries.

Whereas Bangladesh doesn't even have a complete cricket academy or indoor facility. Neither do we have any fast bowling track. And in order to do well in Test matches, we do need to ponder on these matters. Therefore I still believe that Bangladesh could have waited a little longer to be endorsed as the tenth Test playing country.

Dr Aftab Siddiqi
Banani, Dhaka

Caving in of Dhaka land

Sir, According to the Ds front-page report of 26 June "Land in many city areas about to cave in". I have gone through the report in detail. Unfortunately, in the report there is no mention about the fate of innumerable high-rise buildings, which are likely to face disastrous consequences in case the land underneath caves in.

Dr Sarah
Dhaka

Economic Sanctions Should Go

Economic embargoes are creating misery, not democracy; they are weakening the health of ordinary people, not the iron grip of those who rule them. It's no wonder that doctors have cause to oppose them. They are not just bad economic policies; they are also public health menaces.

A friend of mine recently gave me a copy of a journal which included an article written by Madeleine Albright, the U.S. secretary of state. The journal, Annals of Internal Medicine, is published by the American College of Physicians and the American Society of Internal Medicine.

It's not everyday that a secretary of state writes — or has any reason to write — an article for a learned medical journal. Standing alongside offerings with such high-domed titles as "Prevalence of and Risk Factors for Hepatic Steatosis in Northern Italy," Albright offers a vigorous but unconvincing defence of economic sanctions, notably those directed at Iraq and Cuba. Elsewhere in the magazine appear articles critical of these embargoes.

Why is a medical journal publishing articles about economic sanctions, anyhow?

Aren't the editors going beyond their professional expertise when they venture into the domain of foreign affairs?

In fact, Albright's article has

legitimate place in the pages of a medical journal. At the busy intersection of diplomacy and public health, the vehicles of policy makers often collide with those of doctors. Specifically, sanctions have a place in medical discussions (and in medical journals) because embargoes against countries that make people poor, it erodes their ability to buy food and medicine, however available they may be in theory. The wealthy and powerful, of course, can buy what they want: it's just ordinary citizens, especially the have-nots, who are hit.

The shortage of medical care

is another reason to end it.

But to say, as Albright says, that Hussein and, to a lesser extent, Castro are to be blamed for their countries' plight is to say only part of the truth. It says nothing about the role of U.S. — the role of the sanctions — in the misery that Iraqis and Cubans suffer. It ignores, U.S. complicity, however unintended, in the misery of people who already suffer under the lash of autocratic rule. Albright points out that food

unlike many rulers (notably Hussein) he has always devoted a huge share of his country's resources to basic medical care and basic education.

The U.S. embargo on Cuba has been in place since 1961, which is a long time for any government policy to remain intact. The U.S. policy has completely failed to achieve its intended goal, which is to weaken Cuba and promote opposition to Castro. The sanctions against Iraq were imposed in 1991, and they too have failed. In fact, it is likely that Hussein is stronger now than he was when the embargo was first imposed.

Over the years, international support for the Cuba blockade has disappeared, so that the United States now stands virtually alone in maintaining it. There is every indication that the same erosion will make a mockery of the Iraqi blockade: already support for it is weakening in the United Nations, even in those Arab countries that would be Iraq's most immediate victims. Increasingly, they are isolating the U.S., not its adversaries.

These economic embargoes are creating misery, not democracy; they are weakening the health of ordinary people, not the iron grip of those who rule them. It's no wonder that doctors have cause to oppose them. They are not just bad economic policies; they are also public health menaces.

How do We Know that the Minister has Kept His Promise?

by Syed Akhtar Mahmood

In a recent article in The Daily Star ("Budget Time Shadow Boxing," June 23), Prof. Rehman Sobhan has lamented the absence of transparency in budget presentations and highlighted the need for greater accountability. He has talked about performance budgeting where the expected outcomes of budgetary expenditures are clearly spelt out and mechanisms put in place to judge whether the expectations have indeed been fulfilled. These are critical issues that Prof. Sobhan

needs to be addressed. The reforms? Or, to take another example, if we are putting public money into an institution, such as the Bangladesh Institute for Development Studies (BIDS), the relevant questions could be: why do we need a BIDS? what is its mandate? what is it supposed to do? Clarifying the objectives of a project is so critical to identifying monitorable indicators that half the task is done once the project or programme goals have been spelt out.

Let us go back to the example of public expenditures on education and health. The objective here is not spending the money per se but something else, such as improved access of the poor to education and health, and better quality of education and health services. Why do we want these? Firstly, because these are worthwhile by themselves, an well-educated and healthy population is itself an indicator of development. Secondly, because human development, in turn, facilitates other dimensions of development. In order to achieve our goal of wider access to, and better quality of, social services, we may need to build more schools (or hospitals or clinics), provide them with better teachers (or doctors or paramedics) and equip them with the necessary supplies. And these, in turn, may require greater allocations in the budget.

Governments always make promises. Sometimes, they deliver, sometimes they do not. Ministers often get away with broken promises because their commitments are expressed in vague and rhetorical terms. Accountability thus requires a system for converting vague promises to precise indicators. Monitorable indicators could be used for more than just checking on government promises. These could be used more generally to evaluate progress in implementing government programmes and projects and their development impact. Consider, for example, a think-tank or other academic institution funded by public money. Rarely do we ask if these institutions are giving society good value for its money and doing what they are supposed to do. To be sure, monitoring project implementation is not easy; even more difficult is evaluating project impact. Nonetheless, it is worthwhile developing monitorable indicators because the exercise itself could help clarify thinking on how projects may be designed.

In an economy dictated by black money, strategies and planning leave many loopholes. We have to remember that Bangladesh is not a consumer society as in the developed countries. We have to be careful about artificially heated economy and cold feet, alternately, what happened to the stock markets.

We should not imitate Bangkok in style of high living. It has to be remembered that slow and steady wins the race.

A.H.
Dhaka

* * *

Organizations who regularly use performance indicators have found it useful to distinguish between four types of indicators: **input**, **output**, **outcome** and **impact** indicators. An example will clarify the relevance of each indicator and the distinction between them. Consider the yearly budgetary exercise. Across the globe, finance ministers often point to budgeted expenditures on the "socially-important" items, such as education and health, as indicative of their government's commitment to social causes.

More sophisticated finance ministers go further and focus on particular categories of social sector expenditures, such as primary education and public health. They then try to show that these expenditures constitute a significant portion of the budget and/or are rising over time.

Do all these necessarily mean that the government has attached top priority to education and health? No, it does not. A finance minister who makes such a claim is only partially correct. There is more to this than just putting aside money in the budget. This is better understood if we apply the four indicators mentioned above.

Let us begin by asking the all-important question: why do we argue for an increase in expenditures in the social sectors? It is not the expenditures per se that is important but what we hope to achieve through these expenditures. This brings us to a critical, but oft-neglected, dimension of any government programme or project, i.e. its **objectives**. Why are we doing what we are doing? For example, why do we argue for financial sector reforms? What is wrong with the financial sector as it is and what do we intend to achieve through

project design. A project may be efficiently implemented and the project outputs realized, but as long as the design is deficient, the desired outcomes will elude us. The output of a project is thus not the same as its outcome.

Nor is the impact of a project the same as its outcome. The output and outcome indicators tell us what is expected from the project, the first in a narrower sense and the second in more broader terms. The impact indicators place the project or programme within the bigger scheme of things, relating it to the ultimate development or poverty alleviation goals. In our example, expanded access of the poor to social services is believed to have an impact on development. There is little controversy on this. However, one can think of projects where the link between the outcome and the expected impact on development is less clear-cut. For example, a project may involve the hiring of consultants to write a draft privatization law. Here the draft law is the expected output and an acceleration of privatization could be the expected outcome. Proponents of privatization would argue that an acceleration of privatization would have a significant development impact by increasing efficiency in the economy. Opponents of privatization are likely to disagree. In many cases, project designers need to think through clearly the link between the expected outcome and the expected impact of the project.

Although we did not put it in those terms, the above paragraph actually provides a real-life example of the **input-output**-**outcome**-**impact** indicators framework I had alluded to earlier. Increased budgetary allocations to education or health are like **inputs**. They are intended to produce some **outputs**, such as more schools, better teachers and greater supply of the necessary equipment, books, medicines etc. Some of the output, such as number of schools, can be measured quantitatively; others, such as quality of schools, may have to be evaluated qualitatively. However, achieving these outputs is not the end-objective. We want these because we believe that these will lead to better access of the poor to social services and improve the quality of these services. These are the **outcomes** we expect from the increased budgetary spending on education and health. And we want all these because we expect these to have an **impact** on development. The distinction between output, outcome and impact is important and failure to comprehend this could be, and has been, the cause of much confusion in the design and evaluation of many a project.

In real-life projects, the inputs may not necessarily lead to the outputs, the outputs to the outcome and so on. Thus, the mere allocation of additional money in the budget may not lead to more schools and clinics, more books and medicines, and better teachers and doctors. This can happen if the money is inefficiently spent, e.g. siphoned off by corrupt contractors and government officials. When the inputs do not lead to the desired outputs, you have a deficiency in **project implementation**, which is a different from poor project design.

But even when the money is well-spent, we may not see the desired outcome. We may build more schools, and provide them with better teachers and good supplies, but discover that all these make little difference to the poor. This may be if it is not the availability of schools, but other factors which are the real hurdles to the poor's access to education. If the latter is indeed the goal, then these factors should be addressed in addition to, or instead of, building more schools. This is an issue of

another kind.

Here are the latest prices for big events. For \$100 you get to sit in the parking lot next to the candidate's limousine. His speech is piped in over a loud-speaker.

For \$500 you get to stand on the basketball court and wear the name of the candidate