

HDR 2000 and Bangladesh

How the Position Can be Raised?

by K. M. Nurul Huda

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) publishes Human Development Report (HDR) every year since 1990. It ranks the degree of achievements of people in different countries using quality-of-life measures. HDR does not consider all aspects of Universal Human Rights but only three. Comprehensive cohesion of these three variables does influence the position of a country in HDR. Natural calamity might have affected the position of Bangladesh in HDR 2000 in addition to its chronic problems related to low rate of literacy. Quality education for the people of a country has no alternative vis-a-vis occupying an honourable position in HDR.

At the initial years of HDR the quality of life measures included (i) opportunity to freely choose profession and life styles; (ii) right to receive full and free education; and (iii) freedom from political oppression. These factors might have problems for quantification of components for computing the position of a country more accurately. UNDP has thus considered life expectancy at birth, educational attainment, and GDP per capita for placing a country on HDR 2000.

Human Development Index (HDI) is a tool that analyzes HDR. HDI is not a Human Poverty Index. National wealth or financial position of a country is only a considerable factor that measures HDI but not the end. Similarly other two factors are not the absolute measuring criteria of HDR. To exemplify this argument one can consider

that Luxembourg being at the top in respect of real GDP per capita among the 174 countries under consideration occupies only 17th position on HDR both in 1999 and 2000. Similarly the USA being the largest economy in the world could not top the list in HDR. Again Germany, France and other such countries having almost 100 per cent literacy rate are lying behind Canada, Norway and Iceland for other factors that might have negated their HDI. Further more Japan having the best life expectancy in the world could not exceed Canada, Norway and Iceland for other factors that might have negated their HDI. Further more Japan having the best life expectancy in the world could not exceed Canada, Norway and Iceland for other factors that might have negated their HDI.

Bangladesh occupies 146th position in 2000 in HDR heading four steps forward than that of 1999. But it is lying behind all SAARC countries and unfortunately at the lowest ebb in Asia. Bangladesh held 146th position also in 1994. In that year the position of Bhutan, Nepal and a few Asian countries were behind Bangladesh. Though these countries are still lying within the 'low human development' group they have secured a better position through passage of six years time since 1994. Nevertheless it may not be wise to expect that Bangladesh should go much high within a near future given her consistent impediments.

illiteracy, low life expectancy, high poverty and poor GDP per capita. The literacy rate of Bangladesh is only 60 per cent. It has 60.8 years life expectancy against 80.00 in Japan and 70+ in other 75 countries within the group of 174 (1999). Her 44.7 per cent (58.1 million) of the total population of the UK people are living below poverty line. She has only US\$ 369 GDP per capita income (on an average US\$ 1.00 for a person in a day against US\$ 85.56 for a citizen of Luxembourg). These factors that qualify a country for better position in HDR are not conducive for Bangladesh. Evidently Bangladesh have to go a long way keeping development efforts sustainable for attaining a better position in HDR.

HDR 2000 has been published on the basis of information and statistics of 1998. The year was very distressing for Bangladesh's people and economy. The country experienced an antagonistic situation in that year for the prolonged and devastating flood of the century. About 30 million people of 53 districts were severely affected. Agriculture sector alone incurred a loss of about US\$ 720 million besides huge loss in industries, trade and commerce. As a result, the projected food deficit for 1998-99 increased from its normal level of 2.1 million metric tons to 4.3 million metric tons. A poor country like Bangladesh needed more than US\$ 885 million for rehabilitation of the affected people. Government thus exerted all out

efforts to feed the poor peoples and to rehabilitate the economic sectors. Hence HDR based on the progress of 1998 might not have projected the prevalent situation of the country. The apparent socio-economic trend of Bangladesh may show improved position in the coming years.

Mass illiteracy of a country is a major hindrance from attaining good place on HDR. Illiteracy, poverty and poor health condition in a developing country constitute different vicious cycles for the people. One of them moves like: illiteracy low-income malnutrition high child mortality less life expectancy. Now illiteracy contributes to poverty in a country because the illiterate people are unfit to have access to better employment opportunities. They cannot produce quality goods and services. Thus they get poor wages. Their low income does not support them to procure necessary food for themselves as well as for their dependents. They all suffer from malnutrition. Low income also forces them to live in unhealthy living condition. The children and women, the pregnant ones in particular, become the victims of malnutrition and sub-human living environment because both groups need nutritious food and healthy living environment for their growth and giving birth to healthy baby respectively.

The children are thus born and brought up in poor health. With poor health they cannot acquire necessary resistance

against common diseases and fall sick. The parents with low income fail to afford better treatment for their sick children culminating in their early death. Because they live in poor conditions "more than 30,000 children die a day from mainly preventable causes". The poor people also cannot afford to take proper care of their own health. Those who survive through many odds in life cannot enter in the work force of the country as healthy and strong workers. Eventually the entire production system suffers from the weak working force of a country thus affecting GDP. Again, poor people need family support from their children. For this reason they do not want to spare the kids for schooling. By turn the children of a poor family join the illiterate mass and move within the same cycle. In this way the illiterate people with low income cannot breakthrough the poverty trap. This is how the HDI of a developing country suffers from non-attainment of an honourable position in HDR.

Of the three components of HDR variables education certainly can play the pivotal role to influence HDI. An educated person is self-esteemed with confidence. He cannot be subject to neglect, deprivation and exploitation by the influential people of society. Education makes a person conscious of general health, food habit, living condition, child care, civil rights, political rights, human rights, responsibility and obligation to family, society and state and

finally of "a decent standard of living". An educated person can have access to resource base, information technology, and high tech-knowledge that are the most vital requisites for progress in the modern world. Information based knowledge is the dominant factor in the modern economy that can only be acquired through appropriate education. An educated person equipped with technical knowledge can bring about changes in his life style as well as can contribute towards the national economy. In this process the educated workforce can enhance per capita income of a country and ensure long life of its people.

According to government sources about 40 per cent of 130.00 million people of Bangladesh are still left illiterate. Government however has taken a number of steps to raise the level of education for making its people empowered to face the challenges of time. At the same time the authority reposed with the responsible of raising the rate of literacy should bear in mind that mere education is not enough for workforce for a world that is full of sophisticated technology. They need to be widely oriented with computer, Internet and other systems of information technology. By doing this the state of illiteracy can be converted into a state of literacy for the people with high income, healthy and longer life expectancy and more production capacity for positive reflection in HDR.

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Routine Jobs Not Glamourous!

by Abul M Ahmad

The print media is full of stories of inefficiency at the daily routine work level. The systems losses in the civil service human and technical, are abysmal. And the politicians in power are not interested, because there is more glamour in chasing and citing the new development projects initiated or completed by the regime.

Political activity and noise-making is restricted to the foreground at the PR level, and the background routine activities in the public sector are forgotten, or left to the bureaucrats, where the flywheel effect creates a different world. The back-room boys, who provide the background services, are forgotten.

The secretariat bosses apparently do not take maintenance routines seriously, until and unless there is a breakdown of services, when all hell comes down on the affected group or agency. Out of sight is out of mind. Here monitoring is a luxury, and regulatory enforcements are seen once in a blue moon. How is it we all have become so busy as to neglect our direct and personal responsibilities?

Dhaka's sewerage network is so limited and outdated (five times less pipelines) that one is apt to cultivate constipation, after reading the news items and

the editorial (DS July 5). There are not enough funds for routine maintenance and BMR of the costly electric power generators about a dozen plants remain out of order at any one time. Dhaka city needs 10 times more traffic police than the strength sanctioned decades ago. The city needs ten times more roads, and the authorities cannot control the lakhs of unauthorised rickshaws and drivers. New projects cannot solve the problems unless the routine efficiency is raised to maintain the enhanced networks.

The politicians are always looking for new avenues for (usurping) credit; which of course cannot come from routine daily work. The greatest weakness of local politics is egoistic opportunism. It is considered dull to settle down and have a chat with the back-room boys. Are the ministers working overtime outdoors?

One of the arteries of the metropolis, the Buriganga river, is shrinking and drying; but there is no point in looking ultra slim! The Newspaper mills is also gasping for life, sabotage, some say, in the largest newsprint mill in this part of the world (DS July 5). We were exporting fertiliser, now we are importing it; as also sugar and salt, and the retail price of molasses (gur) is more than the price of sugar!

LETTER FROM EUROPE

A Tale of Two Missing Skeletons

by Chaklader Mahboob-ul Alam

Dear reader, the title of this letter is tantalising enough to arouse a sense of anticipation in you and make you sit bolt upright in your chair with eager attention. But this, I am afraid, is not the beginning of a thriller or a detective fiction (although it has taken on the characteristics of a mystery story) but the true account of something much more real the true story of two men who lived and died in Madrid many centuries ago and whose names are still very familiar in most Spanish homes. There has recently been such wide coverage of the event in the media that it has become a favourite topic of conversation at the cafes and bars. A plaza has been dug up and a team of experts consisting of anthropologists, geologists, historians and biologists (for the performance of DNA tests) is working to resolve the mystery. I remember, last summer, road blocks were set up, traffic diverted and a twenty-four hour vigil maintained by the television crew at the excavation site. So if you bear with me a little, you may not feel totally disappointed, after all.

These two men had certain characteristics in common. Both of them were of humble origin, were born in the southern city of Seville, worked in Madrid, travelled extensively (one more than the other), became famous during their lifetime and made powerful enemies. However, their intellectual and artistic contributions left lasting marks on human history. The proof is that several centuries after their death, their ideas and thoughts are still so relevant that the Spaniards want to honour their memories by building permanent shrines at the sites where they were buried originally, hence the search for their skeletons. Both of them were buried in Madrid with pomp and religious rituals befitting their high status in the society. Now their remains are missing. What happened to them? Well, before we tackle this question, let us go back in time and cover their lives and works in quick sketches.

The son of a small merchant, Bartolome de Las Casas, the great Spanish historian and political reformer was born in the year 1474 in Seville. He dedicated his entire life to the cause of human rights at a time when life, particularly that of an American Indian was worth nothing. He fought relentlessly to defend and protect the American Indians from torture, persecution and slavery by his countrymen. In order to have a first-hand knowledge of the situation he made at least twenty voyages across the Atlantic and travelled extensively throughout present-day West Indies, Central and South America.

He did not start out to become a human rights activist. He studied law and Latin in Seville and Valladolid. He went to Hispaniola (now known as the Dominican Republic) in 1502 as an advisor to the governor and in 1512 he was ordained priest. Thus he became a soldier-priest in the services of the Crown and the Church. For his participation in several bloody expeditions including the conquest of Cuba, he was awarded an "encomienda" (a royal land grant including all the American Indians living in that area as serfs). Like most other Spanish

colonisers of his time, Bartolome de Las Casas, took advantage of the opportunity to become rich by using the Indians in mining and agricultural ventures in the most abusive manner possible because according to the then Spanish laws the Indians were no better than beasts of labour. This phase of his career continued for nearly twelve years after his first arrival in the Americas. But the day-to-day experience of this abusive system gradually led him to realise that what he preached as a Catholic priest to evangelise the Indians could not be reconciled with the inhuman treatment meted out to them by his countrymen. So in 1514 he gave up his "encomienda" and started a campaign for the abolition of slavery in the Spanish controlled territories in the Americas and for the defence of human rights. He showed great courage in opposing a system whose main beneficiary was the Spanish establishment at all levels. Therefore, he achieved little success in the first year of his campaign. On the contrary, he made so many powerful enemies that in 1515, he decided

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to return to Spain to canvass support for his cause at the court. He was so persuasive in describing the real conditions of the American Indians to the king and his counsellors that in 1516 the king appointed him as the official protector of the Indians and sent him back to Hispaniola to study the situation further and recommend a more humane method for the colonisation of the Americas.

Las Casas recommended the abolition of the "encomienda" system and in its place, the establishment of free communities, where the American Indians and the Spaniards could have equal status and learn from each other. A site in the

northern part of present-day Venezuela was selected to experiment with this novel theory. It was a revolutionary idea at a time when in Europe, many Christian theologians and legal experts were convinced that the American Indians were not human beings. (There were erudite debates over whether the Indians had any souls or not) therefore, laws applicable to human beings were not relevant while dealing with the Indians. Las Casas, not only considered them as human beings but also wanted to give them equal legal status. Unfortunately, the experiment ended in failure. Feeling frustrated, Las Casas left northern Venezuela, went back to Hispaniola and joined the Dominican Order.

But he did not give up his fight for the cause of human rights. He merely changed the strategy. The Spanish Crown gave legal cover to the Spanish adventurers and colonisers. The Spaniards were also devout Catholics and they derived their theological and moral justification for the colonisation and exploitation of the American Indians from the teachings of the Church. So Las Casas realised that his work would be more effective if he tried to bring about the change through the highest institutions, i.e. the Crown and the Church. He also realised that he could better influence the course of events through personal audiences with the king and his writings. It was at this time that he started writing his monumental work, "La Historia de las Indias" which later turned out to be his masterpiece. This was a terrible indictment against the Spanish

Chiapas, to forbid absolute (a religious act, which is of vital importance to the Spanish faithful) to the colonisers who held the native Americans in slavery. Needless to say that his actions and statements from the pulpit made him very unpopular among the Spanish colonisers. Despite several death threats, he continued with his work and achieved some success in changing the attitude of the Spaniards towards the Indians.

Las Casas returned to Spain in 1547, earned great reputation as a political thinker and became an influential interpreter of Christian teachings as far as human rights were concerned. He continued with his fight for the rights of the oppressed Indians in an indefatigable manner until his death in 1566.

Las Casas was buried with great respect and all due religious rituals, inside the crypt of the Dominican convent of Nuestra Señora de Atocha in Madrid. Not only the intellectuals but also many ordinary citizens of Madrid came to the convent to pay their last tributes to a man with whom they did not always agree during his lifetime. But his relentless fight for human rights had certainly earned him the respect and admiration of not only the Spaniards, but also other Europeans and of course, the native Americans. According to the chroniclers, one man who came to the funeral to pay homage to Las Casas was called Miguel de Cervantes, the father of Spanish literature who wrote "Don Quixote de la Mancha", whose principal character, according to many experts was modelled on the life of Las Casas.

It was going to be a temporary burial site, because Las Casas, in his will had expressed wish to be buried at the convent in Valladolid, (approximately two hundred kilometres from Madrid), where he had studied as a young man. He died penniless and left all his earthly belongings, i.e. his manuscripts for the convent in Valladolid. At the beginning of the seventeenth century, an unsuccessful attempt was apparently made to transfer his remains from Madrid to Valladolid. In 1936, after the start of the civil war, the Madrid convent was destroyed by fire and some of its salvaged relics and treasures transferred to other churches in Madrid. In 1949, although a school was built and the convent reconstructed at the site, the exact location of Don Bartolome's grave was lost for ever. After much research, no one today is absolutely sure as to whether the remains of the great defender of human rights are in Valladolid, or at the convent of Nuestra Señora de Atocha or transferred to another church in Madrid or

destroyed during the various excavation works. Recent excavations at the Plaza de Ramales in search of the remains of another illustrious citizen of Madrid have revived public interest in finding the remains of Las Casas as well because more than four centuries after his death his works are still universally acclaimed as landmarks in the history of the struggle for human rights for the oppressed and the underprivileged.

The second skeleton which is missing is that of Diego Velazquez who is considered as one of the world's greatest artists and his popularity among the Spaniards is still growing. I still remember when in 1990, the Prado in Madrid, (one of world's finest art galleries), put on an exhibition of his work, the response from the public was so great that on the last day of the exhibition the civil guards (armed police) had to be called in to control the avalanche of visitors trying to get in to the museum. Anyone who has had the privilege of contemplating his works at this museum or the National Gallery in London ("Philip IV Hunting Wild Boar") or the Metropolitan Museum in New York ("Princess Maria Teresa") must have been fascinated by his mastery in blending colour, light and shadow to create harmonious representations of nature, form and space.

Diego Rodriguez de Silva y Velazquez (1599-1660) was born in Seville more than one hundred years after the birth of Bartolome de Las Casas. Diego's father Juan Rodriguez de Silva was of humble Portuguese origin. The mother, Jeronima Velazquez, came from a better known Spanish family. This was probably the reason why Diego preferred his mother's surname (Velazquez) to his father's. Even as a child Diego must have shown an artistic bent of mind, because at the tender age of eleven his father sent him to the studio of a painter called Francisco Pacheco. In 1611, he became formally apprentice to Pacheco for a period of six years and much of Diego's later success was due to the teachings of his master who may have been a mediocre painter but was a humanist and a great humanitarian person. During these years Diego learnt the techniques of most of the contemporary styles of Spanish painting and developed his own naturalistic style. Pacheco was so impressed by Diego's virtue, integrity, and great talent that at the end of the apprenticeship when Diego was only eighteen years old, he married him off to his daughter Juana, who had just turned fifteen.

During the period beginning in 1617, (when Diego finished his apprenticeship) and ending in 1622, he produced some of his finest pieces like "The Three Musicians" (Staatliche Museum, Berlin), "Dos Mozos a la Mesa" (Wellington Museum, London), "The Water Seller of Seville" (Wellington Museum, London), "Old Woman Frying Eggs" (National Gallery of Scotland, Edinburgh) which earned him considerable fame. But both Pacheco and Velazquez knew that an artist needed royal patronage in order to be really acknowledged as a great artist.

King Philip III, (the man who ordered the massacre and expulsion of the remaining Crypto-Muslims from Spain) died in March, 1621 and his son Philip IV succeeded him to the throne at the age of seventeen. Count Olivares, a nobleman from Seville became the new prime minister and the king's most trusted grandee. In 1622, Pacheco used his Sevillian connections to send Velazquez to the court in Madrid ostensibly to paint the portrait of the famous poet Gongora, who had excellent connections at the court, but really to paint the

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portrait of the young king, Velazquez finished the portrait of "Don Luis de Gongora" (Museum of Fine Arts, Boston) but was unsuccessful in having an audience with the king. So he went back to Seville somewhat disheartened.

But his teacher and father-in-law Pacheco was a man of great perseverance. He knew another poet called Juan de Fonseca, who had cultivated friendship with the most powerful member of the Seville clique at the Royal court, Count Olivares, the prime minister. Finally, in 1623, Velazquez was commissioned by Count Olivares to paint the portrait of the king. From then onwards until Velazquez died in 1660, he did not know anything but success both as an artist and a court official. (His mentor, Count Olivares met with a much worse fate, who after twenty years of unswerving loyalty to the king lost his power and died in exile in the northern town of Toro in 1645). In quick succession, he was appointed as a court painter, the king's favourite portrait painter of the

royal family, a gentleman usher to the king and in 1652 as the chamberlain of the royal palace which aroused the envy of other court painters and officials. Velazquez was no doubt influenced by contemporary masters like Titian (Venetian) and Rubens (Flemish), but he developed his own realistic approach to the subject never trying to idealise his models. This is also true that he always treated his subjects with respect and sympathy. The portraits of the court buffoons Cristobal de Castañeda y Pernia and Francisco Lezcano painted by him bear testimony to this fact.

In August 1629 Velazquez left for Genoa with the king's permission and spent most of the next two years travelling to Milan, Venice, Florence, Rome and Naples. During this period he studied the different Italian styles of painting and at the same time executed many works of art himself. After his return to Spain in 1631, Velazquez executed some of the finest pieces of painting ever produced in the history of art. One of my favourite paintings, "The Surrender of Breda" (Prado), was painted in this period. In 1649, he again travelled to Italy for new inspiration. In Rome he executed two of his most important works—the portrait of his assistant "Juan de Pareja" (Metropol-

from the Pope, because Velazquez was not of noble origin and because painting, curiously enough, was not considered as a dignified activity. Not only did he become a noble man but today, some of the royal families of Europe carry his blood in their veins through one of his granddaughters (Teresa Martinez de Maza y Velazquez).

Shortly after his return from the Isla de los Faisanes (near the French border), where he had gone accompanying the king to decorate the pavilion for the marriage between the Spanish princess Maria Teresa and the French king Louis XIV (otherwise known as the Sun King), Velazquez fell ill and died in Madrid on August 6, 1660. He was dressed in his habit of the Order of Santiago and buried with full military honours inside the crypt of the church of San Juan Bautista at the Plaza de Ramales, right in front of the Royal palace, as was the custom those days for important people. His wife Juana died only a few days later. She was also buried in the same place beside him. During the War of Independence (1808-1814) against Napoleon's armies, the church was damaged. According to some sources, Jose Bonaparte, who was installed by his brother Napoleon as the king of Spain, ordered the demolition of the damaged church. (It may be mentioned here, as a curious coincidence that the Plaza de Ramales is very near the place where Emir Mohammed I of Cordoba, the founder of the city of Madrid in the ninth century built the first Muslim cemetery of Madrid.) The mystery surrounding the disappearance of the bodies started more or less at this point of time. No one was sure as to what happened to the bodies buried in the church. In 1960, three hundred years after the artist's death, it was decided to commemorate the occasion by building a simple column with a plaque at the site where he was buried and in 1961 it was inaugurated. Things would have probably remained the same for many more years had it not been for the accidental fact that in the summer of 1939, during some routine work at the Plaza de Ramales, conducted by the Public Works Department, construction workers started unearthing skeletons. It became evident that the demolition of the church of San Juan Bautista was done in such a hurry that no one bothered to remove the bodies buried there. Therefore, it was reasonable to expect that the artist's body was still there in one of the crypts. The excavation work continued for months and DNA tests were performed on several skeletons without any success. Since the records containing the detailed plans of the church have also disappeared, it is becoming increasingly difficult to gauge with any accuracy, where exactly the remains are buried. Therefore, the mystery still continues.

TOM & JERRY
HELLO, INSTANT DELIVERY
PIZZA COMPANY? I WANT
A MEDIUM COMBINATION...



YOU DIDN'T GIVE ME TIME TO
SAY HOLD THE MUSHROOMS!



James Bond
BY IAN FLEMING
DRAWING BY MORAK



THEY WANT
TO KILL ME... WE'LL
STAY TILL WE
GET THEM IN
RANGE FOR A
SHOT AT THAT
LIGHT!



AN AMPLIFIED
VOICE FROM
THE RUSSIAN
CRAFT...



OK! WE'LL
SURRENDER-
IF YOU LET
THE GIRL
GO!

