

Role of Commonwealth in the 21st Century

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by Tony Blair

THERE is a tendency to see the Commonwealth as a group of countries bound by historical ties of friendship. It certainly is that. But in a world where globalisation is bringing countries closer together it is also an organisation with a unique role to play in the future. A role based on shared values and shared experiences that cuts across the traditional divisions of East and West, North and South. A role that offers a way of addressing the problems of the twenty-first century together: poverty, development, political and economic reform.

At the Heads of Government meeting in South Africa last year, we agreed to establish a High Level Review Group to find ways of modernising the Commonwealth so that it can respond to the challenges we now face. I was encouraged, at our recent meeting in New York, by the progress made.

We are rightly now focusing on the areas where the Commonwealth can really make a difference, complementing the work of other international organisations. One such area is in strengthening democracy in member countries. The Commonwealth has led the world in defining the fundamental political principles of good governance, the principles upon which the Commonwealth was founded.

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institution, its Ministerial Action Group, plays an increasingly important role in this process of deepening democracy. The ministerial action group has proved its worth several times over in upholding the values of the Commonwealth to which we, as parliamentarians, are all committed: good governance, the rule of law and human rights.

But reform is not just a political question. The Commonwealth has great potential to help drive forward the world's economic and social reform agenda. I am delighted with the emphasis the Commonwealth is placing on debt relief. This is one of the foremost international challenges we face. Historically the Commonwealth has led the way in international efforts to secure a lasting exit from debt for the poorest countries in the world. Last year's CHOGM saw us pledging our support to the enhanced HIPC Initiative and the Commonwealth Debt Initiative. We must continue this work together, offering debt cancellation based on the commitment to economic policies which benefit the poor, promote responsive government and bear down on corruption.

There are other challenges where the Commonwealth needs to be at the forefront. The Commonwealth is rightly playing a leading role in international efforts to respond to the devastating social and economic impact of

HIV/AIDS. Last year's CHOGM sent a resounding message of our intention to increase international efforts to tackle this global tragedy.

The Commonwealth also has a vital contribution to make in areas such as trade and investment, environment, IT, education. Work is already in hand. The Edinburgh meeting in 1997 played a significant role, setting up the Commonwealth Business Council, with financial support from the British Government. And I am delighted by the excellent work it is now doing.

Commonwealth leaders place great value on the CPA's input to the Commonwealth agenda. These conferences provide a unique opportunity for Parliamentarians throughout the Commonwealth to exchange ideas and to reach conclusions on the challenges we jointly face. And I look forward to hearing the results of your discussions. I hope it will allow you to strengthen the network between our countries, as well as helping to shape the Commonwealth's evolving role for this new century.

The author is Prime Minister of the United Kingdom. The article is based on his speech at the opening of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association Conference at Westminster Hall, London on 21 September, 2000.

Meeting the Architect of Evergreen Revolution

Swaminathan is quick to remind us that the most essential factor for any workable paradigm is real synergy between political power and people power. About this and everything else Swaminathan's emphatic words are: "Ultimately, it is the political will of the country to have policies in place Without it, all research, technology... external advice will be in vain."

by Neeman A. Sobhan

Research Foundation.

The aim of the research centre is to marry science and technology for environmentally sustainable and socially equitable development, and the programmes are pro-nature, pro-poor, and pro-women.

Swaminathan believes that social progress can take place not by technological development alone but by combining it with social mobilization and information dissemination. To promote this at both macro and micro levels, the MSSRF has worked in the fields of strategic and participatory research education, training, human resource development, networking, policy advocacy and dialogues. His agricultural research often involves farmers as partners. In fact it is Dr. Swaminathan's continuous efforts for the welfare of the marginalised that is the most admirable side of this scientist-humanitarian. Dedicated to alleviating poverty, increasing food supply, conserving biodiversity as well as the rights of its traditional conservers, and ensuring income opportunities through blending traditional and modern technologies including ICT, he is constantly trying to extend benefits to the disadvantaged. The man behind the 'Green Revolution' is now the spokesman for what he terms as the 'Ever-green Revolution'. He elaborates thus:

"Since land and water will be shrinking resources for agriculture, there is no option in the future except to produce more food...through higher yields per unit of land, water, energy and time. It would therefore be useful

to examine how science can be mobilised for raising further the ceiling to biological productivity without associated ecological harm. It will be appropriate to refer to the emerging scientific progress on the farms as an 'ever-green revolution', to emphasise that the productivity advance is sustainable over time since it is rooted in the principles of ecology, economics, social and gender equity and employment generation.

Regarding the 'Gene Revolution' and the controversy surrounding Genetic Modification of Organisms, he discussed the problem at length, specially where it affects biodiversity and biopiracy. "Unless research and development efforts on GM foods are based on principles of bioethics, biosafety, biodiversity conservation and biopartnerships, there will be serious public concerns in developing countries about the ultimate nutritional, social, ecological and economic consequences of replacing numerous local varieties with a few GMOs..."

The need of the hour is to enlarge the food basket and not shrink it. Also, the contributions of tribal and rural women and men to genetic resources conservation and enhancement needs recognition and reward... At present, the primary conservers remain poor, while those who use their knowledge and material become rich. It is time that genetic engineers promote genuine biopartnerships with the holders of indigenous knowledge based on principles of ethics and equity sharing." And

with these issues he is constantly concerned and waging battle, as well as spreading awareness.

But the main concern of his lecture pivoted around the model he is working on for poverty eradication and environment protection, called the 'Bio-Village' paradigm, supported by IFAD and UNDP. His plea to IFAD was that it should launch a global Biovillage Movement in developing countries. And what is this Biovillage paradigm or movement?

The term 'biovillage' means a village where human centered development assumes primacy. It helps to promote ecotechnology, which brings wisdom of the past and innovations of the present into a synergistic blend. It views natural resources conservation and enhancement as basic to sustainable human livelihoods. It helps to foster the integrated growth of on-farm and off-farm employment. The Village Bioentrepreneur forms the hub of the movement, providing key centralised services to support decentralised production. Through organisation of enterprise based self-help groups supported by micro-finance, it empowers rural families to control their own destiny. Young women and men, whether literate or semi-literate, become the doers and prime movers of the integrated ecological and livelihood security programmes.

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The writer is the Rome based editor of the IFAD publication 'INTERFACE'

IT Parks in Bangladesh: Hard Problems for Software?

THE software industry, which can fetch billions of dollars, is yet to open up in Bangladesh. We are still in search of the golden key to unlock that vault of affluence. This article attempts to focus on key strategic issues: benchmarking, intellectual capital, knowledge management, culture, government's role, business strategy and other problems related to IT parks.

We have seen how garments industry is going through a hard time due to infrastructural constraints, unfriendly business environment and lack of long-term planning. It's time to learn from our mistakes. IT parks provide the basic infrastructure for software business. It is like EPZ (Export Processing Zone) where all necessary facilities are available for software export as well as e-business, particularly in developing countries where e-business infrastructure is not so common. The blessing of reverse linkage of developing countries and industrialised ones has opened the opportunity of software export and IT-related services.

The first step would be to see what other software-exporting nations are doing, what we can learn from them and what to do to catch up with them. Benchmarking can be a right way to enter into global market. Visits to US, some European countries (mainly to understand market), India, China, the Philippines, Mexico, Malaysia etc., would prove fruitful and we can develop cooperative strategy among the nations as well as among us within Bangladesh to share knowledge and expertise. We know how to compete among us, but it's time to compete and cooperate in a profitable way.

Intellectual capital is the prime asset in software and IT-enabled services. The challenge of attracting and retaining human capital is tougher than ever before. It's an unprecedented aspect that the modern high-tech world suddenly requires special technology-related expertise. Survey predicts that some of world's top executive jobs will be in third world countries in future. But attraction of developed countries throws challenge to us for which we are least prepared. In addition, the potential mushroom growth of small businesses by independent programmers by dint of Internet will pose another threat to IT parks for hiring and retaining IT experts in future.

IT parks should be learning organisations where knowledge management practice will go on in terms of personal mastery, mental models, shared vision, team learning and system dynamics. IT parks can convene an international brainstorming to generate new ideas. There should be a well-equipped library and information bureau regarding business, market information, current trends and the like.

IT parks should go for setting up training centres not only for programmers, system analysts and other IT job-related skills but also for software and e-business entrepreneurs along with project management expertise. But the issue of world-class teachers remains elusive in most of the training centres. An efficient programmer is paid around \$40,000 p.a. in western markets. If we would like to have an experienced teacher, we have to pay him/her around 3/3.5 thousand dollars per month. But salary structure of neither our universities nor private institutions does allow that. Besides, our tradi-

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by Ahmed Salman

tional education system does not help to develop cognitive skills in students which is a must for IT-related jobs.

There should be a 'networking culture' that drives information around the park. A database can be built to share knowledge and expertise. A strong monitoring system must be there to keep vigil on franchised training centres. Are they really offering world-class training or just harnessing money out of sheer enthusiastic puzzlement? We have to keep in mind that we cannot expect other countries to show us the right direction so that we can compete with them globally in near future. Can We? We get to do it by ourselves.

The government can play a crucial role in providing the basic infrastructure and business environment. It needs to provide full administrative support, implement underline cabling project, enforce Intellectual Property Right and Deregulation of Telecommunications. It should have task force and action plan. It has to implement the suggestions of JRC Committee without any further delay. It can adopt the Korean style in getting back the drained brains by offering international remuneration package. On the top of that, it must foster an effective system to facilitate international technology transfer and know-how.

The business strategy will be critical success factor for Bangladesh's software industry. We must have pre-emptive core

competencies for sustainable growth.

A dynamic leader like Chandrababu Naidu, Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh, is desperately sought after in our country. A SWOT analysis of our software industry will speak out our strengths, weaknesses, potential opportunities and threats in the twinkling of an eye. We have to identify the emerging opportunities with a new perspective. We have to dominate our local market and gain experience from it.

A skilled, English-speaking workforce and their ability to adapt and learn the emerging technologies will help us compete globally successfully. There should be interacting specialist companies rather than independent ones. They must possess rich ecology of deeply interdependent systems. It must be adaptable so that it can cope with change. Companies with valued systems, processes, sound management principles and business models, will become effective players. We need to follow the catchword - think global but act local. Our software companies are focusing on low-cost model that in turn is unsustainable in the long run. We have to keep in mind that branding is important for sustainable growth. Though the trend is rare in our local market and most of our companies are very small in size and revenues at present, merger and acquisition will be helpful to have synergies in future.

Infosys has become bench-

mark for Indian IT industry. We have to benchmark the business model of Infosys to be a successful player. Whereas we are still focused on low-cost model as mentioned earlier; companies must have a mix of onsite and offsite projects, quality initiatives and good quality processes in place to move up the value chain. But we are thinking of having projects through sub contracts with neighbouring country. But will they allow us to move up the value chain in future? We need to think twice. There should be some alternative ways to enter into global market.

IT parks will never be well equipped without having proper e-business infrastructure. IT park consultancy group can have salient role to provide local companies with right direction for switching to 'Clicks and Mortar' model from traditional 'Bricks and Mortar' business model. One of the easiest ways to have technical expertise and know-how is through joint venture. There should be R&D section at least for quickly absorbing international technology and know-how.

E-commerce projects are on the increase, they are called Extended Enterprise Resource Planning that consists of Customer Relationship Management (CRM), Enterprise Planning (ERP) and Supply Chain Management (SCM). Those projects will be mix of onsite work and offshore projects as mentioned earlier. Nowadays, onshore projects are on the increase due to e-commerce onsite projects which in turn give long-term benefits to software companies. We have to not only diversify and identify growing areas but also diversify across clients and geographic locations. For example, Application Service Provider (ASP) is another interesting growing segment.

If we have a look at professional skills needed from corporate strategy up to software database, the scenario can be as follows:

Business Strategy
Business Process Reengineering
Information System Strategy
Business Analysis
System Analysis
System Design
Programming
Database Administration

The hierarchy evidently expresses that we don't have all

necessary expertise to offer the whole package. For instance, how can one expect a person, who has no foreign business exposure, to analyse system for a dynamic company of US where cross industry customer supplier relation is vital? The question never arises as we are doing and studying in third world country and trying to give a solution for most advanced nation in the world. Besides, we need a lot of hybrid professionals to manage projects as well as help us to move up the value chain. The world's leading management issues such as Business Process Reengineering, Change Management, Knowledge Management, e-Commerce in terms of CRM, ERP and Supply Chain, Process Management, Total Quality Management and the like, are yet to be familiar with us, whereas they are being widely used in developed economies. Therefore, no IT Park is self-helped without including our foreign talent pool.

Yet there is hope. Survey says there will be around 10,000 graduates of Bangladesh origin in

UK, of whom some will graduate in IT and Telecommunication sectors and around 6,000 people are working in IT sector of US. The bulk of successful future of IT parks largely relies upon how efficiently we can utilise that foreign think tank.

A web site and database can be built immediately with a view to having the Chinese Bamboo network in miniature. There will be two important portions of the web site - first, the database of what expertise one is willing to offer us and second, type of business one would like to get involved or is doing now.

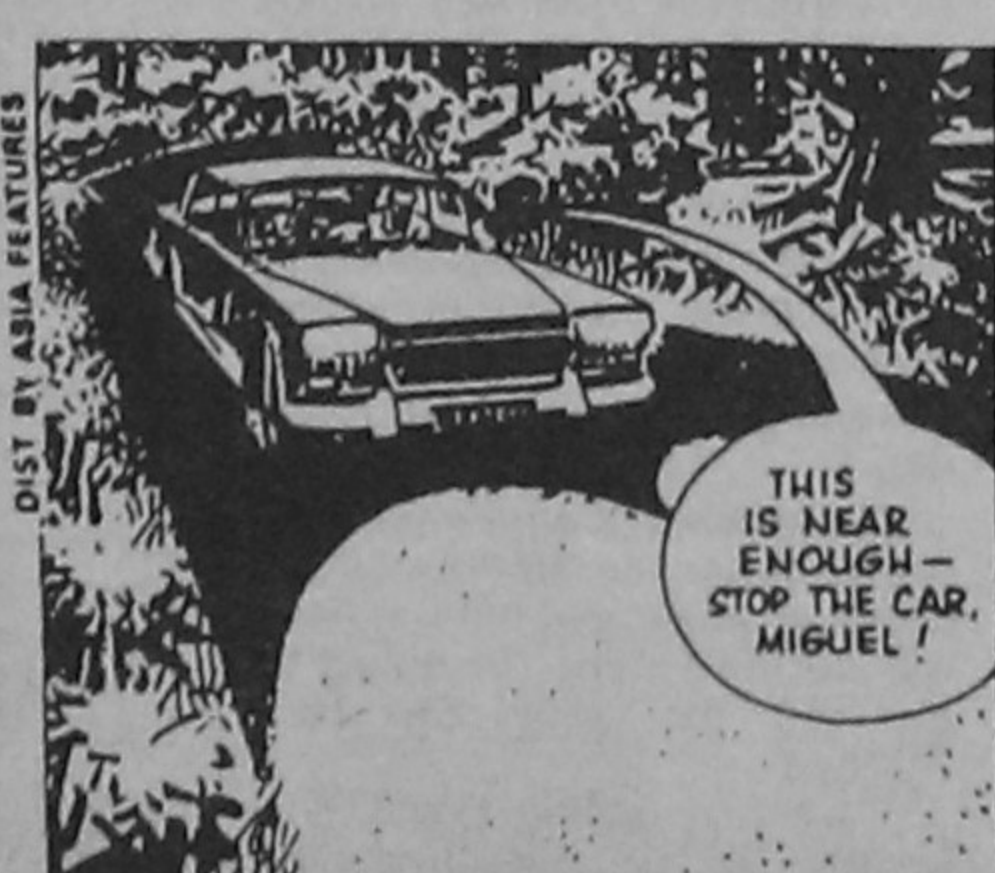
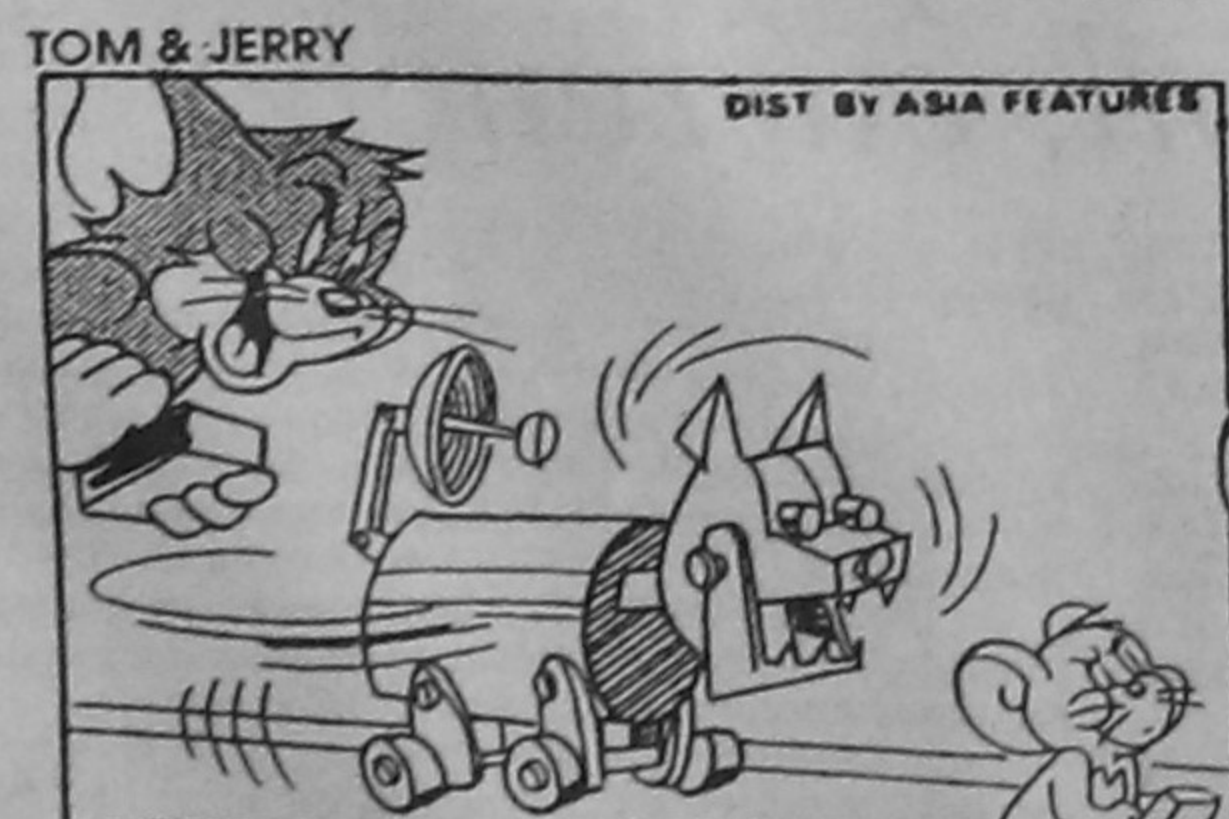
Marketing strategy of IT parks will be another critical success factor for our software industry. Robust e-marketing and conferences in abroad are crucial steps along with general marketing strategy. The question remains: how should we develop our human capital - whether by doing local projects or seeking for sub-contract or having some international projects through our potential network. The success of international marketing will depend upon which mode we take.

But we cannot ignore our shortcomings. Honestly, we lack patriotism. Favouritism and red tape are two other lethal diseases that we often suffer from. There is

much left to do with JRC report. Software and IT-related business fall into quaternary level of economic platforms. We are still stumbling in our primary level that is basic needs. We could not achieve anything significant in secondary level that is heavy industry. We are poor performers in tertiary level that is service industry like bank, tourism and media. How come we shall do something world-class all on a sudden in the most sophisticated quaternary level - IT industry, when we have achieved almost nothing in the learning curve? It is high time we identified the glaring difference between hope and reality.

Is everything bleak? Perhaps not. We dream our software industry of being worth 5/6 billion dollars in next 10 years. We have to undertake some challenging missions like what we have reckoned so far. One can also envision the richest man of Bangladesh after 10 years would be a computer wizard or an infopreneur or a netpreneur. E-business is the ultimate way to materialise our vision. But that is another story for another day.

The author is an alumni of University of Westminster, University of Bradford and University of Cambridge.

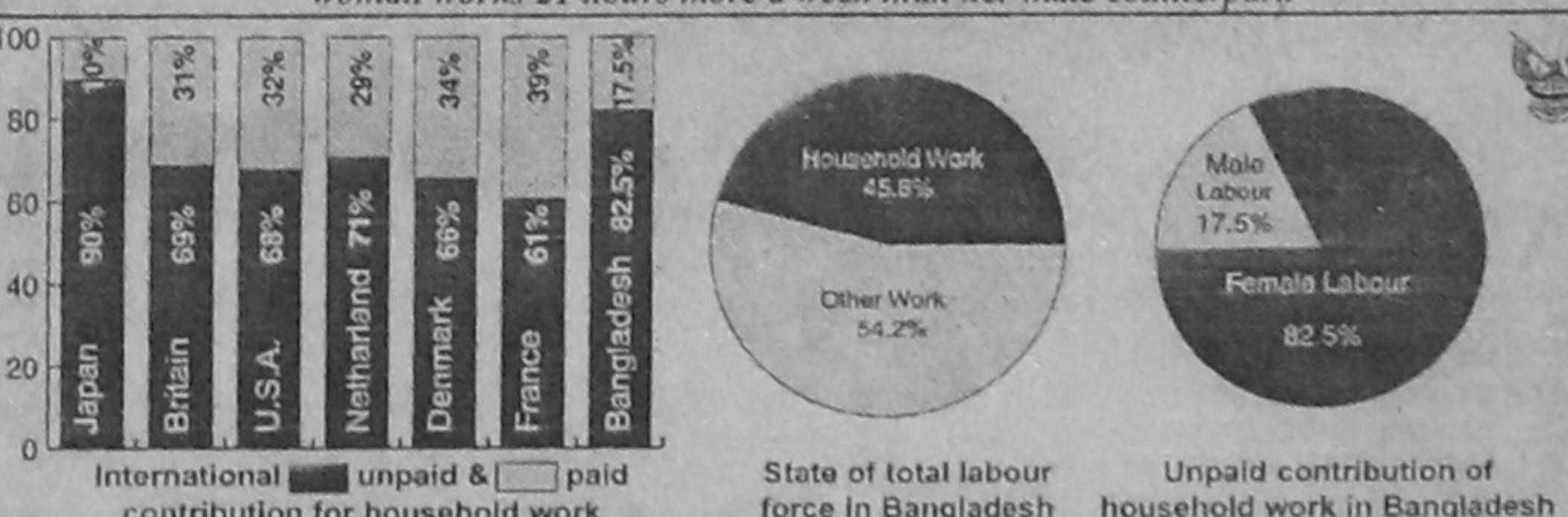


By Hanna-Barbera



The labour of the Bangladeshi women put in household work is unrecognised. The 1989-95 labour force survey by the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics categorised 95% of women aged 10 to 65 as housewives.

A 1998 study on gender issues conducted by Steps Towards Development, an NGO, showed that 54.4 percent of women are now engaged in the agricultural sector. It mentioned that a housewife works 200 days a year in the self-rearing sector while other members of the family work only 100 hours. The total working hours of men and women in the self-rearing sector is 69,000 million, of which women work 44,000 million hours. Another study, "Trade Liberalization and its Impact on Women: The Case of Bangladesh 1995", conducted by Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS) revealed that a woman works 21 hours more a week than her male counterpart.



State of total labour force in Bangladesh

Unpaid contribution of household work in Bangladesh

Invisible contributions of women to society came into the limelight when the System of National Account (SNA) of the United Nations was adopted in 1993. According to the 1993 UNDP study, goods worth 16 trillion US dollars are produced and consumed by households worldwide. Of those, \$ 11 trillion US dollars are produced by women. The study revealed that the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of a country may increase by 20-35 percent if the working hours of women spent doing household work could be included in the market value. In Bangladesh, the condition of a working woman is even worse than that of a housewife because she has to do all the household works of the family in addition to her job. According to a survey conducted by the UNDP, a working woman spends 30 hours on household work a week while a non-working housewife spends 40 hours. The International Labour Organisation and SNA favour bringing household work under the GDP of the country. But the authorities in Bangladesh have not yet adopted the SNA system and the government has no plan right at the moment to bring household work under the GDP, said a senior official at the Labour Directorate. "The government is still following the age-old gender-biased system instead of taking appropriate steps to evaluate the household work put by women," says Salma Ali of Bangladesh Jatiya Mohila Ainjibi Samity emphasising the need for massive campaign on the issue.