

LDCs marginalised by globalisation

Critical mass of investment missing

THE least developed countries' underdevelopment syndrome of moving one step forward and two steps back is largely a matter of their failure to perform to potential. This under-performance is due to suppression of talent in the LDCs caused in part by their internal inadequacies and the rest by extraneous adversities.

The process of globalisation seems to have placed more obligations on the shoulders of the poor countries than on those of the rich ones. That is one inequitable condition we have in terms of the very approach to the challenges, to say nothing of the rather rapid marginalisation of the LDCs in a so-called globalised world.

These are the sordid realities we face despite an acknowledgement of facts that (a) this is an interdependent world; and (b) the rich countries ought to play a complementary role to that of the developing countries in alleviating poverty amongst three-fourths of the humanity.

The only good tiding with which the UN conference on LDCs began early this week is this: the EU and Japan have offered free market access to goods from LDCs. While this liberalisation is awaited from the USA, Canada and other rich nations, the existing rules of origin applied by them remain a major impediment to boosting exports from the LDCs.

Incidentally, on child labour and labour union fronts, Bangladesh has proved highly responsive to international standards as a leading LDC country which can be lost on the rich countries.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's 4-point positioning at the LDC meet in Brussels must have found a responsive chord in other leaders of the developing world. Her principal proposals were for market access to LDC products, protection of LDC interests from the impact of globalisation, higher aid flow of appropriate quality and regular monitoring of commitments made to impoverished countries from time to time.

Debt moratorium would itself signify an investment of \$4.5 billion a year in the socio-economic sectors of the poorer countries. Alongside an improvement in the quality of aid-flow, practically meaning that this be ensured without strings attached, private sectors in the rich countries need to regard the LDCs as targets for their investment, especially FDI. In addition, the ODA flow has to increase significantly by virtue of a specifically asserted political will by G-7 countries.

There has been a recurrent demand from our development partners that we have transparency and good governance in our countries. That is all very right but it is time perhaps that we, for our part, emphasised the need for transparency at the international level too, in matters of the global financial institutions' or donor community's dealings with the poorer countries. On the whole, a greater sensitivity ought to be shown by them to the needs of the LDCs.

It is a pity that the Action Programme for the LDCs' rapid growth and advancement has turned out to be a document of inaction. In fact, most of the development agenda adopted at the LDC conferences during the last two decades are in a state of hibernation. While the world leaders need to push their systems to implement those agenda, LDCs should stay in readiness with appropriate national mechanisms to do their part when the time comes.

PHOTORIAL

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STAR PHOTO: AKM MOHSIN

Hocus pocus

We have entered the 21st century but still quacks and voodoo practitioners carry on their business, inherited by generations. These unscrupulous businessmen sell relics of different sorts like animal bones, teeth, skin etc. luring illiterate and poor clients with their attractive speeches and slogans. These relics can be considered as collectors items but not as remedies for diseases. Is the Ministry of Health aware of these quacks?

Who loves Sonar Bangla?



HASNAT ABDUL HYE

appear almost on regular basis. The third advertisement has been issued by the general Sole Agent of AsiaNet offering holidays in various places in India in collaboration with Oberoi Hotels and Resorts.

It is common knowledge that a good number of Bangladeshis have emigrated to countries like America, Canada, Australia. Many of them become immigrants through their own efforts or with the help of relations and friends already living abroad without waiting for advertisements by commercial firms.

who have houses or flats in America, Canada or England. The Bangladeshis belonging to all these groups love or used to love Sonar Bangla when the national anthem is/was played in Bangladesh. But their love of Sonar Bangla is not strong enough to make them have an abiding stake in the country where they were born and which gave them the opportunity to make it professionally and materially in the first place. Their homeland gave whatever it could which made them a privileged class in the first place,

completion of studies they accept employment and settle abroad, the country of adoption receives all the benefits without much investment. More seriously, Bangladesh is deprived from their valuable contributions. It is argued that enough job opportunities are not available in Bangladesh to attract them back. But opportunities may not be created unless they first return and become change agents. That supply creates its own demand is not only an old saying in economics. It can be passed off as conventional

Sending children abroad for education after school final (O' level/A' level) has become a standard practice for not only the rich families but also for those in the middle class. If they cannot afford to send their wards to America or England there is always India waiting to welcome them with open arms and vacant seats. It is estimated that more than 50,000 students are presently studying in India in various institutions some with dubious standard. Study abroad, whether far or near, costs a lot of money for the

about US\$30 million is spent every year on medical treatment abroad. Not only rich families, even patients from middle class now rush to neighbouring countries for routine cases of child delivery or for simple operations like gall bladder. This lack of confidence of Bangladeshis in our domestic facilities and indigenous expertise is not only deplorable but also detrimental to the development of local medical facilities. When the Indian Prime Minister had knee injury he returned from America and had it operated in Bombay. The Indian President had his gall bladder operation in Delhi. In sad contrast 45 lakhs of taka reportedly spent by our Speaker were all spent abroad, as is the case with most of the well-to-do patients. If the rich and famous do not patronise local health facilities in Bangladesh these cannot be developed to the desired standard. Here also the strategy should be to set up new or existing hospitals and clinics through joint venture allowing foreign doctors and nurses to work under contract for such length of time as may be necessary to raise the standard and build up reputation. Considering the huge outflow of resources every year on account of medical treatment abroad, expenses to be incurred by Bangladesh in foreign exchange in such joint venture projects will be insignificant.

If the love of the rich and the upper middle class for Sonar Bangla is confined only to the national anthem neither the fabled past will return nor the vision of the glorious future will become a reality. On the other hand, our dependence on other countries for things that we are capable of producing will never be available either in desired quantity or quality. It is not yet too late for the privileged class of Bangladesh to redeem their pledge to build Sonar Bangla.

IN MY VIEW

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ALL of us, Bangladeshis, love Sonar Bangla when the national anthem is played. In real life some of us love her more than others. There may even be some, perhaps minuscule in number, for whom the infatuation does not go beyond lip service. But if love consists in only taking and not also giving back then the above distinctions are irrelevant. As recipients then we are all the same, our social status notwithstanding.

The discourse on our love for and from Sonar Bangla, our motherland, not arbitrarily chosen. It is prompted by three advertisements in an English Daily on two subsequent days. The first advertisement invites Bangladeshi families to invest 120,000 Canadian dollars at a time or 400,000 Canadian dollars on annual basis for five years which will give the family the opportunity to emigrate to Canada and enjoy facilities like free medical care, free/concessional education, etc. Similar advertisements are made by other firms or consultants for other destinations. The second advertisement published in the same daily on the same day provides information about education/training in various subjects in a college called Alpha Beta College in Sydney, Australia. (These seats of higher learning must have run out of conventional names, like the Banks in Bangladesh!) Similar advertisements for higher education in the USA, UK and other countries

They belong to various technical professions in their mid-careers and also some retired Bangladeshis. The reasons for such immigration are various. All the children of these families may be living abroad and they desire their parents to live with them or near them. Another group of Bangladeshis emigrates after serving in international organisations, which enable them to make enough savings and enjoy pension facilities. Whatever the particular circumstances, in most cases members of this group get the job because of their Bangladeshi nationality. A third group leaves Bangladesh as a conscious choice and calculated decision being attracted by the 'better' living conditions abroad. The fourth group may be the target of the advertisement mentioned above, i.e. those Bangladeshis who have enough money to invest abroad and thus qualify to become their citizens. In addition to these four groups there is a good number of Bangladeshis

But love so received from Sonar Bangla remains in many cases unrequited and fails to hold them in her embrace for good. It is not only the siren song of the foreign shores that hypnotises them, the realisation that Bangladesh is Sonar Bangla only in a song also coax them away. That the vision of Sonar Bangla cannot be realised without their continued presence and contribution is not given serious thought. Bangladesh thus loses some of her most experienced citizens on a regular basis. Their apprehension about Sonar Bangla not making it in reality moves gradually to become a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Going abroad for higher education has a more insidious effect for their country when the students don't return. The Bangladeshi boys and girls who go abroad mostly with their parents' expenses are among the brightest that the country produces. Considerable investment is made by their parents and the country on their education. When on

wisdom even with the pejorative of old wives' tale. When a critical mass of trained manpower is available in the country, breakthrough in many areas with intractable problems becomes possible. Negative factors like political instability, law and order problem, underdeveloped infrastructures and lack of other facilities can be challenged and addressed more effectively when a growing body of enlightened foreign trained men and women engage in self and wage employment in various fields on their return. Coming from developed and fast changing societies they have the motivation and capacity to release new forces of change more aggressively and with greater determination. For this change to take place it is not however, necessary that everyone should return. If a family has two or three of its young members studying abroad one can stay back and keep the link with the family through occasional visits while others return with their acquired skills and expertise.

family and ultimately for the country. This cost could be saved if students go abroad for higher education after graduation in Bangladesh. Their demand for quality education at home can encourage many more private schools, colleges and universities to be set up and developed. If these are set up as joint venture projects with incentives given by the government they can have standards comparable to foreign institutions. In these institutions foreign teachers can be employed to work with local ones to inspire confidence among guardians. This will not only help keep the standard high but also establish linkages with foreign educational institutions facilitating higher education abroad for their students subsequently.

On similar grounds of outflow of resources and negative impact on indigenous development many more private medical colleges, hospitals and clinics should be set up in the country. It is estimated that

More soap, more stains



MOHAMMAD BADRUL AHSEN

LET us take a deep breath and then dip into this question. Why does more soap get more stains on the cloth? Of course, I am asking metaphorically, and it is not about a wet wash or a detergent. Look around and you will find heating evidence of this outrageous contradiction. More education, more piety, more freedom, more choice and more affluence have reduced our lives into a pathetic situation. More has turned into its own antithesis, as fear, anxiety, greed and cruelty keep taking our lives into their coils.

How does it happen though, more wash bringing more stains on the cloth? More and taller mosques are teeming with worshippers, yet there is a thudding void in our souls. More sprawling and modern campuses are filled with learners who are confused between knowledge and wisdom. More people are free to vote for their candidates of choice, but politics keeps slipping out of popular consent. More clothes, more food and more shelters have exposed us to a bitter

priviation. We have turned into balloons, which are most hollow when fully blown.

Edmund Burke lamented in his *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, "It is gone, that sensibility of principle, that chastity of honour, which felt a stain like a wound...." Stains hurt in a sensitive culture when the honour of a person is blemished, because the dignity of a man is attributable to the reputation of his morale. Robert McFarland, the National Security Adviser to US President Ronald Reagan, swallowed sleeping pills because he was

In the chemistry of education, religion, wealth, freedom and discretion, an individual is expected to emerge with certain uprightness, his or her character embodying what is pure and non-negotiable in human conduct. Education brings the light of knowledge, religion the depth of faith, wealth the comfort of conscience, freedom the fervour of enterprise, and discretion the choice of decisions. All of these are meant to work together to build the character of a person who will have the tools of life in his hand to cultivate an unbridled soul.

is more than an absence of opportunity. With freedom, he is more blessed than those men and women who have died for it. And he has the power to decide, which means he doesn't have to go through life in the straitjacket of indifference and uncertainty.

Why do such people tend to degenerate, the soap discharging filth instead of lather? The cleansing action of soap has four distinct steps. The surface of a cloth becomes wet, and it absorbs the soap. Then the soil is dispersed from the surface into the water,

CROSS TALK

Education and religion have become those gods on the walls, which protect the commercials in our life. Meanwhile, the proverbial soap no longer washes, because it has got scented. Soaps come in variety of scents like lavender, jasmine, and sandal. Add two more names called education and religion, and you will smell good if not clean and fresh.

It means all of these opportunities are supposed to strengthen the pillars of conviction by which an individual should be able to promote virtues in his actions. It means he doesn't have the compulsions to go against his grains, having the means to keep a clear conscience by choice. He is more privileged than an illiterate person who may not know right from wrong. He is more unambiguous than an atheist who isn't convinced if virtue is the key to heaven (if there is a heaven). He is more fortunate than a poor man who doesn't know if character

where it is held in suspension and prevented from being re-deposited onto the clean surface of the cloth.

In which step is our metaphorical soap failing? Is it failing to get the fabric wet, or is it failing to get itself absorbed? Is it failing to disperse the soil from the surface of the fabric or is it failing to prevent the soil from re-entering it? Where is education failing short of its mission to shape the animal into the rational? Where is religion undercutting its own crusade against the squalls of sacrilege? How is it possible that profanity and profanity can coexist

at all? Maybe like everything else, soap has its saturation level. Education, religion, freedom, etc. don't mean anything after a certain point. Look around for evidence and you will be convinced. How do you segregate the enlightened from the benighted, the learned from the ludicrous? How can you tell the believer from the beguiled, the pious from the callous? How can you distinguish the killer in your neighbourhood from the god-fearing man who tells you on national television about the virtues of Ramadan? How can you distinguish the same killer

Musharraf in new power play

A S M NURUNNABI

PAKISTAN'S army chief has 18 months until he must restore democracy and hold elections. He now keeps his cards close to his chest regarding how he intends to restore civilian rule and what kind of political system the army intends to introduce. The deadline, set by the Supreme Court is October, 2002 by when national and provincial elections must be held and power transferred to a civilian government.

There are, however, increasingly strong signs that even after the elections the army will remain the sole arbiter of power. All indications are that army chief Musharraf will also become president and the 1973 constitution will be amended to introduce what politicians and the media have already dubbed "a controlled democracy" to replace the freewheeling parliamentary system in place before the coup. Former Prime Ministers Nawaz Sharif and Benazir Bhutto both exiled abroad, will be kept out of politics.

It is felt by the army that its plans will win public acceptance because of widespread popular disillusionment with rampant corruption under past elected governments and a relative lack of current political protest. But there is a fear that public apathy may turn into anger if Pakistan's economic crisis deepens and the army's role in civilian life increases. International reaction to a military-led democracy will heavily

depend on how democratic it appears and the effect that it has on Pakistan's tense relations with India and its support for the Taliban in Afghanistan.

It was reported that the first clear indications of the course being charted by Musharraf came at a news conference in Karachi on March 25. "I am not retiring in October. Elections will be held in October 2002 but not before that", he announced. Asked if he would become president, he replied: "When the time comes you will know it. Many things have to be discussed."

Analysts think that Musharraf may still have to weigh his options but taking the presidency is the path taken by all three of Pakistan's former military rulers. Following them, Musharraf will ensure that power is concentrated in his hands. It may be well to recall what ultimately happened to his predecessors as soldiers-turned politicians. The first two were overthrown by public unrest while the third, Gen Ziaul Haq, was killed in a plane crash. On March 28 last, the civilian

cabinet endorsed Musharraf's plans to amend the constitution, which he argued were necessary because "there are no constitutional remedies to Pakistan's political problems."

The political scenario that the proposed changes in constitution are likely to bring about seems to be as follows: the amended constitution will give the president back powers to appoint service chiefs and dismiss both parliaments and the prime minister at the National Security Council's recommendations.

The military-dominated NSC was created as the supreme decision-making body immediately after the coup. Its role is expected to be endorsed by constitutional amendment after October 2002.

The time frame foreseen in this behalf is that by August this year staggered elections for local government councillors will be completed.

President Rafiq Tarar is then expected to extend Musharraf's three-year term as an army chief when it ends in October and later bow out in favour of the general

whenever he is elected president.

The most important task, according to analysts, will be for Musharraf to engineer support for his receiving the presidency. The Supreme Court will likely endorse his becoming president but public acceptance may prove more difficult.

The most likely path to overcome this difficulty will be that the local councils will elect the president. The army will have screened many of the 250,000 newly-elected councillors. Many are likely to support Musharraf.

Bhutto has sounded an alarm at the prospect of the new president and army-led NSC wielding enormous powers. On the other hand, there are moves to weaken the opposition. The army would very much like to see Sharif and Bhutto's parties divided. Sharif's Pakistan Muslim League split on March 25 when an anti-Sharif faction chose army nominee Mian Mohammad Azhar as its president.

Bhutto's Pakistan People's Party is united at present but, like Sharif's faction of the PML and other parties it is suffering from a crackdown

because of its opposition to military rule. Overall little real resistance is evident while many politicians are still trying to curry favour with the generals.

The economic problems in Pakistan are no less serious. Severe drought and a deepening recession could create unrest. By the autumn, the International Monetary Fund has to decide whether to agree to a major new loan package and rescheduling of Pakistan's \$38 billion foreign debt. But even if the IMF does make the concessions that Islamabad wants, there is no sign the domestic economy is about to revive.

Musharraf's military-led democracy is unlikely to be acceptable to the international community. India, which has refused to hold talks with the military regime over Kashmir, will come under pressure should a Musharraf-led civilian government take over. New Delhi will probably keep trying to isolate Pakistan in foreign capitals over Kashmir and to end Islamabad's support for the Taliban. But eventually it may well have to face up to the fact that the army and Musharraf are in power for the foreseeable future. Finally, it might even agree to peace talks.

The US and European Union above all want the army to stop backing the Taliban and to help bring peace to Afghanistan. Though Musharraf seems unlikely to do so, to win international support he may just have to prove more flexible.