

Government accepts donors' demand for poverty reduction programme

Is it to facilitate concessionary loans or commitment to reduce poverty?

CONCESSIONARY loans from IMF and World Bank is now linked to implementation of the poverty reduction programmes by the government. The government and the private sector will jointly manage the Poverty Reduction Strategy Programme (PRSP) conceived by the donors. It will be "country owned rather than government owned" as disclosed by the government. These facts were made public at a recent city seminar jointly organized by the IMF and the Government of Bangladesh.

All of the above is welcomed as is the statement made by the IMF member that it expects Bangladesh to dramatically reduce poverty by 2015 and almost eliminate by 2027. The fact that IMF sees the need to at least publicly push a poverty reduction programme means it too recognizes the need for eradicating poverty as a platform for generating wealth. Both IMF and the World Bank have rethought much of their positions and thrust on poverty reduction is an attempt to remain relevant as WTO threatens to overwhelm all other outfits.

The government has also agreed to waive the Official Secrecy Act in this case and greater accountability has been written into the programme. It appears that public demands are effective only when they are articulated by major donor agencies. It has taken the IMF and the WB to make the government take poverty reduction, transparency, accountability and participation based development seriously. One was also under the impression that all development plans were always country and not government owned. Obviously, the official quarters thought otherwise.

One also observes that the very donors who demand transparency are hardy in their functioning and this is essential if the issue is to be taken seriously. Appearing what is clearly a donor driven programme, one wishes the government had some means of translating public demands into political-economic realities instead of waiting for donors to push them.

The more one listens to the people, the less will governments have to function according to dictates. It depends on what is perceived as more important in policy shaping. Whether it's public opinion or donor opinion that matters even when they speak of the same. At this point it's both the donors and the people who seem to be asking for the same from a government that has the electoral mandate to deliver, if it does not waste the opportunity on opposition bashing, as the previous government did.

Visa for AL-backed convention

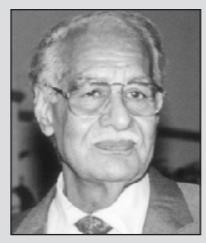
International participants should have been allowed to participate

ACCORDING to the organisers of the two-day convention on "Crimes Against Humanity", eight of their invitees, three from Pakistan, four from India, and one from Maldives were not allowed to participate due to visa related problems. Among the most prominent of those prevented from coming was the well-known human rights activist Asma Jahangir from Pakistan. In comments to the BBC she said she was originally granted visa but told at the last moment that it was valid only from the 20th and not before. When she pointed out that the visa did not mention any date, our embassy in Islamabad cautioned her about inconvenience on arrival.

This one story tells it all. Obviously the government had a change of heart about international participants and decided to prevent them from attending the AL-backed convention. In our view this move has significantly damaged our government's democratic credentials and gave more credence to the AL convention than perhaps it would have otherwise got. In the age of the Internet and instant communication nothing can be hidden or prevented from becoming known to the world by preventing participants from attending conferences. In fact more attention is attracted to an event when the government tries to prevent it from taking place properly. If the government felt that these foreign guests would be given wrong information by the opposition then it could easily have given its own versions of things to the same guests through personal or group interaction while they were here. By preventing them from coming the government has only proven to the outside world that it had something to hide and also that it did not allow the opposition to function freely.

These actions are products of autocratic mindset completely out of tune with the 21st Century world. On the one hand we claim to be a democracy and on the other we prevent those who are opposed to the government from holding a peaceful convention with international participants. A democratically elected government, adhering to the rule of law, should never have anything to hide from its people or from the people of the world. We strongly protest the government's action and insist that it should never happen again.

Three years of nothing



KULDIP NAYAR
writes from New Delhi

edness. The northeast cannot claim to have had even a single private project of five crore rupees in the last many years.

Villages, where 70 per cent of the population lives, have a slice of only 24 per cent of the country's growth. Urban poverty is becoming more glaring. And only 10 per cent of our students go beyond the sixth class, although the country's literacy rate is 62 per cent.

The unemployment problem is

more sophisticated machines and less and less of hands. He expected other opportunities to come up. True, the service sector is expanding but industrial growth is falling. It has come down to 2.3 per cent from 9 per cent in the last few years. But without the solid ground of industry, the service sector will be hanging in the air. Those who are beating the drum of globalisation should realise that the growth rate in the last decade, after the introduction of

was mere book adjustment, money going from one pocket of the government to another.

By dismantling partially or wholly what was laboriously built in the last four or five decades, the government is playing with the country's future. The countries that are advanced today were economically better off in terms of per capita income before their industrialisation began. We have to do our own thinking, profiting by the example of

The BJP-led government has devised its own way of governance: to instill fear. It is arming itself, weapon-wise and law-wise. No other administration has bought so many weapons in such a short time as this one has. New Delhi does seem to realise that the more strength it acquires in conventional arms, the bigger becomes the danger of nuclear warfare in the subcontinent. The whole strategy is faulty.

(Prevention) Act, 1987.

The hard posturing by the BJP-led government has led to its being dictated by the fundamentalists. The RSS parivar, particularly the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP), is sabre-rattling on the construction of the temple on the site where the Babri Masjid had stood before it was demolished. This is to resume the same old religious frenzy which had triggered off the worst type of communal riots in 1992-93. The Muslims, though extremely concerned, are generally quiet. But they see in the VHP move another instance of the 'might is right' dictum. The extremist fringe among the Muslims may retaliate if the temple is sought to be built without a mutual settlement or a judicial verdict. The Sangh parivar does not seem to realise the harm it is causing to the polity which draws its strength from its faith in secularism. The hatred is threatening to tear Indian society apart. My fear is that Vajpayee might resign if the VHP tries to build the temple without any settlement on March 15...

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