

WEHAB for sustainable prosperity

UN Secretary-General names five key areas where Johannesburg Summit can make a real difference

WATER and sanitation, Energy, Health, Agriculture, Biodiversity: these are the five key areas where concrete results can and must be obtained at this August's World Summit on Sustainable Development, said the United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan on 14 May 2002.

"These five areas could be remembered by a simple acronym -- WEHAB -- Mr Annan said Tuesday as he launched a new campaign to raise awareness for the Summit. "You might think of it like this: we inhabit the earth. And we must rehabilitate our one and only planet." The Secretary-General added that he hoped this acronym would become "something of a mantra" between now and the opening of the Summit in Johannesburg on 26 August.

By concentrating on these five areas, Mr Annan said, in a speech at the American Museum of Natural History, the Summit could produce an ambitious but achievable programme of practical steps to improve the lives of all human beings while protecting the global environment.

"These are five areas," he said, "in which progress would offer all human beings a chance of achieving prosperity that will not only last their own lifetime, but can be enjoyed by their children and grandchildren too."

The World Summit on Sustainable Development, which will be held in Johannesburg, South Africa, from 26 August to 4 September, will bring world leaders, citizen activists and business representatives together to work on an agenda for ensuring that planet Earth can sustain a decent life for all its inhabitants, present and future.

All too often that issue is overshadowed in the policy-making process by more immediate problems, such as conflicts, globalization, and most recently, terrorism, the Secretary-General said. But the Johannesburg Summit offers humanity "a chance to restore the momentum that had been felt so palpably after Earth Summit" [held at Rio de Janeiro in 1992].

New efforts are needed, he added, because the present model of development, which has brought privilege and prosperity to about 20 per cent of humanity, has also exacted a heavy price by degrading the planet and depleting its resources. Yet, according to the Secretary-General, "at discussions on global finance and the economy, the environment is still treated as an unwelcome guest."

High-consumption lifestyles continue to tax the earth's natural life support systems, research and development are under-funded and neglectful of the problems of the poor, and developed countries "have not gone far enough," he said, to fulfil either of the promises they made in Rio--to protect their own environments and to help the developing world defeat poverty.

The issue, the Secretary-General said, is not environment versus development, or ecology versus economy. "Contrary to popular belief" he said, "we can integrate the two."

Mr Annan summarized the progress he hoped to see in the five areas -- "areas in which progress is possible with the resources and technologies at our disposal today," -- as follows:

- 1. Water -- Provide access to at least one billion people who lack clean drinking water and two billion people who lack proper sanitation.
- 2. Energy -- Provide access to more than two billion people who lack modern energy services; promote renewable energy; reduce over-consumption; and ratify the Kyoto Protocol to address climate change.
- 3. Health -- Address the effects of toxic and hazardous materials; reduce air pollution, which kills three million people each year, and lower the incidence of malaria and Africa guinea worm, which are linked with polluted water and poor sanitation.
- 4. Agricultural productivity -- Work to reverse land degradation, which affect about two-thirds of the world's agricultural lands.
- 5. Biodiversity and ecosystem management -- Reverse the processes that have destroyed about half of the world's tropical rainforests and mangroves and are threatening 70 per cent of the world's coral reefs and decimating the world's fisheries.

"In Johannesburg, we have a chance to catch up," he said. "Together, we will need to find our way towards a greater sense of mutual responsibility. Together, we will need to build a new ethic of global stewardship. Together, we can and must write a new and hopeful chapter in natural -- and human -- history."

UNIC

Non-functioning school system spawns poverty and crime

MD. ASADULLAH KHAN

CLICHES, clandestine party politics, petty party feuds and money making business to the utter disregard of human resource development namely academic pursuit litter Bangladesh landscape. Statements uttered so often that we believe them to be true. One example is the oft repeated boast that the literacy rate in the country has soared to a lofty 64 percent, and may be in no time it would be nearer 100 percent. To many, that would appear to be a hollow claim. We seem to have become masters of lip service, a nation more concerned with ritual than actually taking action. While we brag about our educational system making a leap forward, we are unable to discern that it is malfunctioning. Teachers don't teach, students don't learn, libraries are empty of books, old schools and colleges with a rich legacy are crumbling down. Yet new schools and colleges seem to mushroom everyday. Apart from politically inspired programmes, education appears to have become a low priority, only 3 percent of GDP goes to education, while a substantial portion of GDP is spent on non-merit subsidies. The educated society or more correctly an enlightened band of work force is vital to any emerging, developing economy. Nearer our home, the Asian Tigers are a fine example, having understood that 100 percent literacy and a technically trained work force are mandatory requirements for their progress. Yet while we have turned our attention to so many mundane things, we seem to have ignored one basic thing: development of the schools and colleges that already exist and improving the quality of teaching.

Shockingly, there has been an invisible liquidation of old schools that once produced a talented pool of students. For example, Satkhira PN High School named after the Late Zamidar Pran Nath Roy Choudhury of Satkhira who donated his magnificent "Dol Pujaban" on 3 acre of land for the school as early as 1862 is now a shambles. The expansive mansion compartmentalised into classrooms from the days the school came into being has crumbled down because of neglect and apathy. A three-room building that the Facilities Department built in the 80s is now in total disarray, its roofs are leaking, plasters and concrete rods falling down. All told, the school which has now 850 students on its roll is not functioning. Other than a government secondary school that can admit a limited number of students in compliance with the government rules and regulations, Satkhira PN High School is the only institution in Satkhira district with a rich legacy and tradition catering education to hundreds of students born of poor parents. It is simple apathy and lack of interest in education or so to say

human resource development that has rendered the situation beyond redemption. Shockingly, how could things come to such a sorry pass when the top echelons in the administration are agog with the spectacular achievement in the educational arena? Citizens of the country pay taxes for the efficient running of the state meaning schools, colleges,

shabby and dilapidated school building, high drop-outs and shrinking academic facilities like libraries and laboratories.

Even when the government attached priorities on primary and secondary level education, these sectors are not functioning. Let us throw away higher education at the moment, because through the

effort keep that mantle glowing? Much to our shock and horror we saw that an old school of repute that produced cream of students, notably university teachers, engineers, doctors, civil servants, lawyers, journalists crumbled down close to every body's eyes because of apathy and neglect. It is worth

journalist editor Toab Khan, journalist late Toha Khan and Md. Shaukat Ali till recently Professor of Civil Engineering in a reputed Engineering College in Toronto, Canada were ex-students of Satkhira P.N. High School. For some thirty years, this school had on its teaching staff a band of dedicated, committed and

scholarly aptitude shaped the mind and future of a vast cohort of students who in later days contributed enormously towards national glory and advancement in different capacities either in administration, teaching, technical field or politics. It is time that the illustrious sons either this school or other schools in rural Bangladesh produced recognised the dangers of letting the institutions decay and turn into ruins. It is a common knowledge that most privately-run schools in rural Bangladesh are now swamped in crisis. The illustrious sons of these schools once produced will have tremendous shock to learn that their native places are sliding into a morass of unparalleled crime, drug addiction and growing human misery in absence of non-functioning schools. From Sunamganj to Satkhira to Nilphamari to Rajan, to name a few, portents are grim, but the end result could be apocalyptic. Once the rot sets into some of these places, what's to stop it from spreading through the rest of the nation?

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healthcare facilities like hospitals, water supply and sanitation. Yet when a public failing like the one the poorest section of people in Satkhira are facing, the administration is not upto the task. The plight of the 150 year old Satkhira P.N. High School points to an invisible liquidation and abysmal neglect of the academic institutions, the very baseline from where action programmes relating to poverty alleviation works in the country could have started. Pathetically true, when it comes to education, there is inevitably the plea of fiscal constraint and resource crunch shrouding the academic institutions especially private schools in rural Bangladesh. In such a situation the future of education in the country appears to be grim as the funds crunch has hit rural schools lowering quality nationwide. To-day the labyrinth of schools in the country is confronting a fiscal landscape more hostile than ever.

Despite the fact the past governments in the country showed interest in education very little work was done. And now because of fiscal constraint grants are being cut ruthlessly. The reconstruction grant sanctioned for most schools has been stalled for non-availability of funds. Reputable institutions like Satkhira P.N. High School, Nalta High School 15 miles off Satkhira, the institution established in the very birth place of Khan Bahadur Ahsanullah, an enthusiastic promoter of education from the early 30s are now in a shambles. The main building of the Satkhira PN High School has collapsed and the remaining 4 room building is in a bad shape. The roof of the building leaks and the plasters along with concrete rods are falling down. Incidents of falling plasters hitting students in the classroom have also been reported. Since the government grants started dwindling the system of elementary and secondary education in the country has been breaking down. Today it is an immense illustration of chaos with little hope on the horizon. The system has turned into a battle of contending dooms: poor quality teaching,

World Bank IMF's tinted glasses, higher education was a sector where large amounts of government money was spent on wasteful subsidies! But when the World Bank stressed the need to protect elementary education upto SSC level because it felt that the social rates of return in these sectors exceeded the returns in higher education and because investment in "universal literacy" helped improve equity and remove income in balances, things hardly improved. Let us make a firm analysis. Thirty years have rolled by in making wasteful planning, giving lip services and this brought painful failures and a realisation that education either at the primary, secondary or higher level can't be supported by government alone. Government must also actively consider about levying an education cess if it can't fund education in the present situation. All graduates working in government, autonomous and private organisations other than income tax payers who have benefited from schools, colleges and universities must pay education cess at a modest rate to be decided upon by the government and this must be diverted to ameliorate the collapsing educational institutions. With determination and will the present sorry state of things could be reversed. Driven by nostalgia many wealthy expatriates are changing the face of villages and home towns where they once lived. It must be a humble effort to payback what we owe our land, our early schooling place. Mentionably, scholarships introduced at the primary level to encourage the underprivileged groups to attend school will be of no use unless the structures are there or amenities for teaching are available. To be more precise, the government cannot just throw up its hands and forget about the dismal condition of privately run primary and secondary schools that are now in a pitiable condition. Tragically, all the old schools the nurseries of brains and talents in the country are in a mess struggling hard to retain their existence. All over the world it is taken for granted that educational achievement and economic success are closely linked. Sure enough, if there are no schools, no commodious classrooms, no teaching, no quality education, or precisely speaking no access to education, these exploding population will be forced to live below the poverty line. Consequently, these vast cohort of illiterate people will be incapable of getting proper jobs or any ostensible means of decent living.

The official literacy rate in the country is 64 percent. But everyone knows that this figure is a lie since any one who can merely read or write his name is counted among the literate. These unfortunate Bangladeshis living below the poverty line have no access to healthcare, sanitation or clean drinking water not to speak of having employment either.

The root cause of this poverty, decline in the quality of education and drop-out from schools is linked to bad economic policies we have pursued since liberation of the country. Bangladesh is a poor country because poverty has become a constituency which is carefully nurtured by politicians of every hue. So they spend vast funds on grandiose schemes that amount to little more than charity. Since in our country charity definitely begins at home, most of the money gets funneled directly into every capacious pockets of officials right down to the village level. Naturally poverty continues to exist and grow in a monstrous scale. But even if all the money channeled through various schemes did reach the people it was meant for, they would continue to be poor because no government has given people the tools with which they can themselves better their lives.

If these were not true, politicians would concentrate resource elsewhere. They would build roads and power plants so that the amenities of 21st century could filter down to the darkest depths of rural Bangladesh. They would build schools worth its name so that the vast cohort of underprivileged boys and girls could have access to education undeterred, so that the children of the poorest of our people could have a chance to rise above the poverty line. They would focus their energies on providing healthcare and sanitation so that even the poorest Bangladeshis could be certain that their children would not die of preventable diseases. But if politicians did all these things, it would become that much harder to persuade "the people" to vote for silly reasons through exhortations of religious and extremist slogans.

Now the question that must be answered to-day is: If an ex-Zamidar of Satkhira could donate land, building and teachers' pay about 150 years ago, why can't the government of the day or the affluent people through their collective

mentioning that one student Khashnabish who stood first in the Matriculation Examination in 1945 under Calcutta University was a student of Satkhira PN High School. Prof. M. R. Khan, National Professor and an eminent Pediatrician in the country, Late Khademul Bashar, first-Air Chief of Bangladesh, three ex-chief engineers namely late Md. Shafi Khan (Civil) Obaidul Bashar and late Shafi Ahmed Khan (Elect),

meritorious teachers like Uma Pada Datta (Headmaster), K. C. Bose (Headmaster) Girindra Chandra Ghose (Headmaster), AK Magfuraddin (Headmaster), Monoj Kumar Majumdar, Basudev Chatterjee, Monmatha Ghosal, Abul Hossain Khan, Nausher Ali, B.Sc. (Assistant Headmaster), Wazihur Rahman and Syed Badruddoza. These teachers through their moral fibre, intellectual acumen and

Museums and globalisation

MOHAMMED SIRAJUL ISLAM

TOMORROW (May 18) museum across the world will observe the International Museum Day. A museum is an institution which collects documents and antiquities; preserves, conserves and displays exhibits and interprets material evidences and associated information for the public benefit. In 1977 during International Council of Museums i.e. ICOM's 12th General Assembly in Moscow a recommendation was made for instituting an "International Museum Day" to be observed on 18th May every year. Given that each country has its own specific traditions and conditions, the ICOM secretariat recommends that members organise their events around 18th May. The day has taken such importance that in some countries, the occasion been extended to a week or even a month of museum activities. So as to develop the action begun in 1978.

At the meeting of the Advisory Committee for International Museum Day it was decided that the theme for International Museums Day-2002 would be "Museums and Globalisation."

International Council of Museums (ICOM) has defined that

museum is a non profit-making, permanent institution in the service of society and its development and is open to the public. It acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits for the purposes of study, education and enjoyment of the public. Museum, as we see today, is the result of a growth of several centuries. It is a living institution fascinating people of all classes, poor and rich, grown-ups and children. All find an attraction to the museum because to each and everyone, it supplies the necessary mental food. It satisfies their curiosity for the wonderful past which is presented to them in the living memorial exhibits in the museum galleries.

The educational role of the museum is complex. Thinking about learning within a cultural institution means being aware of the link between culture and pedagogy. It is not enough to focus only the learning strategies of individuals, and the educational potential of museums and their collections, it is also necessary to place this within a knowledge of the social and cultural roles that museums play. The concept of critical pedagogy as used by Henry Giroux (1992), is helpful in articulating the relationship between museum and cultural

organisation and museums as sites for learning.

Museums possess a tremendous potential for the development and encouragement of the goals of multicultural education. By their nature and function, museums confront the multiple dimensions of human cultures across time and space. For learners, museums serve as places where people collect, display and share fragments of the world in which we live. Many focus on non human topics, such as desert ecology, and many more focus on the people from different cultures or at least on a part of their life. This slice of culture may be the world of works, or inventions over the years, or a famous artist. Museums are filled with a wealth of real things and replicas of peoples, processes and events. Most important, museums are places for teaching and learning.

Generally museums are divided in two classes, local or national and international. Local or national museums represent the culture of a particular nation or country, display local art, architecture, painting, old manuscripts, inscription, metal work, industrial commercial and folklore antiquities and artifacts. International museums also displays the world civilization arts

work, paintings, inscriptions, potteries, sculpture, ethnological and numasmatical items. Our National Museum also has been displaying the objects of foreign countries, like China, Kenya, India, Egypt, Pakistan, Thailand, Myanmar and many others.

Museums arrange local or international workshop seminar, symposium, training, demonstration and package programme, consequently increasing globalisation. Museums exchange their publications, books, guide-books, brochure, pamphlets, bulletins, journal, catalogue, photograph, replica, reproduction and albums. It is their world-wide museum conception.

It is a well established fact that museum educates the community, and it serves and stimulates the community's intellectual activities. Bangladesh National Museum should expand its collection with a view to including the objects of other nations since earliest times. We should try to gather objects mutually from neighbouring countries. Exchange of museum objects will go a long way to strengthen cultural relationship among the nations. So the museum makes a wonderful globalisation possible.

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