

Whither PRSP

The draft strategy paper

M M AKASH

(Continued from yesterday)

At page one of the NSEGR (National Strategy for Economic Growth and Poverty Reduction) it is written: "For operational purposes, the strategy paper will form the core of the sixth Five Year Plan (2002-2007) beginning from 1st July, 2002."

But in his last budget speech the finance minister spelt out his own understanding of this strategy paper in terms of the following words: "This strategy will be subsequently converted to PRSP which will provide the basis for holding dialogues with the development partners..... Necessary administrative and economic reforms will be implemented in phases to implement this strategy. A three year macro-economic framework will be developed for achieving the purpose of the strategy. The budget deficit will be contained within sustainable limit, domestic resource mobilization will be augmented to gradually achieve self-reliance and domestic borrowing by the Government will be scaled down. Besides wastage and misuse of resources will be curbed in all spheres of the economy. Private sector will be promoted and made more robust." [Section 26 and 27 of the Annual Budget Speech, 2002-2003]

From the above statement it seems that a standard SAP policy package based on a three-year rolling investment plan for macro economic stability is the chief concern of the Finance Minister whereas poverty reduction strategy can wait until more resources are available from the donors. This statement creates apprehension about the status of our ongoing six-year plan process. Will it be continued or will it be stopped? What will be its status vis-à-vis the NSEGR and what shape the NSEGR itself will take? We know that at least twenty-one dialogues were held with different sections of the people at three successive levels -- Upazila, Division and National -- before finalizing NSEGR. It will be extremely useful from the people's point of view to look at these dialogue reports spelling out people's own priorities. The paper has presented the summary findings of these dialogues in chapter three titled "Participatory Consultation on Poverty Reduction Strategy: Emerging Lessons". As reported there, the participants roughly identified seven past commendable achievements and at the same time pointed out to sixteen urgent failures in the field of general development, especially the development of the deprived and poor. These are worth mentioning:

Achievements

1. Bangladesh has been able to reduce acute deprivations measured in terms of food and income entitlements.
2. Some increase has taken place in educational and health facilities for the poor.
3. The wage of the rural labourers has increased.
4. The traditional money lending business has been curtailed.
5. The volume of remittance transfer from the foreign countries has increased.
6. Employment opportunity in the non-farm sector e.g. fishery, poultry, small business, services etc. has been widened.
7. The role of the Women Entrepreneurs in the rural areas has increased. But side-by-side the number of areas of key concern was quite large:

Failures

1. The law and order situation has deteriorated extremely!
2. Especially the vulnerability of the poor and the weak has increased enormously.
3. "Mastanocracy" has increased very much.
4. The administration in general and especially the law enforcing agencies do not have any accountability.
5. The political parties have, as it seems, recruited the dropouts from the S.S.C. and H.S.C. examinations in order to turn them into terrorists under political protection.
6. The poor people are generally disorganized and are not aware of their rights.
7. The power of the local level Government (UP and UZ level elected body) is inadequate and there is also lack of accountability.
8. The quality and standard of health services at local level is quite low.

Actually any plan that does not have the courage to attack inequality cannot but have a pessimistic result. Look at China, Vietnam, South Korea, Cuba, and all other poverty reduction success stories even well recognized by WB, you would find that the success could only be achieved on the basis of an egalitarian growth based on fundamental redistributive measures.

9. In the field of education there is no uniformity and inequality is being enhanced by this dual education system.
 10. Not only health and education, other governmental services e.g. electricity, water and road services all are in equally deplorable condition.
 11. The standard of agricultural extension services is also quite low.
 12. There is an extreme lack of coordination among the N.G.O., C.B.O. and the G.O.B.
 13. Regional inequality especially rural-urban gap is increasing.
 14. Politics has become polarized and conflicting.
 15. The micro level borrower and saving groups have not been able to form a united federal body of their own.
 16. Poor have neither voice nor any participation in the policy formulation process at local, regional and national levels.
- Although the above list can't be considered as comprehensive and complete yet one would wonder what actually has been suggested in the strategy paper to address these important issues, which were self-identified by the people from the bottom?

Fundamental weakness of the draft

The draft document concentrates mainly on a technical growth projection exercise and gives very little attention to the really thorny problems, which did surface up in the preparatory dialogues. It is rightly recognized that in the nineties the national inequality index (GINI INDEX) has been increasing at a very accelerated rate (i.e. 2.1 p.c. per annum, see P7)! But in the very beginning of the technical exercise it was fatalistically assumed that nothing could be done to reduce the present level of inequality. Moreover it was

further assumed that in future the inequality in the society would continue to increase. Only on that basis the projection suggests that if and only if Bangladesh could achieve a sustained average growth rate of seven percent over the next twenty years we will be able to reduce absolute income poverty from the current level of 50 percent to 25 percent. This actually reflects the "Millennium Development Goal" for the developing countries (Reducing poverty rate by half within next twenty years). But if we assume that our growth performance would continue to remain same as before (i.e. two percent per-capita income growth) then number of poor people will rather increase from 63 million to 64 million. And still a tragedy is that, if our plan even if 100 percent successful, would only be able to reduce the number of poor people living in the society to a level of only 43 million (the current level is about 63 million). So only 20 million poor people at the margin will be able to cross over the poverty line within next twenty years and almost 68 percent of the currently poor will continue to remain poor.

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cannot but have such a pessimistic result. Look at China, Vietnam, South Korea, Cuba, and all other poverty reduction success stories even well recognized by WB, you would find that the success could only be achieved on the basis of an egalitarian growth based on fundamental redistributive measures.

This strategy paper describes the role of the private sector as "The Engine of Growth". But let us look at the facts more critically. Our past experiences have clearly proved that there are two distinct types private sectors in our country. The largest private sector is the agricultural sector and non-formal rural urban sector. During the last decades in spite of the lack of or little state help they played the leading role in augmenting our economic growth. On the other hand the big corporate sector and the co-operators of MNCs actually had failed to produce any significant growth in the modern sector (of course the Garment sector is the only exception but that also is based on special international opportunity and the cheap women labour of our country). So the plan should have specified which private sector they want to target: **the big defaulters or the productive entrepreneurs?**

The plan surprisingly remains silent or ambivalent about a few burning issues of our country. Let me mention a few here. What is going to happen to our garment industry after the withdrawal of MFA agreement in 2005? How will you face the pressure to privatize Gas, Electricity, Water, Railway, etc. and what would be the net impact of such a reform on the poor? How can the government mobilize more resources from the rich? How education and health sector can attain uniformity at least in the basic level? These are

really thorny and difficult issues and also popular issues because they touch the pockets of the rich and if successfully implemented can change the lives of the poor. Actually the plan takes it for granted that hard anti-poverty reforms within the framework of SAP will be occurring and wishfully hopes: "The pro-poor programmes will be made strong to complement the liberalization agenda. Macro economic stability and robust growth would ensure that employment losses as a part of needed economic restructuring can be offset by rapid growth in other sectors" (P 27-28)

But all previous studies here and in most of the countries of the world shows that donor driven SAP measures cause slump, poverty and inequality instead of growth, affluence and justice. So what is the basis of this wishful thinking?

Conclusion

The strategy document abounds with numerous rhetoric on "Pro Poor Growth". But never goes beyond the traditional safety net measures. It starts with a self-defeating assumption that inequality cannot be reduced. It is funny to find a chapter titled "Policies and Institutions for Reducing Inequality" where at the very beginning it is stated that what can be done at best is "to prevent any serious worsening of income distribution to ensure poverty reduction as average income increases". It also remains silent or rather supportive of the measures of SAP dictated by the foreign donors. It totally ignores or pay scant attention to the real issues of life that had actually surfaced up during their own dialogues with the people. Finally it is not clear whether the document will be under national ownership or the donors will hijack it, especially the WB who has both carrots and sticks at its disposal.

But it will be very unfair if I do not point out at least one very strong and the most pro poor statement of this strategy paper. At page 39 it is rightly mentioned: "A faster pace of poverty reduction would require greater voices of the poor. Greater voices would be ensured through moving beyond the narrow domain of micro-empowerment measures such as access to credit. For greater agency role of the poor, measures would be taken for building institutions for the poor at sectoral, sub-national and national levels with emphasis on developing new institutional ways and means for collective empowerment. This would be needed not just for catalyzing the active pressure group function of the poor but also for increasing their aggregate claims in the distribution of overall benefits for economic growth and distribution"

Whoever has written this deserves to be congratulated for speaking the truth. This should have been the starting point of this strategy document and focus should have been concentrated on further concretizing effective means for effective empowerment of the so-called poor. Instead, the ruling class has relegated this statement to a corner of the text, and has kept it hanging in the air. Perhaps they do not want "faster pace of poverty reduction"! I would like to end my discussion on the draft strategy paper with a statement by Naom Chomsky. He said that a text could be understood by not only looking at what it contains but also what it omits and ignores.

(Concluded)

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In memoriam

Azizul Haq: A soul dedicated to the service of people

SHAFIQUK ISLAM

Janab Azizul Haq lived a very significant and eventful life. He passed away on 3 September 2002 in the Comfort Hospital adjacent to his residence. It was a very thoughtful decision of Janab Azizul Haq to be a part in the establishment of the Comfort Hospital in the south-east corner of his own house in which two rooms have been dedicated, one for him and another for his wife, Hosnara Haq.

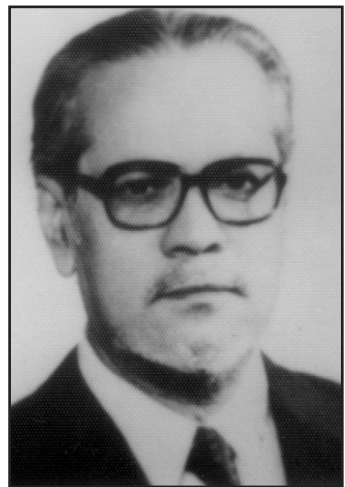
Birth and Education: Azizul Haq was born in village Chandia under Brahmanpara upazila of Comilla district in February 1923. He passed his Matriculation examination from Comilla Zila School in 1939 with letter marks in English. He wanted to study Science and as such he got himself admitted to Chittagong Government College in I.Sc. He also got letter marks in English in his I.Sc. Exam. When he came to pursue his higher studies in Dhaka University, in view of his record marks in English he was advised to study English. He got First Class both in Honors and M.A in 1943 and 1944 respectively. He also secured first class in LL.B from Dhaka University. He received Fullbright Scholarship in 1959 and did his Master of Public Administration from Harvard University.

Professional Career: He started his career as a teacher of Dhaka Intermediate College in 1944. He joined the Bengal Civil Supply Department in 1945. From 1947 to 1968 he occupied many distinguished posts in erstwhile central government of Pakistan such as Director, EPIDC; Chairman, EPSIC. From 1969 to 1973 he was the Director of BARD, Comilla. After his retirement from government service, he became the Special Advisor of UNICEF Bangladesh from 1973 to 1976. During that time he contributed to the rehabilitation and reconstruction of school programme, development of curriculum suiting the needs, hopes and aspiration of the people of Bangladesh. School kitchen garden programme was his unique contribution for addressing the issue of malnutrition of children.

Wherever he worked he made his mark and used to draw spontaneous attention. His contribution in social sector was so visible that though he did not have any political affiliation, he was made Special Advisor in charge of the Ministry of Agriculture, Forest and Fisheries in 1976. Subsequently, he became the Minister for Agriculture and held

that post till 1979.

CIRDAP: As the Minister of Agriculture, he used to attend the annual Conferences of FAO in Rome. He realized that in order to make the work of FAO more meaningful, Regional Agencies keeping affiliation with FAO needed to be established. With the support of the Government of Bangladesh he could convince the appropriate authorities for the establishment of the Centre for Integrated Rural Development for Asia and the Pacific (CIRDAP) in Comilla attached to BARD. He was the first founder Director of that prestigious regional organization which he had created with his tireless effort. After



Late Azizul Haq

his retirement, CIRDAP was shifted to Chameli House in Dhaka.

Rotarian Azizul Haq: He joined the Rotary movement in 1950 and became a member of the Rotary Club of Dhaka. He was the Chartered President of the Rotary Club of Comilla, which was established on 23 February 1969. He became the first District Governor of R.I District-328 in 1984-85. Under his active guidance and leadership, Rotary Club of Comilla successfully implemented the Inland Fisheries Project in Bangladesh under a 3-H (Health, Hunger & Humanity) grant from the Rotary Foundation of R.I to mitigate protein deficiency of the people of Comilla region.

At the 75th Anniversary of the Rotary Foundation, R.I Convention in 1992 in Florida, USA the Inland Fisheries Project was signaled as a unique achievement representing Rotary's Spirit of Service. In that convention, 75 Rotarians were declared as Rotary Candle for their Service Above Self globally, and Rtn. Azizul Haq was declared the Candle number one. It was a rare prestige not only for him but also for Bangladesh

In 1996 Rotary Club of Comilla established Rotary Vocational Education Centre (ROVEC) and dedicated it after his name as "Azizul Huq Centre". The Centre has a children's Library, a Computer Training Institution, and a seminar hall for training purpose at Bagichagaon, Comilla.

In Rotary, Janab Azizul Haq held various significant posts such as President, District Governor, RI Fiscal Agent, and Regional Coordinator.

He used to provide home hospitality to the Rotarians who wanted to help Bangladesh. One example is Rtn. Reg Collard who developed the Livestock Improvement Project in Mymensingh and a safe water programme for mitigation of arsenic in Shahrahi in Chandpur district.

Scout Azizul Haq: He became a Scout as a student of Comilla Zila School. He used to tell us that the Scout Movement planted the seeds of social work in him. It also gave him discipline and rigor to be an organized human being. He was decorated with the highest award the Silver Tiger of Boy Scouts for his contribution. He became the Commissioner of Boy Scouts of erstwhile East Pakistan.

Debater Azizul Haq: He was known among his contemporaries as an eloquent orator from his school age. In the extempore speeches, no one could beat him. He used to speak with logic and with good humour. He was a strong promoter of Debating Societies in schools and colleges.

Other Social Welfare Activities: He was a member of the Executive Committee, BIRDEM; Ex-Chairman of Bangladesh Association for the Aged; E.C. member of Bangladesh Family Planning Association; Chairman, Board of Trustees, Santosh Islamic University; Member, Board of Trustees, Asian Institute for Rural Development, Bangalore, India; Executive Member of Association for Social Action (ASA), HDF, UCEF, ABC and a member of the Board of Trustees of the Chittagong Eye Infirmary & Training Complex.

Honour and achievements: Janab Azizul Haq received Khan Bahadur Ahsanullah Gold Medal for Advancement of Education; UNICEF Regional Award for his service for children and women; Comilla Foundation Gold Medal for his social work. He was also one of the founders of the University of Comilla, a private university.

My Acquaintance with Him:

First I came to know Janab Azizul Haq in 1969 as a rural development worker when he joined as the Director of BARD. Dr Akhter Hamid Khan, the founder of erstwhile PARD (now BARD) introduced Janab Azizul Haq saying, "I can't claim that I have many friends, but Azizul Haq is my friend. I have given him the responsibility of the Academy to develop it as the centre of excellence for rural development." From that time till his death, I tried to be with him as colleague in UNICEF and as a Rotarian. The memory of my association with him on several occasions, is of listening to him about his life and works, the antagonism he had faced, the love he received which made him a person with outstanding stature in his contemporary age. He led a very simple life with high thinking. He was always above any prejudices and a caring person. To me, he was like King Midas, any one coming in contact with him, turned into a different person. He had an inner light which he could infuse into others. With the loss of Janab Azizul Haq we have lost a thinker and a mentor. Our Rotary Club Dhaka Mid City lost a regular club guest. We pray for the eternal peace of his departed soul.

Empathy for the People: Janab Azizul Haq was so kind hearted that a simple example will speak about that. He used to provide funds to the veterinary surgeons for providing treatment to the livestock of the poor farmers of his area. There are other instances such as he used to support the poor students to continue their studies, provide shelter for the homeless. He was an extraordinary counselor to those who used to consult him for any job. He used to show them the way to succeed in life.

He is survived by his wife Rtn. Husnara Haq, Chartered President of R.C, Dhaka Mid City and an ex-Professor of English, University of Dhaka, son, Zia, a Chemical Engineer based in Washington DC, USA, daughter, Pia, a Geographer & GIS Specialist working in EGIS, Dhaka.

Before I conclude, I would like to mention that his life was so eventful and versatile that it is difficult to record all the contributions made by him throughout his life in a few pages. But as one of his close associates I have humbly tried to compile some of the significant contributions here.

Rtn. Shafiquk Islam, PHF is Member of R.C, Dhaka Mid City.

Community radio in tune with the grass roots

ROBAET FERDOUS

THE Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, throwing off the shackles of hesitation or restraints, is on the point of giving permission for Community Radio. Such a decision will undoubtedly act as a progressive step towards the free flow of information. Till today, not a single radio center sprang up to broadcast countless problems and immense probability with which people at grass-roots level are identical. Out of twelve radio stations working throughout the country, there is a private channel named Radio Metrowave. A research conducted by BARD (Bangladesh Academy of Rural Development, Comilla) reveals that half of the time of a programme schedule in connection with the state-run radio stations is allocated for music, 8 per cent for news and programs based on information, and most of the remaining part for motivational programmes.

Metrowave broadcasts programs for nine hours the major portion of which is fixed up for music. It, no longer, encourages programmes based on information or development. Programmes, oozing out of the government and non-government radio stations, have similar traits. Their programmes, for example, are one-sided and biased, providing no scope to the audience to participate therein. From time to time, the broadcasting organisation gets the task to cement close links with the audience finished, by answering the questions of some of the selected audience as regards songs or films. Thus the audience comes to be detached from the planning stages of programmes, collection of information and the broadcasting process. A peculiar sense is pervasively present in these organisations as if the honorable directors had grown conscious, beforehand, of the whole gamut of feelings or emotions, the audience nurtures. So they make and transmit programmes of their volition. And the audience listens to it silently. Thus the people put a seal on their lip automatically. Never do they chance to express their reaction to bring about a change in these organisations. Granted that the audience means ignorant, illiterate and passive whereas the anchorman is omniscient, enlightened and active. A code of practice likely to enable the people to make a contribution to the interchange of information, ceases to exist. The audience is thus deprived of the opportunity or right to have access to the ingredients of facts which constitute the foundation of mass media.

So the various ways of mass

The proper utilisation of local dialect, prevalent custom and culture so that all sections of the people are afforded the opportunity to contribute towards the enrichment of national culture, can make Community Radio accessible to all.

media, especially radio and television, appeared before the people as a mysterious thing. And the audience fell victim to its captivating allure. Radio stations gave birth to a sort of master-servant relationship in which the anchorman symbolises a lord and the audience his obedient servant. Since different means of mass communication couldn't rise out of the ideological straitjacket of traditional ideas, they have failed to reflect on a uniform, mass-oriented pattern of life. An attempt to discover the people, living in the far-flung rural areas, from the perspective of urban life, proved shattering.

The fact of broadcasting programmes on rural life was not prioritised as such. At one extreme, it appeared motionless and still. Many a person identified the media as being detached from the Masses. Someone described it as class-media. Society figures took advantage of such broadcasting organisations opportunistically for long, thereby providing comprehensive coverage of their own problems.

Community Radio, in the context of such realities, is likely to play a part in establishing human right to the use and distribution of information. It stands within the prospect of the people's credibility that the run of Community Radio Programs shall integrate with the necessity of diversity and community. The audience shall take part directly in interviews and discussions on radio programs. It is expected that Community Radio, as unbending, unbiased and participatory mass media, shall prove instrumental in ameliorating the condition of people, living in remote areas. By narrowing down the difference between information provider and information collector, Community Radio may ensure the people's access to the planning, selection and broadcasting of programmes. Community Radio, if properly used, is likely to enable an individual, shorn of information, to be enriched by means of a great deal of information.

But the truth of the matter is that planners and executives, in the bygone period, were far from regarding mass media as the key to the development process, by imposing undemocratic and unconstitutional decree upon the public. Consequently, the right of the common people to have access to information which, in all likelihood, constitutes the mainstream of development suffered a serious setback. The

enrichment of national culture, can make Community Radio accessible to all. This broadcasting organisation should, as early as possible, give birth to a situation in which commoners, besides collecting information and news, may edit, arrange together and broadcast programmes. The pioneering individuals may easily boost up, although never practised in the realm of mass media, the gradual growth and development of Community Radio by conducting a survey of how programmes impact upon the people's consciousness, or to what extent such programmes become acceptable to the audience. The nation gives credence to the fact that Community Radio, having no regard with religion, creed, caste, sex and so on shall adopt measures to conserve the cultural traditions and heritage of the people, and so to foster and improve the national language, literature and the arts, thereby appearing as popular mass media.

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