

## How to shore up the economy?

*It can't be done without rule of law*

THE ADB's Quarterly Economic Update, September 2002 on Bangladesh, released by its Country Director Toru Shibuichi day before yesterday, has hit the nail on the head. The growth rate in Bangladesh "is too low to create sufficient job and reduce poverty". The growth rate for FY 2003 is likely to increase to 5.4 per cent from 4.2 per cent during FY 2002. But that by itself wouldn't reduce unemployment significantly, according to the ADB reckoning. The GDP growth, led by industry and services, will have to increase to around seven to eight per cent annually in order that 25 to 30 million new jobs are created by 2015. Unless we reach that threshold, poverty which is the mirror-image of unemployment, will not be alleviated.

Creation of productive and gainful employment opportunities is critically dependent on investment. But "a weak law and order situation continues to adversely affect the development activities and investment climate in the country," says the update. Different chamber and industry bodies have made out a strong case for robust government action against crimes, murders, armed hooliganism, ransom-seeking and other forms of daily extortionism that industry, trade and business have fallen prey to. The World Bank, our development partners, bilateral donors and visiting foreign investors' delegations never tired of saying what we ourselves have felt in our bones namely, the law and order rating of a country is crucial to making investment decisions, either in favour of it or against it.

The government appears to have run out of normal options to control crime. That is why we are seeing army deployment for law and order reflecting the gravity of the situation. The criminals must get the message loud and clear.

The Bangladesh situation has been compounded by the fact that the government and the opposition are caught in a welter of confrontational politics. Now, the confrontation is in their respective mindsets not so much obvious and demonstrative in terms of opposition's agitational programmes like hartals and sieges or the ruling party's combative measures against them. As part of this rather unfolding positive outlook, one can cite the example of the opposition taking to parliamentary politics as a matter of policy. But these are bound to prove superficial before long if the armed cadres or mastaans would continue to be maintained by political parties, overtly or covertly.

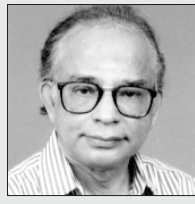
By an association of thought, we are led to what the World Bank Country Director Frederic Temple said while addressing a workshop on *good governance and accountability*, organised by News Network on Monday. He maintained that poor governance, law and order and corruption are the major hurdles in the way of achieving economic stability. Temple quantified the losses through inefficiency at the Chittagong Port at US\$ 900 million representing 14 per cent of the export value of goods transhipped. He has put annual revenue loss due to corruption and inefficiency in customs and income tax administrations at US\$ 500 million per year. In addition, the systems loss in the power sector valued at US\$ 100 million and the siphoning off of Tk 30-40 crore annually through public procurement account for a huge waste of scarce public resources, both domestic and external.

The net result is erosion of public confidence in the system of economic management coupled with deterioration of the investment climate, to say nothing of 'poor quality goods, works and services.'

Things cannot get any worse; so, it is time to bounce back.

We have learnt the hard way that it is basically the quality of politics in the country that tends to influence economic management. It is highly imperative, therefore, that the political parties in their best wisdom reach a consensus on the fundamentals of keeping the national economy safe from the vicissitudes of politics. What is a constitutional or democratic government worth if it does not work for the economic uplift and welfare of the people.

## Rightsizing BADC



HASNAT ABDUL HYE

BADC was suddenly in the news, at least in one national daily, with report of government decision to shed manpower from the organization and threatened strike by farm labourers appointed by it. According to the report, the ministry of Agriculture has asked BADC to retrench its 1604 farm labourers who work in fields to produce seeds for sale and distribution by the corporation. About 2842 officials and employees of the corporation will also have to go. Approximately taka 169 crore have been allocated to pay off the staff who will be retrenched. In this latest phase of retrenchment about 1187 of officials might be given golden handshake. It is learnt that the government has already sanctioned Tk.40 crore as retrenchment benefit to officials, employees and labourers during this year. When implemented, this will be the second largest retrenchment of manpower in the public sector carried out by the present government after Adamjee. Needless to say, it is a painful decision but one that brooks no delay.

The decision to downsize BADC is an old one which has now been renewed with greater urgency. The last government carried out a study three years ago which showed that BADC could manage with 6800

officials, staff and workers, given the prevailing workload. Monetary saving to the tune of Tk.24 crore could be made annually by shedding surplus manpower, according to the findings of the study. The findings and recommendations naturally created discontent among BADC personnel. The glorious past of the corporation and its important contributions were highlighted. Justification for retaining existing manpower was sought to be made

ogy, which made historic breakthrough in our agriculture, will be lauded without reservation. Because of these role and achievements green revolution and BADC, together with two-tier cooperatives have become inseparable in Bangladesh. As everyone knows, the green revolution, based on high-yielding variety of seeds, chemical fertilizer and irrigation involved a drastic transformation of our traditional agricultural practices. It

for similar activities. It went about its task of modernizing agriculture through the introduction of new technology of green revolution methodically and painstakingly. In every thana a depot was set up for storage of diesel and irrigation equipment complete with repair facilities. Training was given to mechanics, engine drivers and even farmers. Godowns were built for storage and marketing of fertilizer. Similar arrangement was made for

seed, BADC in effect became redundant. It was only a question of time for it to be folded up. But organizations like BADC does not become totally irrelevant as long as new roles emerge.

Switching from import of certified seeds to producing them through contract farmers was the new incarnation of BADC. It, together with remnants of the erstwhile activities, required a head office and manpower at field level, albeit with a

Instead of clinging onto jobs that have lost demand there are a few undertakings where its past expertise can be utilised for the benefit of farmers, particularly the small and marginal farmers. One of these is the production and marketing of certified seeds, which BADC has already undertaken. But it has not been accompanied with rationalisation of manpower at the head office. Seed production and even horticulture does not justify the number of staff still retained. BADC in its new incarnation cannot be the same beemoth as it was in its heydays.

It is quite possible that in future some more new activities may emerge as suitable for undertaking by BADC. These will obviously have to be such which cannot be undertaken or promoted either by the private sector or any other agency. Provision of package of services (irrigation, seed, and fertiliser) may be one such activity. This may be justified on the ground of slow coverage by the private sector and for competitive efficiency. But this will have to be strictly on commercial basis justified by profit or at least break-even earnings. The incremental staff will have to pay for their salary, allowances etc. through the income earned. With this type of activity BADC will require drastic restructuring and a new working procedure that will be fully decentralised. This is of course, about the future and a hypothetical possibility. The reality of the present is stark. BADC has to adjust and carry downsizing to the logical end. In deference to its glorious past and present role one may describe the exercise as 'rightsizing'. It will be painful nevertheless.

Hasnat Abdul Hye is a former secretary, novelist and economist.

## IN MY VIEW

**BADC's success became the cause of its decline. With the popularity of the new technology the private sector became aggressively involved. When the stage was reached to wind down subsidy from fertilizer, irrigation equipment and seed, BADC in effect became redundant. It was only a question of time for it to be folded up. But organisations like BADC does not become totally irrelevant as long as new roles emerge.**

on the basis of the new activities undertaken, particularly in the area of horticulture and seed production. In the face of opposition and unrest the government soft-pedalled, perhaps biding for time. When election was just round the corner the unpopular move of retrenchment was put on hold. It is now the unpleasant but unavoidable task of the present government to move ahead with implementation of rationalisation programme for the public sector.

The decision to retrench BADC personnel should not be seen as an attempt to run down the past of the organization. The organization is not being berated for its failure. Those who knew its history and are familiar with its activities in the past will always appreciate the achievements. Its role as an agency that helped disseminate a new technol-

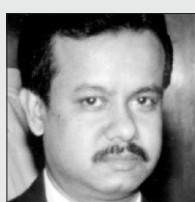
required huge investment for import, marketing and distribution of the technology package represented by seed, fertilizer and irrigation. To heighten the task, the majority of potential users were small and marginal farmers conditioned to subsistence farming and averse to costly risk taking. For an agency in the public sector it was a formidable challenge and unconventional role. As is well known, public sector is familiar and operationally at its best with regulatory work. Social engineering that involves change in peoples' age-old habits and practices is not its cup of tea. Behaving like a semi-commercial organization, buying from abroad and selling to farmers at subsidized rates, etc. were even more unfamiliar. It goes to the credit of BADC that it was undaunted by its lack of experience and precedence in the public sector

storage and distribution of high yielding variety of seeds. It was aided by agricultural extension officials and by farm cooperatives. The private sector was engaged as contractors to drill deep tubewells and import power pumps. Needless to say, every aspect of this huge operation did not proceed with clockwork efficiency nor without irregularities. Whatever be the occasional lapses the momentum for the technological breakthrough was never lost. Green revolution became a reality, the equity issue notwithstanding, and BADC was at its vanguard. Now it is all history. BADC's success became the cause of its decline. With the popularity of the new technology the private sector became aggressively involved. When the stage was reached to wind down subsidy from fertilizer, irrigation equipment and

reduced strength. This called for restructuring of the organisation with a view to rationalising manpower. Unfortunately, this was delayed even postponed with consequent financial complications. Even for the new-found role, BADC had no justification to have permanent farm labourers. For production of vegetables and horticulture temporary labourers could be hired. Ironically, though funds from different projects have reportedly been diverted to pay surplus staff, payment to farm labourers and contract farmers has remained suspended for months.

Reviving BADC in its old form is now out of question. Even attempt to retain additional staff after the retrenchment of 13000 since 1993 at a cost of Tk.232 crore will be unjustified given the present responsibility and role of BADC.

## Mist in the woods



MOHAMMAD BADRUL AHSAN

HIS tiny body came thrashing on the floor as he threw himself at her feet and wrapped his arms around her shins like a chipmunk clinging to a pole. The woman, who stood towering over him, jerked her body to shake him off, while her face twitched in shock and disdain as if she was in the coils of a snake. The boy wailed in spasms as she struggled to loosen his hold, others in the house wondering what was wrong between the two of them.

The woman cursed the boy that his tongue should burn in hell for what he had uttered if she were to claim a legitimate birth to her parents. The boy wailed louder and louder, asking for her forgiveness. She fumed even more, slapped the boy in the face and pushed him hard to unglue from her body. In the fits of anger she looked at those who had gathered on the scene and said at the top of her voice that the little punk had asked if she would like to marry him.

The small crowd around the two broke into laughter. The oldest

member of the house showed his embarrassment by putting his hand on his head and sticking out the tongue pressed between his teeth that looked like half the limp body of a rat caught in the jaws of trap. How could the boy say such a horrible thing to a woman who was old enough to be his mother, he asked. Someone in the crowd said in jest that *Rupban* and her lover *Rahim the King* had come down to earth. Another roar of laughter rocked the

landed face like sunshine beaming on a wasteland. He asked the boy again, this time with a contrived coolness, where on earth did he find that stupid idea to marry an older woman. The boy curled up on the floor as if the chilling glare of people around him was sending shivers through his soul. He was still sobbing, but the sound had begun to grow feeble like the tapering sputters of a dying engine. A middle-aged man smacked his

lips and surveyed the scene before speaking up with trembling voice that he thought he could marry if he liked a woman.

Each of those who were present split his side with laughter, while the boy looked amused as if he was finally being understood by all. The oldest man swung back and forth in the gust of laughter, stamping on the floor and slapping on his thighs, the noise of bellows rising from his lungs while his hollow cheeks sank

that she was the focus of attention with a suckling in that ridiculous situation. She grabbed the boy and jolted his body as if to shake out the secret he didn't want to speak. She slapped him again and screamed, her anger vibrating in the impatience of her body.

The boy groaned and bawled, this time muttering words in a weepy drawl. The middle-aged man rebuked the woman and told her that enough was enough. He took

with a tranced voice.

The noise of bellows rose again from the lungs of the oldest man who coughed before he told the boy that he had insulted and embarrassed the woman who was as old as his mother would have been if she were alive. The boy pouted his lips and said that wasn't true. As a matter of fact, he claimed, the woman looked like his mother who was killed in a village row. The oldest man said that was all the more reason why the boy should have been respectful to the woman.

For a while two of them stared at each other in the eyes as if to ascertain what one was trying to tell the other. The oldest man said with a smile that the boy should go and apologise to the woman and put an end to her embarrassment.

The boy walked to the woman and said he was sorry. He said he often dreamt of her wandering in the woods and her face converged with that of his mother before she vanished in the mist. He told about it to the gatekeeper of the house, who said that he was in love with the woman. The gatekeeper then said that he should ask the woman if she would marry him, because it was the only right thing to do for a man when he was in love with a woman.

The woman knelt down on the floor and hugged the boy, while rest of the crowd cracked up and convulsed with laughter. This time the woman wept, and the boy kept shaking her to know if he was forgiven.

Mohammad Badrul Ahsan is a banker.

## CROSS TALK

**A faint smile worked through the glum face of the boy, his swollen cheeks looking puffy in the glow of shame. He got up and sat on the floor, his eyes shinning through the wet eyelashes that sparkled like drenched grass after shower when the sun comes out. He pouted his lips and surveyed the scene before speaking up with trembling voice that he thought he could marry if he liked a woman.**

room, while the boy looked miserable and ashamed.

At long last, the woman managed to wiggle out of the boy's clutch, shaking her legs as she walked away to a corner of the room, complaining that the little monster had iron hands. While other female members of the house tried to calm her down, she demanded that exemplary punishment should be given to that rascal while he was still young. Then she turned at other women and described how her heart had leapt like a nervous frog the moment she heard that boy ask her that ridiculous question.

The oldest man couldn't resist a smile, which appeared on his crin-

lips in annoyance like the frustrated spectator of a tasteless show. He suggested that it could be the fantasy of an immature kid, and there was no need to make a spectacle of it. He rebuked the woman for being too sensitive and said that at her age she should be happy that a young suitor had come into her life. Another roar of laughter rose from the crowd.

A faint smile worked through the glum face of the boy, his swollen cheeks looking puffy in the glow of shame. He got up and sat on the floor, his eyes shinning through the wet eyelashes that sparkled like drenched grass after shower when the sun comes out. He pouted his

and bloated like the gill of a breathing fish.

The boy repeated his words, and rollicking laughter shook the walls. The woman fretted for a while, and rudely asked her little paramour to shut up. The boy lay down again, his face wrecking under the impact of gathering tears. The oldest man had regained his composure by that time, and asked the boy with a straight face that although what he said was basically true, where possibly could he find that idea.

The rush of tears choked his voice, and the boy bitterly wept, his tiny body quivering like the lid on boiling pot. The woman fidgeted meanwhile, feeling uncomfortable

the boy into his embrace and rudely asked others how they could be so cruel to that boy who had lost his mother. The boy wailed louder at the utterance of those words, which must have dredged the wound that had never healed inside his heart.

The oldest man pulled the boy towards him and locked him in between his bony legs bent like inverted angles. He ran his fingers through the boy's hairs, and told him that he should have respect for older people, especially for the race of mothers. If his mother were alive, would he have allowed others to talk to her like that? The boy nodded his head, closing his eyes like a coddled cat. Mother! He uttered the word

## OPINION

## Respect begets respect

PROFESSOR ABDUL MANNAN

PERHAPS about half a century back poet Kazi Kader Nawaz wrote a poem in Bangla glorifying the honor and dignity of a teacher. The text of the poem goes like this: A moulana of Delhi was appointed to teach the last Moghul Emperor Aurangzeb's (1618-1707) son. One morning the emperor saw that the prince was pouring water on the feet of the moulana while he was performing the 'ouzu' to say the morning prayers. Suddenly the moulana realised that the emperor while passing by had observed what the prince and the moulana were doing. The moulana became a bit worried. What would the emperor think about the incident? The prince pouring water at the feet of an ordinary moulana! The worry was to be short-lived. The moulana had second thought: why should he be worried about the incident? Teachers being the most honorable people in the society are entitled to obedience from their pupils. He has not done anything wrong. If the emperor summons him he will tell him what the great books of knowledge say about the honor and dignity of a teacher.

Next day the moulana was summoned to the emperor's court. He wondered what was waiting for him. To his utter surprise the emperor charged moulana that the prince has not learnt any good

manners from him. He went on and said, "Yesterday I saw my son pouring water on your feet while you were performing the 'ouzu'. But why didn't he clean your feet with his own hands? What kind of manners did you teach him? I was very sorry for being a witness to such an unfortunate incident!" the emperor added. The moulana was surprised. He bowed before the emperor and said, "From today, the head of a teacher will always remain high. You are great emperor, Aurangzeb, you are great!"

The above incident has been narrated just to show what is expected from a teacher as well as from a student in an ideal situation. Emperor Aurangzeb ruled India some four hundred years ago. No one these days expect a student to be washing the teacher's feet nor does a teacher has the need to ask anyone to do so. The context has changed and so has the culture. But surely teachers do demand respect from students and students expect proper treatment from teachers. A few personal experiences will not be out of place.

I have been in the teaching profession since 1973. It began in a large public university. I studied at an 'elite' school in Chittagong where we had quite a few foreign teachers back in the mid fifties and sixties amongst us. Almost all of them were Christian missionaries. They would be very friendly people

and would keep on telling the students not to be afraid of their teachers but learn to respect them. People should be afraid or scared of dangerous animals only. Teachers are no animals. They would also say respect is earned and not forced. The behaviour of my schoolteachers was such that respect for them would come from within. The only person of whom we were scared was the prefect. Well people in-charge of discipline cannot afford to be lenient. In those days, discipline was a top most priority in most of schools.

During the later part of my life I tried to carry the culture of respect with me. Respect for parents, respect for elders, respect for teachers, respect for fellow colleagues, respect and love for my students was always there in me. At least I tried. But this is a culture, which perhaps is gradually slipping away. When I was appointed the Vice-chancellor of Chittagong University on November 6, 1996, first thing I did before I joined was to go to the residence of some of my former teachers and senior colleagues and seek their blessing. They were extremely happy when they saw that one of their former students was appointed to the highest post of the university. Few days later I happen to meet one of my favourite teachers, Dr. M. Habibullah of Dhaka University at a University Grants Commission meeting. When I touched his feet in

public and sought his blessings I could see tears in his eyes. He commented: 'what can a teacher expect in his life than such respect from one of his former students?' I heard he quite often would narrate this incident to his students in the class. I always had a very high respect for another of my teachers, Dr. Abdullah Faroukh of Dhaka University. He passed away a few years back. I could not meet him personally but did not forget to give him a call. Couple of days later I receive a letter from him saying that he is overjoyed to see in his life time that one of his students has achieved such a success as to become a Vice-chancellor. Ahmed Safa, the late litterateur wrote to me that he has never sent a letter felicitating to anyone. He has sent me one because he respects me. Ahmed Safa was much senior to me all the way. We knew each other since my student days at Dhaka University. I told my teacher Dr. Abdullah Faroukh, Ahmed Safa and other well wishers that I am a very humble person. However I try to respect people and believe that respect begets respect.

Why is the culture of respecting people becoming rare? This is a question that sociologists can perhaps answer. As laymen the only thing we can say is that one of the reasons the young generation are getting away from this culture is

that 'role models' are becoming a rare species. Role models in politics have long since disappeared. Most of the teachers these days hardly find time to spend with their students outside the class. They are either busy with private tuition or on the run for the second assignment. The urban parents hardly find time to spend with their children. Many children experience a lifestyle, which is not supported by their parents' honest income. I have known people of my profession 'terrorising' their students in the class and reminding them that they will not discuss anything more than once in the class room! I always wondered why couldn't they say I am your best friend in the campus and I will repeat anything that you are not able to understand till you do so. Such colleagues perhaps have never understood the magic that comes with such a simple approach. To command respect from students or from others one will have to create role models and set examples. The students or the young generation will have to be told the difference between respect and fear. There is no shortcut to this or any reason to apply force. Respect is something that will have to be earned. Respect begets respect. The sooner we realise the better for us.

The author is the Dean of Faculties, East West University

## Good English does matter!

KAMRUL SYED  
Kansas, U.S.A

WE are living in an era where globalisation has changed everything exchanging free flow of information on the web less than a second as well as the transformation of human skills and intuitions. Nations are uplifting tariffs and barriers to ease businesses and other affairs. We can no longer isolate ourselves from the rest of the world. Good education and learning communicative English are must in this 21st Century. But it seems that most of the educated Bangladeshis with the exception of a few are lagging far behind in making them eligible in the global market.

Even though our people become educated but their education remains limited to our geographic boundary. But this degree doesn't mean a thing to the world unless we can prove that our learning and communication skills are good enough to cope with the English speaking world. Once our people go overseas they end up as dishwashers and holding other less-prestigious jobs. We often come across people like these who in spite of holding good degrees can't find a suitable job overseas.

What's the utility of getting all these higher education and professional degrees if it becomes

obsolete when crossed the national boundary? There is also a tendency among the Bangladeshis to become segregated in their own community than being part of a dominant culture. I believe nobody wants to leave their comfort zone unless they have to but my friend it is the learning process! For most people, the problem lies with their poor communication skills.

It is sad that even though we start learning English from the kindergarten level our communicative English does not match the standard of all these English speaking countries. Nowadays, there are hundreds of English-Medium schools in Dhaka and other parts of the country which have opened its doors on profit motive but do very little for developing communication skills of their students. Unlike the Indians, Bangladeshi parents usually don't communicate in English with their children. Early teens or most teenagers learn only a few jargon words for their everyday lives and tend to mimic MTV culture or Indian subculture and pretend themselves that they are not lagging behind from the western world. But they are pathetic in comparison with our neighbouring country India let alone the 'international standard'. One might argue that India has so many official

languages that English is the only way for them to communicate with each other. Obviously, on the average, their proficiency in English is much better than that of Bangladeshis. However, the real problem exists with our education system. We are more apt in memorising the lessons rather than actually understanding it. Our education system emphasises depending on our tutors for notes or to follow guide-books without understanding the subject matters. By doing so, we are in fact jeopardising our future rather than actually building it. Also in most cases our teachers are not qualified enough (even though they hold countless degrees) to teach effectively or simply can't make the classes interesting. How can we expect positive outcome when our teachers are lagging behind the modern education system?

We need to keep in mind that the world is becoming a global village. Getting a degree or two is not a ticket to find suitable jobs. We need to upgrade and update our education system and concentrate more on English learning.