Selling the nation's souls

T is indeed an interesting juncture of our national history. The external pressure is mounting, the internal flux is waiting to burst out and the policy makers have to decide whether to sell the souls of the nation or not. The high quality natural gas is a remarkable blessing for a country like ours. While the 65 per cent of the world's proven oil reserves are in the Middle East and almost 75 per cent of the world's proven natural gas reserves are in the former USSR, the gas and oil reserve in Asia or in Bangladesh amounts a very tiny fraction of the global commercial venture. Although we won't be flooded with gas dollars as the Saudis were with petro dollars in the seventies, it is a vital decision for the policy makers in three respects. Firstly, external geo-political dynamism is shifting very quickly and to be a credible part of the contemporary order the government, to some extent, will have to pay heed to the external pressure, which is in favour of exporting gas. Secondly, internal political culture of the nation is very volatile and people are easily swaved by the emotional remarks of the politicians, which are currently opposed to the idea of exporting gas. And as a political party current government is not only concerned about the well-being of the country but also to buy their legitimacy from the people for another five years through striking a critical balance between external and internal forces. And finally, how much economic sense it makes to improve the well being of the current generation by exporting gas at the expense of the future generation assuming that future can reap the benefit if we don't sell now. A critical discourse of all those factors is essential to come up with a decision of such important national issue. This piece is dedicated to attain that

Under the umbrella of the global capitalism big businesses around the world are increasingly influencing the national economic policies and shaping the trend of the future global economy. Fortune 500 companies constitute the bulk of the research and development spending of the world. The future knowledge of the world is at the core of those big corporations by the U.S. firms. Although only 14 per cent of

objective to some extent.

the global population lives in the developed countries, they own the 97 per cent of the world's big corporations and by R&D spending 99 per cent of the global new technologies are in the control of those big corporations from the developed countries. In the new world order, trade barriers are shifting and global market is getting inter connected through trade and more importantly. through the expansion and infusion of those big businesses into the emerging and developing economies. The informal nexus between the big corporations influential governments of the world is a worrying phenomenon for the developing countries, in general and Bangladesh, in particular. As a developing nation heavily dependent on foreign like ADB and World Bank, Bangladesh cannot simply ignore the mounting pressure from those

seems to me that Bangladesh can create a positive image in the external world by sending a signal that it is ready to cooperate with the world business interest. But the big guestion is at what cost? Policy makers of the nation will have to weigh the cost of exporting gas against the future benefit it can reap and make no mistake, no nation in the world can ignore the forces of global big business and capitalism. The best example in this regard is China. It tried hard to nurture indigenous big business to compete with the global giants but finally gave up in 1999 by signing the WTO treaty. Let's accept the fact. It is the big corporations that who bring FDI. And why should any business invest in our economy if they cannot reap the profit from it. They don't care about principle. The only thing they care about is profit.

Internal political dynamics is no less important for the policy makers.

export, the opposition will call for mass protest and if they deicide not to export, then the opposition will again take the credit. It is difficult to wake up some one who pretends to be asleep. Our politicians are like that. If not constructive engagement, the only viable option for the policy makers is to educate the people through mass media. It won't be easy and I can easily predict some rough times are ahead no matter what decision comes out of the cabinet. But gifted with a huge middle class urban society, people will in the end be able to separate the skim from the milk and reward an economically viable proposition.

Finally and most importantly the economics of gas export should get the utmost priority in the process of making a decision. Forecasts have suggested the exports could raise \$300 million a year in foreign earnings for the cash-poor country. The



No matter how tremendous the external pressure is policy makers should weigh a decision in terms of internal dynamics as well as the whole normative economics behind the decision. One thing is pretty obvious that the present generation can certainly gain from exporting gas. But the uncertainty revolving the impact on the future needed to be assessed carefully keeping in mind the external technological and global business revolution, internal dynamics and a proper mechanism of spending the gas revenue to compensate the future generation.

bodies to formulate its national policy on gas export. Already a \$250m loan from the Asian Development Bank (ADB) to build a pipeline to supply the western part the country hinged on the exports. The ADB has asked the government to export gas daily to India, the nearest market, to underwrite the loan. Major oil companies. including Unocal, Chevron, Texaco of the US, Anglo-Dutch Shell and Ireland's Tullow, and many smaller Western oil exploration firms, have pressured successive governments to export natural gas.

After the fall of USSR, the de facto foreign aid is declining and sitting on a world class natural gas reserve, no matter how small it is, Bangladesh simply cannot ask the donor agencies to donate more once they can generate their own revenue through gas export. It seems that global big corporations and their buddies are committed to invest in the country once they get what they want i.e. gas export. It

They are sitting on a live volcano that can erupt any moment. Gas export will certainly become a big issue in national politics. Plenty of protests have already been staged. Government will have to sufficiently convince the people no matter what decision they make. In developed countries they usually have referendum on such kind of issues. But in a country like ours, one year of gas revenue will be easily evaporated and it's very hard to afford for the exchequer. The most effective way for the government would be to share the burden of convincing with the external bodies. But again it involves the external bodies into the policy making process of the individual nation and the so-called notion of sovereignty issue is in question. The only option then left to us is a constructive engagement among the political parties. But the way our political culture works no matter what decision government makes, it is going to be an issue in the politics for sure. If they decide to

malaria, measles, and malnutrition

are the main killers. Poverty is an

overriding cause. Some 600 million

children live on less than US\$ 1 a

day. Malnutrition contributes to 60

per cent of all deaths in childhood.

Malnutrition and infectious diseases

are a deadly duo that preys espe-

As per statistics of Social Welfare

Department the number of floating

children in our country is about four

lakh. More than one NGO engaged

in rehabilitation of sex workers

informed that the number of children

born to prostitutes across the coun-

cially on the young.

reserves of 13 trillion cubic feet (390 billion cubic metres) of which more than 23 per cent has already been extracted, according to official figures. The reports said unless new reserves were found Bangladesh would need to import natural gas after 2015, estimating that up to 69 trillion cubic feet would be needed up to 2050. Given this official figures Bangladesh is studying a proposal by Unocal to export gas to neighboring India through a 1,350 km (850 mile) pipeline while still seeking \$685 million in damages from Unocal for the discharge of natural gas during a devastating fire in 1997. Unocal said in its statement it believes there were still "undiscovered gas resources of over 32 trillion cubic feet". Bangladesh will be selling part of its own self and the economic gains from it better be worth it.

country has proven recoverable gas

The fact of the matter is we need foreign currency and we also need FDI from foreign businesses and no

Children caught in a vicious cycle

SHAKEEL AHMED IBNE MAHMOOD

cause of ill health, but to what extent does illness perpetuate poverty? Little is known about poor people's experiences of ill health or their coping strategies. What direct and indirect impact does sickness have on their economic well-being?

Eleven million children die every vear from preventable and treatable causes, according to WHO and UNICEF. Of the 11 million, eight million are babies; half of them in the first month of life: 90 percent of the children die each vear at home

A study by the Institute for Development Policy Analysis and Advocacy (Proshika) and the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine examines these issues in Dhaka city. Illness is a key constraint on the ability of slum households to secure their livelihoods. Action is needed to reduce health risks, improve healthcare and provide social and financial support. As part of the Urban Livelihoods Study, the researchers analysed qualitative data from one 'bustee' (slum) settle ment supplemented by information from a wider quantitative survey of 732 households. Factors for poverty are: ignorance, illiteracy, malnutrition, overpopulation, various diseases, superstition, joblessness, low income, rape violence, food availability, accessibility to health services or its availability and also perhaps most importantly gender disparity, behavioural patterns and caring practices at household.

They also found that ill health is a chronic stress factor for slum dwellers, directly causing loss of income, job insecurity and increased expenditure. There are also serious indirect effects on family relationships and social networks. These include husbands taking another wife when their original partner suffers prolonged illness and the abandonment of wives when they become pregnant or cannot contribute to the economic well-being of the household. Social support networks are weakened when a family affected by illness becomes a drain on resources

The World Health Organization said that despite recent progress in combating iodine deficiency, 50 million children worldwide were born last year without protection against the deficiency. A lack of iodine. particularly during foetal developUnited Nations has focused on providing iodized salt. Since 1990. when the World Summit for Children set a goal of eliminating the deficiency by 2000, the number of countries with salt iodization programmes has risen from 46 to

Perspectives on development revealed that nearly 700 Bangladeshi children die of hunger or other nutrition-related cases every day, a World Bank report warned. Bangladeshi street children and primary school children both are malnourished.

The fact that many children of the poor must work, either for their own survival or to augment family income, cannot be ignored, as alternatives are still not in place. Under these circumstances. preventing children from working is clearly immoral as some parents find it impossible to give their children the care and attention they need. However, encouraging results of a pilot project have given the country 'new hope' that it can break this most challenging development barrier. The government is now expanding the pilot project into a nation wide National Nutrition Programme (NNP) to take nutrition services to all rural areas of the country by 2015.

According to UNICEF, half of Bangladesh's children are malnourished and many work instead of attending school. Despite the government's various steps to increase the nutrition status of the nation, the malnutrition level in the country still remains highest in the world, affecting the health and education of the children and productivity of its adult population.

Children deserve to be at the very centre of our development agenda and international cooperation. We have to work consistently and continuously in support of our chil-According to UNB, the child

mortality rate in the country is still 60 per thousand as 40 newborns in 1000 die within one month of their birth. In the annual conference and scientific session of Bangladesh Neonatal forum June 2002, it was

try having no identity of their fathers is nearly one and a half lakh. The number of sex workers is almost one lakh. This includes floating prostitutes. Most of the offspring of these sex workers become floating kids and majority of them reside in Dhaka

One NGO worker informed that on an average 693 floating children enter Dhaka city every month from various parts of the country. Most of them are either forced to come to the city due to torture by step mothers. misbehaved by fathers or being driven by hunger.

Recommendations: Appropriate measures must be taken at the earliest. Importance of proper education at all levels, including school and out-of-school and counselling, offering nutrition services, improving immunization and control

ment, is a leading cause of mental revealed that the child mortality rate of diseases is emphasized. Public impairment. While doctors say the in our country is higher than that of awareness on fortification and mineral can be absorbed by eating many developing countries of this nutrition, reduction/ alleviation of region Then pneumonia diarrhoea micro nutrient deficiencies increased resistance to diseases increased intelligence, income and productivity and better opportunities for survival and participation in development work is urgently required to overcome the problems.

> Conclusion: How children are cared for at home and in their community has a decisive impact on their chances of survival. We need to provide parents and caregivers with essential knowledge and commodities that can save the lives of their children. We also need to bring down the child mortality rate at an acceptable level to achieve the desired goals of national develop-

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poor must work, either for their own survival or to augment family income, cannot be ignored, as alternatives are still not in place. Under these circumstances, preventing children from working is clearly immoral as some parents find it impossible to give their children the care and attention they need. However, encouraging results of a pilot project have given the country 'new hope' that it can break this most challenging development barrier. The government is now expanding the pilot project into a nation wide National Nutrition Programme (NNP) to take nutrition services to all rural areas of the country by 2015. The WB and other donors are supporting the NNP launched in 2000. Malnutrition has a significant effect not only on the individual member's welfare but also on the Bangladesh economy. If the current situation continues. Bangladesh will lose \$ 22.9 billion in ten years that can only be averted through comprehensive nutrition programme. However we also need 'strong political commitment' and administrative support and intensive collaboration with development partners. Above all Bangladesh should immediately translate its Health policies into

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action to benefit the people of the

get the return or once we deny them to reap the return after they have found gas reserve in our country. But the decision to formulate the gas export should focus on some deeper normative economics than iust numbers. Numbers don't always speak the truth. If we export gas today what would be the impact on the future economy. Policy makers will have to decide whether the current generation will gain at the expense of the future generations. If we enjoy a better per capita income and after fifty years major part of our forex reserve is spent on energy import then better not export now. But the argument doesn't stop there. The pace of technological development will certainly develop alternative sources of power and if the future of the economy shifts towards alternative sources of power and the viable market of our gas is limited given our geographical set-up, then the world class gas will have no value or very limited value to the future generation. In that case, better exploit it now and give the future generation a better economic foundation by investing in the national infrastructure. If we wait to explore new gas field and then decide to export, I doubt any company will be interested to commit

further resources if they are not

allowed to reap the return from the

existing discovery. And most impor-

tantly, even in the long future we

need foreign expertise and technol-

whose traces will be long lived.

body will invest once they cannot

ogies to explore and extract our resources. Decision of the government has to be saleable to both the nation as well as future and existing foreign investors with equal importance. In this phase of global business revolution we simply cannot afford to play with the market the way we want to. If we don't show proper respect today, market will punish the future as well as existing generation in a severe manner Every nation is selfish in international politics. No matter how tremendous the external pressure is policy makers should weigh a decision in terms of internal dynamics as well as the whole normative economics behind the decision. One thing is pretty obvious that the present generation can certainly gain from exporting gas. But the uncertainty revolving the impact on the future needed to be assessed carefully keeping in mind the external technological and global business revolution, internal dynamics and a proper mechanism of spending the gas revenue to compensate

following years. Mohammad Mozahidur Rahaman is

aCommonwealth Research Scholar, University of

teousness. In the end Kabir and his picketing group won; that was a bad year for the officer and so were the

son for a travel to the far end of the globe intending to enjoy short leisure with the son's family and medical care of distinguished son in-law there. It was otherwise in the destiny. After half an hour of flight from Dhaka airport, he collapsed on the lap of his son sitting beside; the worries in filling the vacuum being British Airways plane, on insistence of his son for a quick medical attention, turned back in mid air to return to Dhaka. The ambulance was in readiness on instruction from the air and he was taken to CMH but only to be pronounced to have passed away. December 14 of 1992 was a day of profound grief to the family, friends, students and

Lest we forget

N inspiring research

scientist and a devoted

teacher of physics during

his working life, the man was known

to his acquaintances wearing a face

of fulfilment and satisfaction in his

well-earned days of retirement.

Then one day he joined his eldest

acquaintances of Dr. Mohammad

M BADIUZ ZAMAN

Born in 1925 in 'Ruhr' Bengal of Chandidas-Kirtibash-Tarashankar-Kumudranjan, he was second of five sons of his parents. His father went on elephant back for wedding and in Kabir's own time all brothers compulsorily had to take training on horse riding. He was markedly noticed in his early days for not taking own advantage of privileges in that feudal society, being bent upon values of education and sense of idealism. These earned him popularity barring shades of religion and social segments. Rural carnivals (mela) were popular in those days and many kinds of anti-social activities were rather for recreations in such carnivals. The mela of Boiragitola near his place was one of the largest in rural Bengal. In his late school days during one such mela he and his friends together stopped all anti-social activities including gambling; but those were sources of income particularly for the law enforcing officer who had camped with family in the very house of Kabir's parents. In no time complaints reached and Kabir was summoned by the parent for advice to stay away from whatever clashed with interests of the law enforcing officer, then a quest at the house Kabir was cool in briefing laws in these regards. He had blessing of a pious mother known for her righ-

Kabir was a role model to young generation of his locality for value of

education and idealism. This had very positive impact in that society. After schooling, Mr. Kabir had college education in Burdwan and graduation from Calcutta a year before the British rule ended. He started his career in the Presidency College of Calcutta encouraged by Dr. Qudrat-e-Khuda who was the Principal of the college at that time. One day in 1950 he visited Dhaka and went to pay a courtesy call to his earlier acquaintance Khan Bahadur Abdur Rahman Khan (father of Architect F.R. Khan), then Principal of Jagannath College. Principal Khan apprised Kabir of his

Dr. Mohammad Kabir: Inspiring

teacher and scientist



Late Dr. Mohammad Kabir

created with migration and loss of good teachers since partition of Bengal and asked Kabir to teach in Jagannath College. This was a difficult decision to make all on a sudden, but deliberation of Principal Khan prevailed upon and Dhaka became home of Mohammad Kabir and his family.

A soft-spoken amiable personalitv Mohammad Kabir was very particular about responsibility toward his own family. In spite of strong desire he could not start undertaking doctorate programme of education till lapse of a decade before completing certain responsibilities. He completed his doctorate degree in Medical Physics from the University of Leeds in England and nost doctoral Fellowship at the Central Scientific and Industrial Research Organization in Canberra, Australia. He visited several countries on assignments.

While a teacher, he was superintendent of two student hostels and this brought him closer to the students and even to their personal matters requiring attention and advice. There were students who would come for tutorial instructions. Then there were others who would come for preparation of employment opportunities in aviation.

socio-economic lives of the people

remains pervasive. The most basic

public goods do not get delivered.

Our government still lacks institu-

tional delivery system to reach the

poorest section of the society who

are without any direct political

umbrella to reallocate investments

in their favour. The ability of govern-

ment to deliver most basic services

is further weakened by endemic

corruption. As a result of these the

physical structure of poverty in

Bangladesh has become more

meteorology and like. Some students from modest homes needed material support and thus his children had tutors like 'Noresh bhai'. 'Ansar bhai' and others. A friend of his vounger brother was unable to deposit fees for final university examination for remittance had not yet arrived from his father; Dr. Kabir immediately made a provision within means although he did not know the friend; such was his idea of priority. Others came with problems of variant natures. One used to be a short story writer. After a few encounters on the subject, the teacher advised his student to bottle-up his talent for the time being and be mindful to the studies. Well, the student turned out to be a successful man later in life but not a writer. He remained an admirer and frequent visitor to his former teacher till last days.

Dr. M Kabir was long associated with scientific research and in guidance of young scientists till he was head of Technological Research Board. He was an active member of the Association of Scientists and Scientific Professionals. This brought him close to scientists within and outside the country. Some foreign scientists like Dr. Augustine A. Inuma of Japan and another from Egypt were his personal friends and came to stay with him and his family in Dhaka on multiple occasions. He conducted oint studies with them and pubished papers in international journals. Dr. Kabir maintained his habit of writing scientific articles in various scientific journals including Nature. He authored textbooks on general science and mathematics approved by the Education Board and translated scientific books in

Dr. M. Kabir taught physics at Jagannath College for almost a decade. He also taught briefly at the Mymensingh Agricultural University, holding positions of Head of Physics as well as Head of Mathematics simultaneously. His innumerable ex-students spread all over remained as attached to him as they were when students. They are politicians, engineers, doctors, scientists, teachers, civil servants, lawyers and in all walks of life. He enjoyed friendship of large circle among teachers of Dhaka University, Mymensingh Agricultural University and scientists of Atomic Energy Commission, Jute Research Institute and of the scientist community.

Bengali

We remember Dr. Kabir on his tenth anniversary of demise: he will remain to all of us who knew him an

Poverty, employment opportunity and rural development: Reciprocal relationships

MOHAMMAD RAFIQUL ISLAM TALUKDAR

the future generation. This decision

involves the selling of our souls.

They better get it right this time.

N the decade of 1960s rural development was just seen as the augmentation of agricultural production. In the 1970s it got defined in the World Bank declaration during its conference in Nairobi, Kenya in 1973. There the socioeconomic development strategies against rural poverty included small farmers and landless peasants/labourers. The 20th century's most common/mainstream definition was given by economist Falcon who declared, "rural development means wide scale participation of rural population in the modernisation process.

Bangladesh is one of the poorest countries in the world. Here the scenario of poverty has become a mainstay of rural life. Most of the rural areas of Bangladesh can be marked as below poverty level. Alarming number of rural families depend on only one member's income. Most of the rural people in Bangladesh neither have depend able income nor have any sustainable income generating process. Majority of apparently able-bodied persons are unemployed, halfemployed or employed in disquise. Socio-economic conditions are depressed and crisis ridden. An increasing number of families somehow survive with below minimum calorie intake.

Only 5 per cent of the people claim 95 per cent of the gross national profit, and the remaining only 5 per cent is distributed among 95 per cent of the people, mainly rural people (80%), Approximately 10 per cent educated and half educated of the people who migrated from village to town with a view to changing their lives through involvement in the process of industrialisation as well as urbanisation have been frustrated to a considerable extent. They have no job security. Recruiting, suspending or punishment of these human resources are absolutely dependent on the will of owners, who are using

maximum labour and merit of those employees, but without delivering the rational financial support to provide economic security. Only negligible amount of profit is distributed among the employees, of which they simply fail to save any amount for future security. The inevitable result of it is that they remain the same as they were before -- poor.

The migrant people who work in NGOs also fail to meet both ends. Development notions have mostly become intangible in their personal lives, although they are concerned with human development. Those

The need for creating opportuniwho work in projects are not getting ties for self-employment should be It has been thirty years since the independence

atrocious.

of Bangladesh but poverty reduction remains a multifaceted challenge. Well we can take this challenge for a better future. A noticeable change between early 1990s and end of 1990s has been marked in some cases. The majority of rural people now have a desire to change their lives.

the facilities the donor countries or sponsor organisations are supposed to offer. And those who work in government organisations get poor office environment and too little salary to maintain a minimum standard of living. They shortly become ineffective and inefficient in discerning their prime function to serve people, rather they fabricate a net of corruption in all forms that destroy the professionalism. As a result public policies and opportunities are running in favour of some affluent people who are clever enough to deal with corruption. Consequently the rural people never get the deserved support.

From a human development perspective people are the ultimate of development. In the light of this view our existing rural development approach mostly fails to build around people-centered commitment. Our administration has fallen back on its most essential tasks.

an essential criterion for rural development. Efficient policy for gender equity and women empowerment in rural environment should be the second criterion. An equitable distribution of important national resources, prospects, facilities and gross national profit can reduce poverty to trigger the real rural development. Another crucial thing is to eradicate corruption from all levels of governance. Establishing the office of the ombudsman is an existing demand to diminish corruption from public bodies through

accountability and transparency mechanisms. Article 77 of the Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh prescribes for the office of the ombudsman. But no government would absorb this idea. After 1990 two democratically elected governments came to power. But none truly felt the need to establish the office of the ombudsman like in Britain and some other

Development does not trickle down itself. Unless the politicians become sincerely committed to govern the country with optimistic vision to touch the human development eradicating poverty, grassroots development would not be possible itself. Government should re-arrange socio-economic. lega and administrative setup where common prospects and opportunities will thrive towards greater good of common people impeding the shelter and protection for the opportunists. Many of the gains will remain fragile unless bolstered by strong growth in favour of the mass poor people. In order to further the improvement of capacities and socio-economic condition of rural people, national approaches to organise, justify and motivate them may be a vital step by government. In this connection the promotion of local government institutions with complete decentralisation may be a pathfinder. Another pro-active way to tackle the whole scenario of poverty and rural development is to take some updated control measures as well as compromise mechanisms to streamline the private and non-government organisations in line with the development needs.

Nevertheless, in order to face the challenge of globalisation government must invest liberally in human

development. It has been thirty years since the independence of Bangladesh but poverty reduction remains a multifaceted challenge. Well we can take this challenge for a better future. A noticeable change between early 1990s and end of 1990s has been marked in some cases. The majority of rural people now have a desire to change their lives. Women are emerging as significant contributors to the socio-economic growth. So there is no reason to lose heart and there are reasons to be optimistic if only the government takes the right steps.

Mohammad Rafiqul Islam Talukdar is a social