

MDGs: Some global perspectives



QAZI KHOIQUZZAMAN AHMAD

Declaration was based on the United Nations Declaration on Universal Human Rights. But, in the way the MDGs have been formulated, the Universal Human Rights are not properly reflected. Therefore, there is a question mark relating to the universal ownership of the MDGs among the peoples of the concerned countries. I have elsewhere discussed these two issues in some detail.

At least two conditions must be fulfilled, if a country has to achieve or at least make significant progress towards the MDG targets. One

and cannot be fulfilled quickly. But it is crucial that governance targets are set and solid progress towards those targets made by taking necessary action with determination.

The other crucial condition is that they have access to necessary resources. In most low-income countries, the domestic resources are limited, many are heavily burdened with foreign debt. Therefore, debt cancellation for the heavily indebted developing countries and increased official development assistance (ODA) need to be provided to all the poor

provide 0.7 per cent of their GDPs annually to the developing countries and territories. But, so far the level reached is 0.22 per cent, which currently converts to around US\$60 billion a year.

As estimated by the UN Millennium Project, developing countries would need US\$140 billion in ODA in 2005, made up of US\$74 billion as budgetary support to finance the MDGs in the low-income countries, US\$18 billion for non-MDG investments in the low-income countries, US\$30 billion for the middle income countries, and the

target of 0.7 per cent.

In the year 2004, the estimated ODA has been US\$60 billion so that another US\$80 billion was needed to make up the projected US\$140 billion in 2005. But, in reality, the ODA in 2005 may be only slightly larger than in 2004. At the same time, developed countries have not eased the access of exports from developing countries into their markets, despite agreements reached under the Uruguay Round of Trade Negotiations. Para-tariff, non-tariff, and other barriers are imposed, restricting imports from developing countries. Also, export opportunities for many agricultural commodities from developing to developed countries are constrained by heavy agricultural subsidies in the latter. In fact, subsidies to the tune of about US\$1 billion a day is provided to agriculture in the developed countries and about US\$2 per day per capita in Europe. Also, unrealistic labour and eco-standards are applied at times. On the other hand, precipitous trade liberalisation put in place in the developing countries, on aid conditionalities, essentially means import liberalisation for these countries, which hurts them, particularly their poor farmers and workers constraining both employment and production as a result of unfavourable competition both at home and abroad.

Clearly, therefore, developing countries remain disadvantaged, often severely, in relation to their export prospects on the one hand and limited ODA on the other. It appears, both because of inward-looking attitudes of the developed countries and aid-conditionalities imposed by them, that significant increase in the ODA and debt relief will not occur in the coming years. Clearly, therefore, the developing countries, in general, will remain resource-constrained on one hand and management capacity-constrained on the other so that progress towards the poverty reduction targets in most countries will not be achieved.

However, given that India and China together account for about half the population of the low-income countries and these countries are likely to make good progress in poverty reduction, there might be significant progress in relation to poverty reduction targets globally. But, a large number of countries in Africa, Asia and elsewhere will not be able to achieve these targets. While it is possible that some of the other targets under certain goals could be achieved by certain low-income countries, the poverty reduction targets would remain elusive for most of them. It emerges, therefore, that the MDGs are yet another agenda floated by the United Nations, which will remain unfulfilled in a large number of low-income countries around the world.

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Helping the poverty-stricken in Sudan

relates to the capacity of the country to implement policies and programmes effectively. In most developing countries, governance is poor in terms of human capability on one hand and lack of transparency and accountability on the other. That is, inefficiency and corruption are the two hallmarks of governance in these countries. It is, therefore, essential that the developing countries take necessary steps to establish good governance, including rule of law and improvement in the economic and social management capacity. Obviously, these are involved tasks

and resource-constrained countries to enable them to implement appropriate policies and programmes to achieve the MDGs. Currently, conditionalities imposed in relation to both ODA and debt cancellation are such that it is very unlikely that aid resources available to these countries will significantly improve. There are some initiatives relating to debt cancellation for sub-Saharan African countries. But, how far the initiatives will translate into real money being made available remains to be seen. Regarding ODA, the OECD countries promised to

balance to meet international operations including global public goods such as scientific research. It has also been indicated that the MDG-related ODA would rise to US\$108 billion by 2015, implying that the total ODA required in that year would rise to US\$177 billion, assuming that ODA for various non-MDG purposes remains the same as in 2005. The total projected ODA for 2005 and 2015 would account for 0.51 per cent and 0.56 per cent of the OECD countries' estimated gross national incomes (GNIs) for the respective years, substantially below

American eyes on oil rich Central Asia

AMM SHAHABUDDIN

Things moving against America?

Meanwhile, the wheel seems to have started moving in reverse gear for America, as the Sino-Russian led alliance had, in a recent summit declaration, asked America to set a date for their withdrawal from Afghanistan as well as from the two SCO member states, namely, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan. Moreover, the leaders at the Summit had also vowed "to step up security cooperation" among its member countries and

the US military presence in the area, particularly when the Taliban regime had been ousted from power in Afghanistan long ago and there is a marked fall in regular fighting there, because it has a historical attachment with both Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan, as members of the former Soviet Union. Although Russia is considered as a mere shadow of former Soviet Union, still it considers the two Republics as part of its sphere of influence.

Moreover, Kremlin is increasingly concerned about America's subtle move to encourage pro-US elements to overthrow the present pro-Russian

with a particular provision for joint Indo-US weapons production and cooperation on missile defence. The recent visit of Indian PM Manmohan Singh to Washington and his talks with President Bush had brought the world's two largest democracies further closer, of course, to serve a common cause. China must be taking it as a great challenge to its growing influence in the region.

This raises another basic question about US maneuvering in this region: What had really prompted Bush Administration to go ahead with its most ambitious National Missile

balance to use these new anti-ballistic missiles, costing US taxpayers 60 billion dollars? Moreover, this new missile production programme has recently become a part of Indo-US defence pact. Certainly not against minnows like Iran or North Korea, or Syria, or even Russia. Who else then?

Asignal for EU also?

But this missile threat is directed not only against the Asian giant China, or any other intransigent country, like North Korea. It has a strong signal for a 'third party' that is waiting in the aisle. While the two 'camps', one led by America and the other by China and Russia, are playing hide and seek in overstepping the other to gain extra-mileage in exploiting central Asian oil resources, the third party, rather in a low profile, is peeping through the key-hole to see the progress of the game and perhaps make its emergence at the right time to play its role in sharing the oil wealth. And the third party is no other than the European Union (EU), which is not just sitting idle on the fence looking the other way. It is quite clear from the statement issued by the EU on the recent crackdown on the uprising in Uzbekistan that left hundreds of citizens dead. America, which preaches democratic rights of the people, and Russia, both seem to be going soft with the autocratic ruler of Uzbekistan. On the other hand, EU had demanded an 'international and independent probe' in the iron-hand army action against the agitating Uzbeks. It may be recalled that EU had earlier, in 1995, revealed its oil exploration plan in Central Asia under which the EU Commission would open a potential fuel transport from Azerbaijan, Kyrgyzstan, and Turkmenistan to Europe.

Conclusion

Only time will show how things move and how China, Russia and EU react to America's new politics – military adventure in Central Asia. And if America goes berserk in Central Asia, neither China, nor Russia, nor even EU can resist the mighty runner. Whatever name you call Bush, he would continue to spread his 'military jurisdiction' wherever and whenever necessary. He had done it successfully in Iraq. He will undoubtedly be looking for new 'green pastures' in Central Asia, if necessary, by creating new 'grounds', although an expert on Central Asia at the Carnegie Endowment, had recently warned that America is 'losing ground' in Central Asia. So what? The show must go on.

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An oil rig in Azerbajan

had accused unnamed (guess who) "out side forces" of trying to "destabilise" Central Asia. The pointed reference to "outside forces" trying to foment troubles must be in the context of recent uprisings in both Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan, which had been suppressed ruthlessly by their autocratic rulers.

It also shows which way America is working to strengthen its position there. The new president-elect of Kyrgyzstan, in his first press conference, following his landslide victory in the recent election, had expressed his intention to review the question of withdrawal of US forces from his country, following the SCO Summit declaration.

Russia is more concerned about

leadership, as they had already successfully done in Georgia and Ukraine, spending millions of dollars in the name of teaching local people democratic reforms and human rights.

China's worry

China, on the other hand, is highly sensitive to and apprehensive of continued military presence of America in Central Asia and at the same time America's short and long-term programmes to boost India to become a major power in the 21st century. – certainly as a powerful road-block to China's rising giant China. The US motive was vividly revealed in the recent Indo-US Defence Agreement, signed in Washington, in June last,

Development (NMD) programme, at a cost of some 60 billion dollars, for which Bush, in his first year of Presidency, withdrew from the UN-sponsored Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) treaty of 1972, on the childish plea that the 1972 treaty had hampered America's defence missile programme. It may be mentioned here that the programme was initiated by president Clinton but was dropped by him in face of increasing criticism against it by China and Russia. But it now seems that where Clinton feared to tread, Bush had rushed in.

America is already armed with nuclear weapons to the teeth, so to say. Then why this new adventure for national defence missile programme? Against which nuclear power, Amer-

Kadigamar's assassination

Some unanswered question

In a statement, the president blamed "political foes opposed to the peaceful transformation of conflict and who were determined to undermine attempts towards a negotiated political solution to the ethnic conflict. As defence minister also Kumaratunga is aware of the opposition within the military hierarchy. Assassinating Kadigamar comes amid a growing political crisis in Colombo--as there exists a heavy division amongst the ruling elite over the peace process.

BILLY I AHMED

A SSASSINATION of Sri Lanka's foreign minister Lakshman Kadigamar has intensified political tensions throughout the country and the danger of a return to civil war. Kadigamar, a member of President Chandrika Kumaratunga's inner circle, was closely involved in finding out a polemic joint aid strategy with the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) and recent government efforts to restart peace talks.

The foreign minister was shot dead at his heavily guarded private house in central Colombo. Police Inspector General Chandra Fernando told the press there was no doubt the LTTE had killed him. A chorus of political parties and media in Colombo have also condemned the LTTE. The most vocal have been the Sinhala chauvinist parties – the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) and the Jathika Hela Ururaya (JHU) – that have been fulminating the government for signing the Post, Tsunam Operational Management (P-TOMS) agreement with the LTTE. The JVP quit the ruling coalition in June, protesting the bargain amounted to a betrayal of the nation and appealed to the police and military "to defy the orders given by the authorities that go against the national interest". JVP declared that "a true son of Sri Lanka has fallen" and denounced LTTE leader Velupillai Prabhakaran as "a bloodthirsty fascist hiding in the Wanni". Pledging to deepen its communal campaign, the JVP stated: "Our resolve not to hand this country to one of the worst criminals in the world grows stronger... We believe that it is better to die fighting for common humanity than to live like a coward."

It is possible the LTTE might have killed Kadigamar, because played the leading role in the government's campaign to have the LTTE branded internationally as a terrorist organisation. The LTTE is also deeply frustrated by the lengthy delays in signing the P-TOMS agreement as well as the continuing attacks on its cadres in the east of the island by a breakaway faction headed by a former LTTE military commander V. Muralitharan, also known as Karuna. The LTTE has repeatedly tongue-lashed the security forces, in particular military intelligence, for supporting the Karuna faction. Last week top LTTE spokesperson leader Anton Balasingham accused the military of carrying out "a dirty war of attrition" in the east and declared the government would be responsible for any breakdown of the ceasefire.

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In recent weeks, Kumaratunga has been in conflict with sections of the military. In June, she ordered the transfer of Rear Admiral Sarath Weerasekera from the east after he provocatively supported Sinhala chauvinist groups that erected a Buddha statue in the middle of Trincomalee. This deliberate designed action meant to heighten communal tensions in a region where there are already sharp conflicts between the LTTE and the rival Karuna faction.

At a meeting of top military officers on July 26, Kumaratunga called for their support to fulfil P-TOMS. At the same meeting, Weerasekera pointedly asked whether the president could impose the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA) or a state of emergency to combat LTTE in the east.

Earlier Weerasekera made an inflammatory speech at a passing-out ceremony at a navy training camp at Punewa. He declared that to refuse to take action against the LTTE's killings was "to show cowardice and timidity". He condemned the ceasefire for allowing the LTTE to build up its military position and told those present: "[We] should be ready to establish peace even through war".

As defence minister also Kumaratunga is aware of the opposition within the military hierarchy. Assassinating Kadigamar comes amid a growing political crisis in Colombo--as there exists a heavy division amongst the ruling elite over the peace process.

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Disability no bar to journalism

MASUDUL KARIM BISWAS

A man/woman or a boy/girl can be physically disabled. But despite that they can think, he/she can write with words and can express. One of their sorrows is although people think of them and sympathise with them, but those are rarely carried out in deeds.

In such a backdrop a media company – Media Professionals Group (MPG) – has come forward with an initiative to translate a dream of a section of disabled people into reality. It is the dream of bringing out their own mouthpiece, the dream of setting up their own platform for realising their rights from the rulers and policy makers. Only a physically impaired section of population having education can represent the other disabled sections (both physically and mentally impaired) of the country. MPG's journalism training for the disabled persons has lit that hope and Bangladesh chapter of a concerned international organisation, Action on Disability and Development (ADD), is supporting the initiative to give it a concrete shape.

We usually hear about training programs or workshops on news media/journalists. It is an innovative idea of MPG to empower one of the disadvantageous sections struggling for right with the capacity to make heard their voice and establish representation through news media. It is the capacity of doing journalism.

To inform and to motivate people are two important purposes of journalism or any mass medium communication. They want to convey how many of them with physical limitations either with blindness or other forms of disabilities can work or perform like a normal person.

Disabled people may not eat or write or walk smoothly like a normal human being. But he/she can independently write a report, can do his/her work differently than other normal human beings.

Seema, an MA student of Rajshahi College and an office assistant of Rajshahi City Corporation, participated in the three-day July 28-30, 2005 workshop on Journalism at the ADD training centre in Rajshahi. took notes of the training, wrote a hard news report and a feature in excellent writing although she is without both of her upper limbs.

Despite being a woman and physically disabled, Deena of Dhaka wants to become a journalist. She wants to write news of sufferings and problems of the disabled in the society.

As many as 25 disabled persons of 13 districts of the country participated in the training workshop. Most of them have passed SSC and HSC. Of them majority were female. Some of them have either completed post graduation or are pursuing graduation or post graduation in colleges. There was also a physically impaired lecturer of a college in Jessore – Md. Abdul Khaleq. Apart from techniques and theories of reporting and feature writing, they were given hands on training on information gathering and news report writing.

One of the findings of the workshop about participants' ability is, most of them can catch the main point of the event or news. News sense is a very important factor in journalism. In that context, their ability to identify main point of the event or intro is very significant. Though they have some problems of language in writing feature or organisng facts in a news report, they showed their potentiality. They were even prompt in understanding the difference between news and feature. In

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