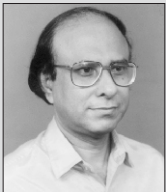


MDGs: Some global perspectives



QAZI KHOLIQUEZZAMAN AHMAD

THE Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) were derived from the Millennium Declaration adopted in 2000 at the Millennium Summit, which was attended by 156 heads of state or government. There are eight goals and 18 targets. The eight MDGs are: eradicate extreme poverty and hunger; achieve universal primary education; promote gender equality and empower women; reduce child mortality; improve maternal health; combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases; ensure environmental sustainability; and establish partnerships for development. The first seven goals and the 10 targets under them are the ones to be pursued by the developing countries, while the 8th goal involves action by the developing countries in terms of further expansion of the role of market and globalisation but also calls for assistance to be provided to them by the developed countries.

The MDGs are now being widely discussed in seminars, workshops, and campaigns within the UN system and around the world. As required, the developing countries have also been preparing, on aid conditionality, Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs) with reference to these goals. That is, unless the PRSP is in place in a particular country, it cannot expect to receive foreign assistance for poverty reduction purposes. In this article I would like to make some remarks relating to the global perspectives of the MDGs. The targets under the goals have been formulated as global aggregates, i.e. in terms of aggregation over developing countries pursuing these goals. Of course, individual countries are expected to follow these targets in formulating their own strategies.

The targets to be achieved have been set for 2015 with reference to 1990 as the base year. The targets set are to reduce the relevant deficit by half or by two-thirds or by three-fourths or to be fully alleviated. In so far as poverty reduction is concerned, for example, the targets are to reduce the proportion of extremely poor people to half by 2015 in relation to 1990, and also hunger by the same proportion.

There is an ethical question relating to certain targets, which arises when the question is asked: which half, which two-thirds, or which three-fourths? Also, the Millennium

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 cattle 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

AMERICA has its own road-map to move from one milestone to the other, to achieve its objectives, by hook or by crook. Its recent move towards central Asia, particularly the newly emerged Muslim states, namely, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan, all former Soviet Republics (of which Kazakhstan is expected to become one of world's largest oil producing countries in near future), shows that it wants to establish its supremacy in the region by dislodging Russia. With this move, America wants to kill two birds with one stone. On one hand, it wants to grab oil and other natural resources of the region, and, on the other, it wants to build up tight security measures against the rising Islamic militant groups in central Asia which is now considered as another fertile breeding ground for such elements. In this tug of war between 'minnow' Russia and superpower America, the former will be running for its survival, perhaps in collaboration with the newly formed regional bloc, called, Shanghai Co-operation Organization (SCO), with the participation of China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. So the stage seems to be well set to run the show.

SCO vs GUAM

In fact, the show had already begun and made considerable progress. As a counter-measure to meet the Shanghai-based central Asian alliance (SCO), America had also formed a regional organisation, named, GUAM, which includes Georgia, Ukraine (in both of which pro-US presidents had been elected recently by defeating pro-Russia candidates), Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan and Moldova. Besides, America had already established military bases in these countries, following the 9/11 terrorist attacks to strengthen the US-led war in Afghanistan. America had built military and air bases in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan during the war on terror in Afghanistan. Although Russia had not opposed the establishment of such military and air bases by America, it had recently struck a deal with Tajikistan in 2004, where five thousand Russian forces are based. In the same year, Russia had obtained a military base in Kyrgyzstan where America also enjoys an air base. So the race for outwitting each other is proceeding in full swing. Meanwhile, Uzbek President is reported to have asked America to close down bases in his country within two months. A real

body-blow for America.

Things moving against America?

Meanwhile, the wheel seems to have started moving in reverse gear for America, as the Sino-Russia 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 ambitions National Missile

ia is going 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 transregional 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 over-stepping the other to gain extramileage 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. Bush will understandably 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.

AMM Shahabuddin is a retired UN official.

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An oil rig in Azarbaijan

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 Asia'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 Kadirgamar 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

ASSASSINATION of Sri Lanka's foreign minister Lakshman Kadirgamar has intensified political tensions throughout the country and the danger of a return to civil war. Kadirgamar, 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 Urumaya (JHU), -- that have been fulminating the government for signing the Post, Tsunami 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 Kadirgamar, 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.

The LTTE has, however, downright confuted any involvement in Kadirgamar's assassination. In a statement, S. P. Tamichelvan, the leader of the LTTE's political wing, condemned Colombo for breakneck catapulting to upshot and called for a full investigation. "We know there are sections within the Sri Lankan Armed Forces operating with a hidden agenda to sabotage the CFA," he stated, adding in later comments that the government should "look inwards" for the culprits of the murder.

Speaking to the press, Tamichelvan declared: "We strongly condemn this act [the murder]... Connecting the LTTE to this killing is wrong and it will worsen the crisis. There is no need for the LTTE to kill him".

While government spokesmen have dismissed the



LTTE's denial, there remains many unanswered questions surrounding Kadirgamar's murder. Those in Colombo who have denounced the LTTE have not answered the most elementary question: what was the LTTE's motive for the murder? Those most to gain politically from Kadirgamar's murder are parties such as the JVP and JHU and sections of the military and state apparatus that opposed determinedly to any deal with the LTTE. The murder will balk efforts to complete the P-TOMS agreement and restart peace talks. While the government has declared that it will continue to oversee the ceasefire, there is clearly the heightened danger of a return to war.

The circumstances of the murder raise several questions. As Kumaratunga's key person, Kadirgamar was one of the most heavily guarded politicians on an island where there has been a long history of political assassinations. Why did his guards not take the elementary precaution of checking possible vantage points there overlooking his home?

The police detained two LTTE suspects ten days ago carrying out reconnaissance near Kadirgamar's house. In the *Sunday Times*, columnist Iqbal Athas, declared the Army's Directorate of Military Intelligence warned a week back that threats against the foreign minister had intensified. Yet 100 metres from his residence, one or more gunslingers were able to set up a sniper's rifle and a grenade launcher and watch their target unhindered for several days or more.

Not only did Kadirgamar have a large contingent of crack army commandos and Ministerial Security Division personnel to protect him, but his home is in a well-to-do area in central Colombo was heavily patrolled. But not only were the gunslingers able to gain access to an ideal vantage point but they were also able to escape unnoticed. According to the *Sunday Times*, Kadirgamar's security detail took no action against the killers. Instead it took two hours before removing any roadblocks, giving the murderers "ample time to escape".

The Colombo media has been critical about the "security lapse" that allowed the assassination. For instance, they dismissed police excuses as absurd that no search was made of the buildings near the residence because Kadirgamar had not wanted to offend his neighbours. It should also be pointed out that suicide bombing, rather than precision shooting, has been the hallmark of the LTTE's previous assassinations.

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."

In recent weeks, Kumaratunga has been in conflict with sections of the military. In June, she ordered the transfer of Rear Admiral Sarath Weerasesekera 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, Weerasesekera 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 Weerasesekera made an inflammatory speech at a passing-out ceremony at a navy training camp at Puna. 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: "[W]e should be ready to establish peace even through war".

As defence minister also Kumaratunga is aware of the opposition within the military hierarchy. Assassinating Kadirgamar 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 is a researcher.

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 odds 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. But it is an innovative idea of MPG to empower one of the disadvantaged 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 any issue or event. 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 organising facts in a news report, they showed their potentiality. They were even prompt in understanding the difference between news and feature. In

newspaper offices, we also find similar mistakes among newcomers or novice reporters.

The initiative did not end with the three-day workshop in July. Participants were given four assignments, both news reporting and features, in one month interval. There will be another training session early September when assignments of participants will be evaluated and their weaknesses addressed. Objective of the MPG is to bring the disabled participants at a stage where they can start working for newspapers, news agencies and broadcasting media.

The trainees were eager to learn more about journalism after the end of three-day training session. They asked the trainers about reading references to quench their thirst for knowing further.

Their deep interest was exposed through inquisitiveness and willingness about different aspects of news reporting. They kept trainers busy in clarifying and explaining different queries on news reporting.

Resource persons of MPG understood the knowledge level of participants and conducted the training sessions in communicative way, as the workshop topic was very new to the participants.

True, if such training workshop had not been conducted, potentialities of disabled persons would not be identified or discovered. The training workshop revealed that it is not impossible for a girl without both of her upper limbs to carry out her study upto MA level and work as an office assistant in Rajshahi City Corporation.

When they were asked to select issues relating to disabled persons, they came up with lots of topics. They said that they no longer wanted to take degrees under social welfare department. They want to be integrated with mainstream educational system. They want end of discrimination. They mentioned their problems in movement and described some horrific incidents of physical harassment on disabled women in different parts of the country. They are more interested to write on those issues. For this, they possess a desperate attitude to learn pros and cons of journalism.

The disabled persons have remained one of the neglected and uncared sections of the society. Even within a family, a disabled son/daughter is undervalued. Perception of most of the people of our society is almost same about the disability of disabled people. They cannot think that disabled people can be differently able. All the people do not know or can do every thing. They are also dependant on others for overcoming their limitations.

It is true that physically disabled people need to struggle more than the physically sound persons. But it is also a matter of fact that disabled persons' performance often can be better than normal persons.

There are lots of success stories among disabled persons. For instance, a blind person of an educated family in Rajshahi city is now earning highest amount among five brothers.

It is also a good sign that conscientious people of the administration have started to recognise the ability of educated and skilled disabled persons. If such people with physical limitations can be imparted capacity building or skill development training, they can also contribute a lot.

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