

Letters will only be considered if they carry the writer's full name, address and telephone number (if any). The identity of the writers will be protected. Letters must be limited to 300 words. All letters will be subject to editing.

Causes of poverty in Bangladesh



In response to the letter "Why Are We Poor?" by Miraz Ahmed (April 5) I want to say something about poverty in Bangladesh, especially the reasons behind it.

Before showing the causes, I would like to delineate the present situation of poverty in Bangladesh. Around 31% of the rural population presently suffers the indignity of chronic poverty: low consumption, hunger and under-nutrition, lack of access to basic health services, illiteracy and other deprivations for more than a decade. About 24% of the total population currently lives in extreme income-poverty. About 19% of rural households cannot have 'full three meals' a day; about 10% subsist on two meals or less for a number of months every year. While Bangladesh has come out of the "shadow of famine", the problem of starva-

tion still persists. However, 47% people are staying below poverty line and 28% of our popula-

tion lives under the extreme poverty line. About 40 million people go to bed without meal

every night. This observation shows that Bangladesh is a country of poor. Although, several international organisations like IMF, World Bank, Government and Non Governmental organisations have been working for the alleviation of poverty but the success in the field is very negligible i.e. 1% or 1.8% at best each year. Statistics show reduction of poverty in the last five years (1999-2004) from 44.7% to 42.1%. But according to the principles of Millennium Development Goals (MDG), we have to reduce poverty by 1.15% every year.

Now what are the causes of poverty, which was the question of Miraz Ahmed. As regular readers of DS we can give the following points as the causes.

- A.Rapid growth of population.
- B.Inequitable distribution of land, income and productive assets.
- C.Death of chief wage-earner.
- D.Incapability of chief wage-

earner through accident, illness, and old age.

- E.Chronic irregularity of work.
- F.Largeness of family.
- G.Low wage.
- H.Habits drinking, betting, and gambling.
- I.Careless housekeeping for improvident expenditure.
- J.Chronic shortage of cash.
- K.Absence of food reserves.
- L.Natural calamities (river erosion, cyclone, tidal surge, excessive rain).
- M.Under developed communications system.
- N.Lack of education and skilled labour.
- O.Lack of administrative fairness and accountability.
- P.Limited access to public services.
- Q.Lack of mass people's participation in local government etc.

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How is it possible?

The prime minister said that she & her government didn't know about the existence of Islamic militants in Bangladesh before August 17, 2005. This went beyond the limits of credibility because her government had banned the JMB in February 2005, which was behind the countrywide bomb attacks on August 17 last year. The pertinent question is if they didn't know about the existence of the Islamic militants why did they ban JMB then?

It's obvious that the role of the government before August 17 was quite questionable. Most of the newspapers in Bangladesh published the news of the potential threat of Islamic militancy. They gave the facts and details. They relentlessly tried to pursue the government to take action against militancy, but they failed. At that time the government said that the Islamic militancy was a *déjà vu* created by the media. They also withdrew the Time Magazine from the newsstands because they published a feature about the potential threat of militancy. If they took necessary steps at that time, some innocent people might have escaped death.

After all, it's Bangladesh, where nothing is impossible. Farmers demand electricity but receive bullets. Law enforcers kill people without trial. Strange!

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BBC debate on Bangladesh

The media and people concerned were so much enthusiastic to acclaim Steven Sackur (famous for 'Hard Talk') was in Bangladesh to arrange a debate on the democracy in the country. I was also counting days to watch the programme and at last that great day came. But this programme could not cross the line of my expectation. Those who watch BBC regularly must know how lively the other debate programmes are (for example the Doha Debate). There was scope to make it like those. The thresholds of my dissatisfaction are here:

The panel to speak consisted of a minister, one opposition leader and Tareq Masud from Bangladesh. Why the number of persons was so small?

Young generation's thoughts influenced this programme. But why were they in the audience panel only? I have seen many debates on India issue in BBC where young leaders like Sachin Pilot represent the young generation and argue on behalf of them. This panel could invite Tareq Zia, Joy Wajed or Mahi Choudhury to make it more lively.

For whom this much talked about democracy stand? Obviously, for the people. Why the people of Bangladesh are again and again bringing the tainted, despotic political leaders back to the parliament? Why they are not casting vote for the people having a much better image? The NGOs are struggling to groom the people for a meaningful democracy. But where were they in the panel?

The lawyers have played a crucial role in strengthening our judiciary, to smoothen the path of democracy through the stockpile of public interest litigations. This panel really missed lawyers like Barrister Tania Ameer, Tanjeeb, Sara Hossain and needless to mention the name of Dr. Kamal Hossian.

Now coming to the issue- democracy. Democracy is more than having an election every five years. It depends on institutionalisation. It contains the issues like appointment of election commissioners, separation of judiciary, caretaker government etc. The allegation is there that the government is interested to have a man of its choice as the chief of the caretaker government. Such points could be discussed critically, rather than revolving around the issue of election and its reaction only.

The most striking disappointment came from the audience in Bangladesh. Few questions were thrown to maintain the formalities and most of the time the audience remained busy in clapping rather than give their strong arguments, questions and comments. (I am really in doubt whether the young people who came had any idea about how the audience usually shake the panels in the other debates of BBC.)

However, Steven Sackur's initiative deserves praise and perhaps this is the first such debate in Bangladesh. But next time, my request to the BBC: please take care to bring more people in the audience who could talk for Bangladesh.

Sharin Shahjahan Naomi

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Fuel prices

A bunch of economists, led by Dr. Wahiduddin Mahmud, joined in the chorus of IMF, World Bank and ADP and suggested a steep rise in the price of fuel (New Age, 9 April 2006). This is total bunk to me. The polygonal agencies always suggest regressive and repressive measures such as fuel price and interest rate hike, job retrenchment, tax enhancement

and monetary contraction. Our local experts, in my humble semi-economist opinion, cannot in clear conscience join in the same choir and sing the same discordant tune to cause misery and suffering for the people.

What happened to welfare economics rather than blind, uncaring and insensitive subservience to World Bank and IMF detrimental prescriptions?

I think the whole premise is faulty. The government is not giving any subsidy on the cost of crude oil. The so-called paper subsidy is due to the very high tax and duty on fuel oil.

You would think these economists will have something better and more beneficial to brainstorm, rather than playing the compliant role of WB, IMF and ADB appeasers.

Omar Khasru

On e-mail



Kuakata fishermen need lighthouse

I sailed out with a few fishermen into the Bay, and they said that a lighthouse would make a great deal of difference. Indeed, as evening came down around us, I could imagine what it would be like with a storm darkening the horizon. I'm sure installing one lighthouse would save many a life.

I wonder how many lighthouses there are along the Bay. The people of the entire region depend heavily on fishing for their livelihood. We should try to make an inherently hazardous occupation less unsafe than what it is now.

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