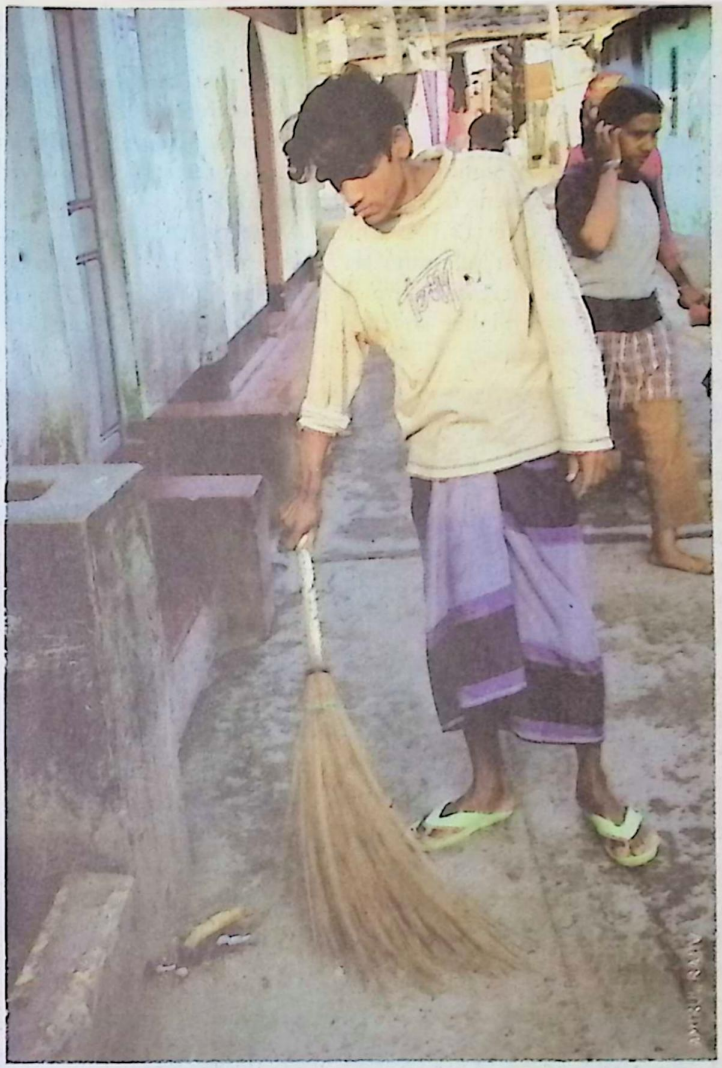
This, therefore, supplements the argument in favour of introducing FSSAP in urban areas to attract more girls to schools. The adult literacy program will have to be rejuvenated. Initiatives will have to be taken to increase access of women and the poor to quality education. WFP is currently running a program supporting the distribution of low-cost fortified biscuits to one lakh primary school children.

Partnership should be deepened with WFP to expand this program, which has proven to be cost-effective and leakage-proof, throughout the country. Only 35% of low-income metropolitan inhabitants use hygienic latrines. In Dhaka, only 26% of slum dwellers use hygienic latrines. The number and quality of public toilets in cities need to be increased. The distribution and quality of water to ordinary urban inhabitants and slum-dwellers paint a dismal picture.



Dushtha Shasthya Kendra (DSK), an NGO, piloted a community-based program on water supply and sanitation in slums. This type of innovation should be supported with public resources, and widely replicated to enhance water and sanitation services to the urban poor. Nearly 46% of the households in metropolitan areas cannot access the health-care services, and poor households have even lower access. Only 12% of the poor receive care from government health centres.

Gonoshasthya Kendra (GK) is a model that has been playing a successful role in providing health-care among the rural poor, at a per capita cost which is almost one-fourth of the cost of public health service delivery systems. Budgetary measures are needed to expand this type of cost-effective public-private partnership model beyond its current operation in 16 upazila in 11 districts.

Targeting inflation

The government has to introduce a "price policy" to contain price increases. It needs to eliminate the sources of market imperfections, such as price fixers, the syndicates, and the plethora of intermediaries. The markets have to be broadened and deepened to spread the benefits of open market system.

There is a need for establishing vigilance teams all over Bangladesh to frequently monitor the price situation prevailing in the marketplaces. But unless the supply of daily necessities is increased, there is not much scope for stabilizing the prices. Besides supporting production of food and other necessities, import of daily necessities has to be encouraged by adjusting the L/C margins and reducing import taxes.

I understand that some progress has been made in this direction. It is imperative to monitor prices, and make appropriate adjustments in duties and trade facilitation. The rise in fuel prices will increase the cost of diesel-supported irrigation, leading to increased food prices, and higher transportation cost of food and non-food items.

There is, therefore, a case for increased subsidy on other inputs of agriculture. The government should provide extra support to the CNG stations in all the highways, as well as to conversion (to CNG) of trucks and other transports carrying daily necessities; regular electricity has to be ensured for CNG stations. Perhaps the increase in diesel and kerosene prices would have been moderate if the import taxes on these fuels were reduced.

There is, therefore, a strong case for revising the price adjustments of diesel and kerosene. Improving the quality of refining could have perhaps reduced the cost of fuel. Budgetary support may be given for improving refinery infrastructure. Additional attention has to be given to the production of renewable energy as well.

Disabilities, etc

According to WHO estimation, about one-tenth of our people are disabled physically or mentally, or both. The next budget has to be disability-friendly, with adequate allocation for the disadvantaged people. Projects should be formulated for providing them training, and follow-up micro-credit for self-employment.

A "disability" identity card should be introduced for them so that they can access transport facilities and health-care at a reduced rate.