

Democracy of dimwits

M. ASHRAF ALI

THE unusually large population in Bangladesh obviously has become a death trap. In 1971, there were only 70 million people, which has increased to 164 million within a span of only 40 years. With the resources the country has it can support perhaps only 70 million people. What is alarming is that out of this population nearly 100 million are illiterate, which would be about 70% of the total population. Those who are considered literate do not possess the literacy at the functional level, and are not even able to read a newspaper, or understand a talk show on television or the content of a radio programme.

Needless to mention that success of a democracy presupposes an educated citizenry. Without education, the citizens of a country cannot participate in the development programmes or demand accountability of the government for its failure and inefficiency.

Human development is crucial for economic development. This fact had been amply emphasised by Professors Harbison and Myers, of

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MIT and Princeton Universities respectively, in 1960, in their book Education, Manpower and Economic Growth. They rejected the idea widely held by many econo-

mists that high-level professionals like doctors, engineers and scientists can bring about economic development. It was emphasised that in



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order to bring about rapid development of a country, it is necessary to educate all the people in the society. They pointed out that a good development plan was not enough unless

the people who are supposed to benefit from it supported it.

The reason for failure of economic development in our country is widespread lack of education among our people, leading to inability to participate in the government programmes.

Since the Pakistan days, thousands of crores of taka have been spent on family planning and population control. But the money has been wasted as the programmes failed to reduce the rate of population growth to a reasonable level. As a result, the country is smarting under the heavy pressure of an unwieldy population.

It has been more than 50 since Harbison and Myers published their book. It is obvious that few economists of our country have read that book and took any lessons from it. But they should have done it.

The authors defined manpower development as increase in the knowledge, skills and capacities of all the people in a society. They also mentioned some economic benefits of education of the masses. They are:

- The per capita production of a literate worker is much more than

that of an illiterate one because the former is motivated by patriotism and responsibility towards his country;

- An education worker chooses votes for his representative conscientiously. In this way, qualified and efficient people are elected to run the government, leading to all-round development of the country;
- An education citizen will strive his best to improve his economic condition, leading to a self-propelling development process. They pointed out that a country that failed to develop its human resources would not be able to make any progress in any sector of development for the simple reason that man is the prime mover in any human endeavour. Looking at the present scenario of Bangladesh, it is clear how correct the authors have been in their conviction.

In 1976, the International Council for Educational Development (ICED) in the USA published a book named New Paths to Learning: Six Essential

Learning Needs for the Rural Poor. In this book, how an appropriate adult education programme should be planned and implemented was very clearly laid down. They also pointed out that mere ability to read and write would not help the rural people. They identified six learning needs, of which literacy was only one component.

It is curious that although at the early stage Brac had a very effective mass education programme in several districts, they currently have none. Needless to mention that it has been suicidal to discontinue the programme.

It has been nearly 35 years since New Paths to Learning was written. If the programme had been implemented in Bangladesh, it would have made a difference in reducing illiteracy in the country. Since the opportunity has been passed up, the resultant adverse consequences must be endured. The concerned authorities should have appreciated the proverb "a stitch in time saves nine."

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The unfinished war

DHIRAJ KUMAR NATH

IN the last 39 years, Bangladesh has achieved remarkable successes in human development index, intellectual enrichment of populace and reduction of poverty with many socio-economic interventions that could draw the attention of the world. Life expectancy increased from 35 years to 65 years, literacy rate from 25% to 66%, population growth rate declined from 3.3% to 1.40%, per capita GDP increased from \$100 to \$750.

Our export diversification has increased from 25 items to 168 items, with the number of markets rising from 68 to 187. Income from export increased through changing from traditional primary items to non-traditional manufactured commodities.

Although undemocratic and autocratic governments ruled the country from 1975 to 1990, when democracy was absent and media had to operate under strict control, the voice for parliamentary democracy and right to information could never

be gagged.

An unresolved issue is the return of Bangladesh's assets by Pakistan even after recognition of Bangladesh by the comity of nations, including Pakistan itself. Bangladesh did not raise this issue, or missed the chance, and has not even calculated the value of the property that Bangladesh can claim from Pakistan.

Bangladesh should also claim war loss incurred due to the massacre of the people and looting of private properties. Now is the time to raise this issue in an international court of justice.

The trial of war criminals in Bangladesh is not enough because those who instigated them with money and motivated them to indulge in crimes against humanity should also be punished.

Pakistan received a huge amount of money from US to eliminate terrorists from Pakistan, but the indiscriminate killing and looting they carried out against Bangladeshi citizens should also be considered as crimes and be compensated. It is

high time to ask Pakistan to return usurped valuables looted during the occupation regime.

This is not an easy task, but not an impossible one provided political commitment can be truly translated into actions and human resources can be mobilised with the spirit of sacrifice as they were after the clarion call of the father of the nation in 1971.

The popular public demand is that the trial of the war criminals should be completed as quickly as possible.

But trial of only 195 accused is not enough to stop the recurrence of such a situation. It should be broad-based with clear documents and evidence.

The Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics has already started preparing for the Population Census 2011. There could be a special column in the prescribed format earmarked for collecting information from every household about the casualties that took place during the war of liberation.

The BSS, with its trained enumerators, can easily collect data from every household about the number of martyrs, and the outraged and tortured persons during the war of

liberation, and also the extent of the damage done by anti-liberation forces. This can easily be done during Population Census of 2011 to make it more historical and significant. It will surely give the opportunity to place most authentic reports before our judiciary with dependable evidence, and help raise the issue in any international forum.

Another unresolved issue is the repatriation of Pakistanis living in Bangladesh. Some people, known as "Beharis," opted for Pakistan, but former PM of Pakistan late Benazir Bhutto repeatedly disowned these people as Pakistani citizens, violating Pakistan's commitments openly. These people are now living at Geneva camp and elsewhere. But the canons of justice demand that they should be returned to Pakistan since they opted for it and fought for it heart and soul.

The Ministry of Liberation War Affairs should also conduct a survey of places where the Pakistanis and their accomplices killed and buried freedom fighters and ordinary peo-

ple. There should be special drive to locate those places throughout the country under a special project, and erection of memorials.

The most important task before the government is to transform Bangladesh into a middle-income country so that the people who made sacrifices for our freedom can have opportunities to improve their lives and live in a nation that practices accountability and transparency.

Good governance must be established at all levels of government and public life, from procurement to parliament, so that the offsprings of freedom fighters can feel proud that their forefathers fought for a noble cause to establish a model nation.

This is not an easy task, but not an impossible one provided political commitment can be truly translated into actions and human resources can be mobilised with the spirit of sacrifice as they were after the clarion call of the father of the nation in 1971.

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Globalisation of militarism

PETER CUSTERS

ON December 20 and 21, Russian President Medvedev paid a two-day visit to New Delhi. He signed a large number of contracts with the Indian government. The most prominent agreements, as reported in the world press, related to arms sales and to construction of nuclear reactors.

Spread over a period of ten years, Russia is set to sell 300 "fifth generation" military aircraft to India, presently valued at more than 25 billion euros. Russia will also help in constructing two more nuclear reactors, on top of the two reactors which it is already building in the Indian state of Tamil Nadu.

Russia's military and nuclear relations with India date back to the era of the former Soviet Union. Until the early nineties, roughly 80% of the military hardware used by India's armed forces was of Soviet origin. Subsequently, in the first post-Soviet period, relations temporarily "dipped" as both sides quarreled over India's outstanding debt -- which Russian sources have valued at \$16 billion. But, in the later part of the 1990s, military-commercial relations between the two were re-consolidated. Today, the majority of the armaments used by the Indian military still come from Russia. Thus, the outcome of Medvedev's Delhi visit may seem unexceptional.

His visit was preceded by visits of US President Obama, in November, of French President Sarkozy in the beginning of December, and of the Chinese Prime Minister Wen Jiao

Bao. Of these three events, the ones featuring Obama and Sarkozy are especially noteworthy if one is to assess India's present policy regarding international military and nuclear purchases.

The American president succeeded in finalising two defense deals. The more important of these covers the sale of ten military transport planes. The French president brought home equally lucrative

Thus, Delhi's foreign military and nuclear purchases and deals, even on the surface, appear quite unprecedented. And yet it would be patently wrong to leave it at this, and fail to note other peculiar coincidences.

India had maintained very intimate relations with Russia's precursor, the USSR. Yet, the military and nuclear deals, both with Russia and with Russia's former adversaries, the US and France, are best understood against the background of changed

through promotion of the country's access to uranium and to international civilian nuclear technology.

Indian newspapers in 2008 speculated that the business to be generated through the deal for Indian and foreign enterprises totalled \$40 billion. Yet, when the nuclear deal was being prepared, it was severely criticised by the Indian government's Leftwing allies and by leading Indian peace activists. They emphasised

India's status as military-nuclear world power, Indian newspapers also pinpointed other, and equally dramatic, implications of the deal.

Coincidentally, I happened to be teaching at the Jawaharlal Nehru University in New Delhi in September of 2008. At the time, outstanding issues towards consolidation of the nuclear deal had just been cleared by the US and Indian governments.

Reading leading Indian dailies, I was stunned by speculation regarding the implications of the deal for exports of US armaments to India. In an article that appeared in The Times of India for instance, figures were cited for the amount of money India had spent on arms since the Kargil conflict (\$25 billion), and that it was "poised" to spend on arms purchases over the next five to six years (another \$30 billion). Arms exports, it was argued, were the US's added objective.

One deal for the sale of weaponry that had already been clinched -- described as India's biggest ever with the US -- was one whereby US giant Boeing would supply the Indian air force with eight reconnaissance aircraft. When Obama visited Delhi in November, more defense contracts were mentioned as having been concluded meanwhile with three US corporations -- Boeing, Lockheed Martin and GE Aviation. According to American sources cited in the Delhi press, US companies had "bagged" 40% of the military-commercial contracts signed by India recently!

India has become a full-fledged and truly adult participant in the militarisation of the world economy.



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contracts for French and European corporations. These, according to the French daily Le Monde, include amongst others a contract for updating 51 Mirage fighter planes, worth a rosy 1.5 billion euros; a contract for Europe's main missile manufacturer MBDA for ground-to-air missiles; plus a contract for the building of two civilian nuclear reactors near Bombay by French nuclear company Areva.

relationships between India and the United States!

In July 2005, the then US President George W. Bush and India's Prime Minister Manmohan Singh signed a framework agreement for nuclear cooperation. The deal brought to an end the West's attempts to stem India's rise as an atomic world power. Officially, the aim of the new deal was to help India expand its production of nuclear energy,

that the controversial deal would legitimise India's status as a nuclear weapons state and that not all of India's "civilian" reactors would be put under an international inspection regime. India, Indian critics argued, would be able to manufacture at least one hundred extra nuclear bombs.

Yet, while public controversies in India have focused largely on the dubious implications of the deal for

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