

PLEASURE IS ALL MINE



IT feels like the legendary Scottish King Robert Bruce (1306-1329), who secured independence of

Scotland from the English hands and became the hero of his country. Once fleeing a battle and demoralised, he spotted a cave where a spider was spinning a web to connect one corner of the roof to another. Every time the wafer-thin creature would slip down the slope of the inner wall it would glide up again to start spinning from where it had left off. Its perseverance eventually paid.

Robert Bruce awed at the spider's success drew a providential inspiration from it, shook off his low morale from several failed attempts, made his final stand, defeated the English, and ascended the throne. The message is inscribed on a boulder at the historic site -- never say give up.

When imploring politicians to pull back from a confrontational brink, journalists might feel they have run out of their repertoire of tricks for persuasion. To them it may sound like pursuing a mission impossible. But we shall never give up for our mentor is Robert Bruce, it has to be him, now.

Potential of urban agriculture

SYED ANWARUL HAQUE

THE leading development challenges of Bangladesh today include alleviation of poverty and environmental management in the context of rapidly growing population. Dhaka is the 8th largest city in the world, with a population of over 15 million. Population influx to Dhaka is very high. Frequent natural disasters -- flood, drought, cyclones, river-bank erosion -- destroy agricultural crops every year and force farmers go to the cities. People are pushed to the cities because of the absence of job opportunities in rural areas.

Most of the urban poor are concentrated in informal settlements, where there is no infrastructure or services to address environmental problems. They are mostly engaged in urban agriculture. One of the biggest policy challenges today is the inclusion of environmental policy into urban policy. Urban agricultural policy can be an integral part of a set of policies for sustainable urban environmental management. It can play an especially vital role in waste management by transforming waste into food and fuel.

A class of "new urban poor" seems to have developed in cities of many countries, mostly in Africa. According to the World Resources Institute (WRI), in 1988, about 25% of the absolute poor in the developing world lived in urban areas. In 2000, this figure rose to about 56%, (WRI, 1997). Urban as well as semi-urban agriculture has been doing well in some African and Asian countries.

The main objectives of urban agriculture, which include food security, poverty alleviation, public health and sustainable resource management, are strongly linked to the problems of urbanisation and management skills of the cities in solving them. The main driving forces for farmers in cities to become engaged in urban agri-

culture are food security and income generation. Apart from food security and poverty alleviation, urban agriculture is most important for public health and sustainable resource management. Urban waste can be converted into organic fertilizers to be



ployed city dwellers. The demands of city agricultural products can be met through urban and semi-urban agricultural practices.

These demands in fact led to development of small-scale urban vegetable, floriculture and horticulture gardening, poultry, fisher-

population of Dhaka, a vast quantity of fruits is needed. To meet the demand and earn money out of selling fruits, fruit plantations have developed in a small scale in the city as well as in the periphery in a scattered way.

Demand for fresh vegetables is increasing in Dhaka, a part of

which can be met by growing vegetables in the city itself.

Demand for poultry, meat and

eggs is growing in the city. It is a

lucrative business and brings good

money for the people engaged in

the business. Ample scope is there

to further widen the poultry busi-

ness in the city.

A part of the fish and shrimp

requirements of Dhaka city and its

restaurants could be met through

their culture in Dhaka itself.

Hotels in cities like Bangkok,

Beijing, Seoul, etc. have mini fish

ponds in the restaurants them-

selves to cater to the needs of the

clients.

Livestock is similarly an impor-

tant sector because of the meat,

milk, cheese, butter etc. Brac and

Milk Vita, apart from NGOs, have

been actively promoting supply of

dairy products to the city dwellers.

This sector has engaged quite a

number of farmers and helps to

maintain their livelihood.

In the near future, urban and semi-

urban agriculture will be accepted and

implemented as a major intervention in

food security and social security

programmes. It provides food, generates jobs, supports business and maintains the landscape.

Already, there is a trend in develop-

ing urban agriculture in Dhaka

city to maintain and improve the

livelihood of the poor people and

help the city dwellers with supply

of much needed food products.

The only need is to organise and

develop the urban and semi-

urban agriculture in the city in a

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used in urban agriculture. Furthermore, more appropriate waste management practices lead to a decrease in health risks.

Urban agricultural projects in Dhaka will open up a new labour market in areas that have been negatively affected by industrial outsourcing of jobs.

Dhaka has been moving towards urban agriculture. Many facets of agriculture are taking quite strong shape in Dhaka in order to earn money by the hitherto unem-

ployed city dwellers. The demands of city agricultural products can be met through urban and semi-urban agricultural practices.

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to government to Westminster type parliamentary democracy.

It was predictable and perhaps natural as well that once elections were held and a political party or its ally ascended to power, political parties will go their separate, adversarial ways. But that they would fall foul of each by the loser invariably refusing to concede defeat and the winner taking it all leaving little space to opposition couldn't be legislated against. Nor is it possible to legislate for such an eventuality. When would the instrument of power be solely harnessed in the service of the people rather than compromising on short-sighted party gains?

Democracy is a matter of practice and habit ingrained in traditions and culture of the highest and unswerving respect for public opinion as aired through the ballot. We have painfully learnt though that it is not merely a matter of elections.

Caretaker government issue had been reopened, thanks to the experience with the last caretaker government. It has now clearly

emerged in bold relief following the Supreme Court's invalidation of the 13th amendment (with a proviso that two general elections could be held under the existing system).

The just retired Chief Justice Khairul Haque presided over the full bench of the Appellate Division that delivered the judgment on the 13th amendment, thereby becoming controversial to

the opposition. When the next national election is held under the CTG, the last retired CJ is likely to be the chief adviser in 2013. The BNP's concerns pivot around a possibility of the caretaker government being done away with in compliance with Supreme Court verdict or the retired Chief Justice Khairul Haque becoming the caretaker government chief. In such a perceived context, BNP has voiced its reluctance to participate in the polls.

No well-wisher of democracy can entertain the notion of any one-sided election nor would the Awami League (AL), the oldest political party in the country, like it to happen. Mere elections have not produced the democracy people wanted to see. To top it off without mandate of the whole electorate would be a disaster.

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Rising like the Phoenix

MARUFA HAQUE

I have visited the ashy remnants of the fire that destroyed their homes. Where the flames burnt everything they had, that was all that they could claim as their own. 14 houses in Ershadnagar slum on March 23, and 39 houses in Sattola slum on March 24 were burned down.

Now they are homeless. They sleep on crowded floors, thanks to their neighbours' generosity; one poor man helping another. Such despair and devastation for those already deprived, already the poorest of the poor, the bottom of the pyramid, the dispossessed.

The strange thing was, I saw hope and resilience. Bamboo structures rose from the ashes like the Phoenix, within hours, for every house lost. To me this proved how strong the slums folks are, in constant battle, and yet



never defeated. Fire, shock, evictions, these don't stop life. Life must go on. I spoke with a few of the victims. They had lost everything. Other community members suffered too.

A national NGO, which works in the slums, came forward with household items and food worth

there to think further about us."

I am a development worker. But still, I don't completely disagree with her. What are we doing for her? What are we doing that is sustainable? What are we doing that won't disappear in the next blaze?

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