

South-South Award: Celebrating Bangladesh's success

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THIS year, Bangladesh got the South-South Award for its noteworthy achievement on poverty reduction as well as ensuring food security for the people. Indeed, Bangladesh's success is remarkable not only in achieving the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) 1 -- eradicating extreme poverty and hunger -- much before the targeted timeframe of 2015, but also in MDG2 (achieving universal primary education), MDG3 (promoting gender equality and empowering women), MDG4 (reducing child mortality rates), MDG5 (improving maternal health), and MDG6 (combating HIV/AIDS, malaria, and other diseases).

We are, however, not in front with MDG7 (ensuring environmental sustainability) and MDG8 (developing a global partnership for development). Failure in achieving MDG7 and MDG8 does not necessarily mean governance failure. Insufficient global cooperation and inequitable distribution of global fund for facing the challenges of climate change adaptation and environmental sustainability are evident.

There are problems with objectives and measurement, which need to be country specific, as well as with the goal set for the global partnership for development. We have made noteworthy progress in South-South cooperation, but reverse is true for North-South cooperation.

Data from Human Development Report 2013 -- The Rise of the South: Human Progress in a Diverse World -- show that each of the notable countries in human development progress in the South, including Bangladesh, has its own history, identity, culture and strategies towards economic, social and human development. On one hand, these countries have achieved success in creating state regulatory and management systems alongside the interconnected cooperation, whereas, on the other, they have

carefully as well as strategically neglected the controversial Washington doctrine.

A recent report in The Economist (November 3, 2012) highlights that the belief that growth brings development with it -- the "Washington Consensus" -- is often criticised on the basis that some countries have had good growth but little poverty reduction, whereas Bangladesh embodies the inverse of that. In addition, a 2008 study by the World Bank, *Finance for All? Policies and Pitfalls in Expanding Access*, acknowledges that well-functioning financial systems contribute to growth, but raises the question, do poor households benefit proportionately from financial reforms that strengthen the economy generally? To what extent is emphasis on financial sector development as a driver of growth consistent with a pro-poor approach to development? In the case of Bangladesh, both answers are positive. The country has high poverty reduction rate and pro-poor development trends compared to that of its growth. The figure shows cross-country evidence of pro-poor development of Bangladesh.

According to The Economist -- same edition -- the poor account for roughly a fifth of the total loan portfolio of Bangladesh. The report adds the country spends a little more than most low-income countries on helping the poor. About 12% of public spending (1.8% of GDP) goes on social safety-nets to protect the poorest: food for works, cash transfers, and direct feeding programmes, which most poor countries do not have.

Furthermore, a special report on world economy in The Economist (October 13, 2012) stresses the concern over the increasing global trends of the Gini co-efficiency, even in Asia, particularly in China. Zanny Minton Beddoes, author of this special report, says: "Growing inequality is one of the biggest social, economic and political

Poor but impressive			
Wealth and health			
	Bangladesh	India	Pakistan
Income per person, \$PPP*	1990 540	874	1,200
2011 1,909	3,663	2,786	
Life expectancy at birth, years	1990 59	58	61
2010 69	65	65	
Infant (aged <1) deaths per 1,000 live births	1990 97	81	95
2011 37	47	59	
Child (aged 5<) deaths per 1,000 live births	1990 139	114	122
2011 46	61	72	
Maternal deaths per 100,000 live births	1990 800	600	490
2010 194†	200	260	
Infant immunisation rate, %	1990 64	59	48
2008 94	66	80	
Female (aged 15-24) literacy rate, %	1991 38	49	na
2009 77	74	61	
Underweight children, % of total	1990 62	60	39
2007 361	44	31	

*Purchasing-Power Parity

Source: The Economist (November 3, 2012)

challenges of our time. But it is not inevitable." It is commendable that Bangladesh is unlikely to face this unwelcome pattern of growth; and the gains of development and pro-poor achievement of Bangladesh go beyond its growth. Bangladesh, however, has passed several paradigms to reach this stage.

In the aftermath of the victory on December 16, 1971, reviving the economic and financial infrastructure of this war-born country was a great challenge for the national leaders. Sobhan, in *Crisis of External Dependence: The Political Economy of Foreign Aid to Bangladesh* (1982),

points out that after independence Bangladesh had to accept an inherited debt liability of \$483 million against the projects that were completed before independence and physically located on the territory of the erstwhile East Pakistan (now Bangladesh).

So, the development of the first twenty years of the independent country was basically foreign aid based, when the focus was on relief, rehabilitation and repairing damages incurred during the Liberation War, followed by food security, country-wide infrastructure development and structural adjustment. Initial support came directly from India and Russia, while humanitarian support from other development agencies went under the coordination of United Nations Relief Operations in Bangladesh (UNROB). Furthermore, this challenge was intensified with the famine in 1974, assassination of the father of the nation in 1975, military coups in 1975 and 1982, devastating floods in 1998 and 2004, and so on.

Throughout the 1980s the dominant development support came from the World Bank under the structural adjustment policy of the IMF and World Bank, while other leading development partners were ADB and the government of Japan. Democratic regime started in early 1990s, and opened the door for growth and development, which are being progressively continued until now. Throughout the 1990s the dominant development assistance approach followed the policy lending, a revised discourse of structural adjustment policy (SAP) to development, which focused basically on the policy reforms as assistance on conditionality.

From 2002 onwards, the modality of foreign assistance was tailored under more flexible and less dominant conditionalities that could be negotiated in advance under the framework of poverty reduction strategy paper (PRSP) that allows policy dialogue with the local consulta-

tive groups and in the context of development partnerships.

Given this context, as pointed out in The Economist report (November 3, 2012), economic growth here since the 1970s has been poor, and the country's politics has been seeing upheavals; yet, over the past 20 years, Bangladesh has made some of the biggest gains in the basic condition of people's lives ever seen anywhere.

Human Development Report, 2013 (see September 23, 2013 OpEd on HDR in The Daily Star), MDGs Bangladesh Progress Report 2012, and winning of prizes and awards in recent years, including the South-South Award, MDG Award, Global Diversity Award, and the FAO Food Award, show that Bangladesh has made significant progress in achieving MDGs. This is particularly because of poverty reduction and ensuring food security, and focusing on three basic dimensions of human development -- a long and healthy life, educational attainment and command over the resources needed for decent living.

We need to celebrate this success despite the fact that the government has not succeeded in meeting people's expectations in all aspects. The prime minister said in her speech at the 68th Session of the United Nations General Assembly: "So, we need to be united in agreeing on a common set of the development agenda that would fulfill our aspiration in building a just, prosperous and sustainable world where no person or nation is left behind." Given the post-MDGs aspiration, this is praiseworthy.

The same spirit needs to be upheld in our country so that the people really become the ends and means of democracy and development. The government needs to sacrifice much here for the sake of institutional democracy.

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From adaptation to building resilience

SALEEMUL HUQ

AS countries, cities, communities, institutions, private sector, and even households and individuals in both developing as well as developed countries start to consider the impacts of potential human induced climate change and how they can adapt to deal with any adverse impacts (and take advantage of any positive opportunities), they necessarily have to climb a steep learning curve about the concepts and terms involved in this new and fast emerging arena of learning, planning and practice.

The initial phase of climate change activities focused around reducing the emission of greenhouse gas emissions, which cause climate change, through mitigation. This remains very important but is no longer sufficient to prevent some degree of climate change over the next few decades. The recently released fifth assessment report of Working Group 1 of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) reiterated the message of earlier reports with an added sense of urgency for taking stronger mitigation actions if the world wished to keep global temperature below 2 degrees Celsius over the next century.

The second phase of planning and activities focused on the need to plan for adaptation to the unavoidable and inevitable adverse impacts of human induced climate change. As the Least Developed Countries (LDC) are amongst the most vulnerable and poorest countries they were the first to develop National Adaptation Programmes of Action (NAPA). Bangladesh was one of the first LDCs to complete its NAPA and then went on to carry out a much more ambitious Bangladesh Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan

(BCCSAP). Other developing as well as developed countries are now also developing similar longer term strategies, called National Adaptation Plans (NAP).

As these adaptation plans start to move from planning to practice they encounter a set of new challenges including what to call them (adaptation or resilience?), and whether to have stand-alone plans or integrate (or mainstream) them into development plans? Most countries are at the initial stages of tackling these issues. Bangladesh is relatively advanced in this respect and, with regard to enhancing adaptive capacity as well as building resilience, is using both terms as it moves forward.

With regard to the term resilience, Bangladesh recently hosted a seven-day-long international "Resilience Academy" with over thirty international scholars from all over the world discussing how to build resilience of livelihoods in the face of climate impacts in all countries, learning from the experience of Bangladesh. The Academy was jointly organised by the International Centre for Climate Change and Development (ICCCAD) at the Independent University, Bangladesh (IUB) with the United Nations University (UNU) and Munch Re Foundation (MRF) in Germany. The scholars will be writing a seminal paper on the topic to be published in an international peer reviewed scientific journal soon.

One of the important aspects that has to be taken into account when moving from planning adaptation to building adaptive capacity of people and institutions is the need to build resilience, not just to the potential adverse impacts of climate change but also to other potential shocks, including short term climatic shocks and economic shocks. Thus, resilience building becomes more than just

adaptation to climate change.

Another important aspect in moving from theory and planning to practice is the need for different stakeholders to understand the problem from their own perspective and then to figure out what to do, also from their perspective. Not all actors need to act in the same way.

Thus, for example, within government different ministries have different roles. Local and central government have different roles, members of parliament have their roles, etc. Also, NGOs, academics, researchers and media all have different roles to play in building their respective resilience to the adverse impacts of climate change.

While many of the stakeholders mentioned above have begun to climb the learning curve on climate change and building resilience, the one that is still lagging behind is the private sector. Despite a few good examples, most private sector companies, including both large multi-national as well as national and small and medium enterprises, are still largely uninformed about the potential impacts of climate change to their businesses, let alone aware of potentially profitable business opportunities that may arise for them to exploit.

Therefore, a special effort to engage with the private sector in Bangladesh is warranted to bring them on board, together with other stakeholders, to not only tackle the problem of building resilience to climate change in Bangladesh but also to being able to export that knowhow globally as the rest of the world also begins to tackle the same problems that Bangladesh is tackling now.

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The New York Times EXCLUSIVE

The Obama Doctrine

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THE recent Obama-Putin tiff over American exceptionalism reignited an ongoing debate over the Obama Doctrine: Is the president veering toward isolationism? Or will he proudly carry the banner of exceptionalism?

The debate is narrower than it may seem. There is considerable common ground between the two positions, as was expressed clearly by Hans Morgenthau, the founder of the now dominant non-sentimentality "realist" school of international relations.

Throughout his work, Morgenthau describes America as unique among all powers past and present in that it has a "transcendent purpose" that it "must defend and promote" throughout the world: "the establishment of equality in freedom."

The competing concepts "exceptionalism" and "isolationism" both accept this doctrine and its various elaborations but differ with regard to its application.

One extreme was vigorously defended by President Obama in his September 10 address to the nation: "What makes America different," he declared, "what makes us exceptional," is that we are dedicated to act, "with humility, but with resolve," when we detect violations somewhere.

"For nearly seven decades the United States has been the anchor of global security," a role that "has meant more than forging international agreements; it has meant enforcing them."

The competing doctrine, isolationism, holds that we can no longer afford to carry out the noble mission of racing to put out the fires lit by others. It takes seriously a cautionary note sounded 20 years ago by the New York Times columnist Thomas Friedman that "granting idealism a near exclusive hold on our foreign policy" may lead us to neglect our own interests in our devotion to the needs of others.

Between these extremes, the debate over foreign policy ranges.

At the fringes, some observers reject the shared assumptions, bringing up the historical record: for example, the fact that "for nearly seven decades" the United States has led the world in aggression and subversion -- overthrowing elected governments and imposing vicious dictatorships, supporting horrendous crimes, undermining international agreements and leaving trails of blood, destruction and misery.

To these misguided creatures, Morgenthau provided an answer. A serious scholar, he recognised that America has consistently violated its "transcendent purpose."

But to bring up this objection, he explains, is to commit "the error of atheism, which denies the validity of religion on similar grounds." It is the transcendent purpose of America that is "reality;" the actual historical record is merely "the abuse of reality."

In short, "American exceptionalism" and "isolationism"

are generally understood to be tactical variants of a secular religion, with a grip that is quite extraordinary, going beyond normal religious orthodoxy in that it can barely even be perceived. Since no alternative is thinkable, this faith is adopted reflexively.

Others express the doctrine more crudely. One of President Reagan's UN ambassadors, Jeane Kirkpatrick, devised a new method to deflect criticism of state crimes. Those unwilling to dismiss them as mere "blunders" or "innocent naivete" can be charged with "moral equivalence" -- of claiming that the US is no different from Nazi Germany, or whoever the current demon may be. The device has since been widely used to protect power from scrutiny.

Even serious scholarship conforms. Thus, in the current issue of the journal *Diplomatic History*, scholar Jeffrey A. Engel reflects on the significance of history for policy makers.

Engel cites Vietnam, where, "depending on one's political persuasion," the lesson is either "avoidance of the quicksand of escalating intervention [isolationism] or the need to provide military commanders free rein to operate devoid of political pressure" -- as we carried out our mission to bring stability, equality and freedom by destroying three countries and leaving millions of corpses.

The Vietnam death toll continues to mount into the present because of the chemical warfare that President Kennedy initiated there -- even as he escalated American support for a murderous dictatorship to all-out attack, the worst case of aggression during Obama's "seven decades."

Another "political persuasion" is imaginable: the outrage Americans adopt when Russia invades Afghanistan or Saddam Hussein invades Kuwait. But the secular religion bars us from seeing ourselves through a similar lens.

One mechanism of self-protection is to lament the consequences of our failure to act. Thus New York Times columnist David Brooks, ruminating on the drift of Syria to "Rwanda-like" horror, concludes that the deeper issue is the Sunni-Shiite violence tearing the region asunder.

That violence is a testimony to the failure "of the recent American strategy of light-footprint withdrawal" and the loss of what former foreign service officer Gary Grappo calls the "moderating influence of American forces."

Those still deluded by "abuse of reality" -- that is, fact -- might recall that the Sunni-Shiite violence resulted from the worst crime of aggression of the new millennium, the US invasion of Iraq. And those burdened with richer memories might recall that the Nuremberg Trials sentenced Nazi criminals to hanging because, according to the Tribunal's judgment, aggression is "the supreme international crime differing only from other war crimes in that it contains within itself the accumulated evil of the whole."

The same lament is the topic of a celebrated study by Samantha Power, the new US ambassador to the United Nations. In "A Problem from Hell: America in the Age of Genocide," Power writes about the crimes of others and our inadequate response.

She devotes a sentence to one of the few cases during the seven decades that might truly rank as genocide: the Indonesian invasion of East Timor in 1975. Tragically, the United States "looked away," Power reports.

Daniel Patrick Moynihan, her predecessor as UN ambassador at the time of the invasion, saw the matter differently. In his book "A Dangerous Place," he described with great pride how he rendered the UN "utterly ineffective in whatever measures it undertook" to end the aggression, because "the United States wished things to turn out as they did."

And indeed, far from looking away, Washington gave a green light to the Indonesian invaders and immediately provided them with lethal military equipment. The US prevented the UN Security Council from acting and continued to lend firm support to the aggressors and their genocidal actions, including the atrocities of 1999, until President Clinton called a halt -- as could have happened anytime during the previous 25 years.

But that is mere abuse of reality.

It is all too easy to continue, but also pointless. Brooks is right to insist that we should go beyond the terrible events before our eyes and reflect about the deeper processes and their lessons.

Among these, no task is more urgent than to free ourselves from the religious doctrines that consign the actual events of history to oblivion and thereby reinforce our basis for further "abuses of reality."

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By THOMAS JOSEPH
ACROSS
1 "Buenos
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5 Singing
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9 diary,
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10 College
bigwigs
12 Use a
soapbox
13 Chop up
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