

The optimum development policy blend for Bangladesh

GEOF WOOD

AS I write, the monsoon in Bangladesh is well established delivering floods in the north of the country and threatening the main traditional rice crop for thousands of cultivators. If the floods persist it will be too late for new seedlings to be transplanted in time to mature for the harvest, even if seedlings were available. This will be a crushing blow for poor subsistence farmers and agricultural labourers in the region, alongside the probable rise in local cereal prices due to seasonal scarcity.

These normal annual events, rather than specifically associated with climate change, are a sharp reminder of the ongoing vulnerability of 25 million poorest families all over the country who will lose employment opportunities.

This is now the fortieth anniversary of my first time in Bangladesh. A roller coaster experience. Much has changed, some of it undoubtedly for the better. The country was in a parlous state in 1974, gripped by widespread floods and famine which persisted well into 1975 when violent political events replaced the struggling democratic government of the Awami League with military rule. The army remained in power, de facto, until the end of 1990. With some interruptions (2006-08), civilian governments have remained in control now for almost 25 years, despite the challenges of a growing population, rapid big city urbanisation and continuing widespread poverty. It is moving towards middle income status, but is that enough to eradicate poverty?

Agricultural production has significantly increased due to the introduction of late winter irrigated boro rice cultivation, a high investment but a much more stable crop which has contributed strongly to food security for millions of families. This crop has thus also created millions of jobs for agricultural labourers, which, according to a recent World Bank analysis, contributes most to poverty reduction across the country.

Alongside this core development are other more controversial sources of income and employment. The garments industry and shrimp production have attendant problems of labour rights and environmental pollution. Bangladesh's participation in global markets via garments and shrimps internationalises the responsibility for these problems through the relentless demand for cheap, often quickly disposable, clothing and the fashion for international cuisine. Too often company representatives fail to redistribute fairly between poor producers, rich - often violent - middle men and their relatively rich consumers. Never was there a better case for state regulation of these industries at both ends of the supply chain, which requires global cooperation. In addition, the urban informal sector and services industry are expanding.

We can reach middle income status but the urgency to eradicate extreme poverty remains. Bangladesh requires much more local, disaggregated analysis of regions of the country. It requires having that analytic capacity distributed more evenly across the country.

But with this mixed picture of technological progress, and underdevelopment when in contact with the global economy, Bangladesh can also be proud of successes. It is doing well on several MDG indicators, perhaps ahead of other countries in the region. It has a rising, educated middle class searching for new standards of public conduct. It has a free and vibrant press as well as critical TV debates.

The macro-economy is well managed with inflation brought down from 12 to 7%. Although a climate of political vindictiveness prevails, there are some improvements in governance and the accountability of state officials and market rent seekers with more corruption cases pursued.

But perhaps above all, Bangladesh can be proud of being a development pioneer. Through the work of key public intellectuals and think tanks it has innovated with social mobilisation through NGOs, and it acts as a tutor to a new generations of visiting aid officials.

There are clearly ongoing challenges. The liberation of the country from Pakistan was a quest for a truly Bengali society, continuing its beautiful cultural and linguistic traditions and representing the aspirations of millions of poor peasants and landless labourers through a mix of state leadership and market opportunities. I recall the core principles which articulated this mix, and which advocated a secular state, while the people of Bangladesh could worship their respective faiths in the private sphere. There was a tolerance of diversity. Obviously there are competing agendas being pursued in Bangladesh connected to wider movements elsewhere in West Asia and the Middle East.

Since liberation there has been an ongoing struggle for the soul of Bangladesh in which international players have allied with their respective clients within the country. Colleagues and friends in Bangladesh have, for years, foreseen that this struggle would have to be resolved, as a precondition for the country moving forward into middle income status.

For Bangladesh's future wellbeing, the issues of rights, justice, fairness (including for women), well-being and poverty must be highlighted during this present phase of

that struggle. Anyone laying a claim to the soul of Bangladesh should not forsake these values. They were the core motive of liberation, and many look forward to their pursuit by the present government.

Such values are the criteria to judge any government's performance. Of course, in a complex society like Bangladesh, undergoing all kinds of transitions, there remain problems of rent-seeking and corruption. But there is enough evidence that a corner is being turned.

In making presentations to MPs in the Jatiyo Sangsad in recent years on the problem of extreme poverty, I have witnessed a strong concern about poverty eradication among both Cabinet members and ordinary MPs. Naturally there are differences of opinion about how this should best be done and over what time period. If I have learned anything from many happy but challenging times in Bangladesh, there is no single fix or panacea.

A solution to extreme poverty does not lie just in Bangladesh reaching middle income status, especially if that process reinforces inequality. A solution does not just lie in growth and trickle down via employment generation and market in-filling; not just in targeted support for small scale entrepreneurship; not just in programmes of social protection funded by expanded revenue; and not just in rapid safety net responses. Blended policy is required, and different blends for different parts of the country and different types of poverty.

Bangladesh requires much more local, disaggregated analysis of regions of the country. It requires having that analytic capacity distributed more evenly across the country. Regional universities can play a much stronger role in the analysis of their local environments, and apply their knowledge to disaggregated forms of blended policy.

And finally, we should look afresh at the patterns of agrarian change in the country - away from the traditional farmer/sharecropper/labourer model towards a greater appreciation of land fragmentation and its implications for new forms of contract farming with implications for the inclusion of the poor into agricultural services markets. If we correctly understand that well-waged agricultural labour is the main key to poverty eradication, then we should have more focus and greater creative thinking in that direction.

I cannot promise another 40 years of association with Bangladesh! But I hope for a few more years at least, and to see the glass more than half full.

The writer has been associated with development in Bangladesh since 1974. He is Emeritus Professor at University of Bath in the UK. He is President of the UK Development Studies Association and Research Adviser to the Government of Bangladesh's Economic Empowerment of the Poorest Programme in collaboration with UK Aid and the Swiss Development Corporation.

The common traffic offenses in Dhaka

RIDWAN QAUIUM

VIOLATING traffic rules has become a common practice for many in Dhaka due to lax of traffic law enforcement. This is not making the roads unsafe and also worsening the traffic congestion. An online survey was conducted where people were asked about what they felt were the most common traffic rules that were violated and the common traffic offenses that were committed for which the roads in the city are becoming unsafe.

Traveling in the wrong-way or opposite direction was identified as the main traffic offense committed in Dhaka by the respondents. A report on this was also published in The Daily Star on September 2nd. Research shows that head-on collisions due to wrong-way accidents are more likely to result in fatal or serious injuries than other types of road accidents. This is why in many countries driving or riding in the wrong-way is considered as a serious traffic violation and offenders are penalized heavily to. Other than posing a serious safety threat, wrong-way traveling also results in serious traffic congestion.

To prevent vehicles from traveling in the wrong direction a few months ago the traffic police department installed a device near Kakrail. During the installation the traffic police department informed the public that gradually the device would be installed in other parts of the city as well but the device became dysfunctional within a few days after installation. Now nothing is known about the status of this traffic device such as whether the device would be repaired, modified and then installed again or whether the police have abandoned the idea of using the device.

The second most common traffic offense that is committed in Dhaka according to the respondents was illegal on street parking. Illegal on street parking reduces the capacity of a roadway. During peak hours illegal on street parking may not only create bottle-neck but also grid lock in the nearby area resulting in serious traffic congestion.

According to the demand of roadways, the capacity of the road network in Dhaka is insufficient. Hence, during most of the day the roads in most part of the city remains clogged. The illegal on street parking worsens the situation even more.

To prevent illegal parking traffic police in cities around the world generally provide parking tickets, tow vehicles and put clamps on wheels. To prevent illegal parking traffic police in Dhaka do provide parking tickets and tow vehicles but compared to the number of violations the number of offenders that are penalized are too little.

The third most common traffic offense identified by the respondents was violating traffic signal. Violating a traffic signal or running a red light is also considered as a serious traffic offense in many countries as the consequences of this offense may result in fatal collisions. Offenders are penalized heavily in many countries. To catch motorists running red light many cities around the world have installed red light cameras.

Most often motorists violating the traffic signal get away with it in Dhaka. This results in collisions and also traffic congestion. Lack of manpower, lack of proper vehicle, tools and technology are a prime reason why the traffic police are not able to catch traffic signal violators.

Speeding and driving recklessly is the fourth traffic offense that is committed in Dhaka identified by the respondents. Speeding and reckless driving is an issue in many countries as it is the main reason for traffic fatalities. Tools such as speed guns and cameras are used in many countries to catch motorists speeding and driving recklessly.

Speeding and driving recklessly can be blamed for many of the road accidents in the capital but the traffic police department here lacks the necessary tools and technology to prevent this traffic offense.

The other traffic offenses that are committed very often according to the respondents are public transports loading and unloading passengers in the middle of the road, driving unfit vehicles, driving without a valid license and minors driving illegally. From various news reports it is apparent that these traffic offenses are also a major reason for road accident in Dhaka. These traffic violations can be very easily prevented if the traffic police department becomes stricter in enforcing the traffic laws.

The traffic police department has always cited that lack of manpower is the main reason why they are not able to penalize traffic offenders. The unemployment rate among the youth is increasing in the country. The traffic police department may consider increasing their manpower by hiring more youths into their force. This will make it easier for them to enforce the traffic rules which will make the roads safer and reduce congestion. In addition, it may also help to lower the unemployment rate. The government may also consider providing more financial support to the traffic police department to acquire tools and technology to catch traffic offenders.

The writer is Transportation Engineer working in Thailand.

Dhaka-Tokyo relations to a greater height

BOTTOM LINE



BARRISTER HARUN UR RASHID

THE visit of the Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe to Dhaka beginning from 6th September will deliver a new trajectory to the bilateral relations. The visit is significant in many ways. First Bangladesh-Japan relations will receive a new momentum and dynamism. Second, Japan is the world leader in technology. Japan's net technology has been transferred to Thailand, Indonesia, China and the United Kingdom. Bangladesh could be a recipient of such technology from Japan. Third, Japan under the leadership of Abe has continued to invest heavily in Asean and other South Asian countries by diverting its investment from China. Japan's economic presence has been felt in India and Myanmar in recent years. The visit may attract many Japanese investors to Bangladesh for its strategic location in the mouth of the Bay of Bengal as a bridge between South and Southeast Asia.

However, infrastructure development in roads and railways, availability of energy, accelerated processing of permits, licenses and improved facilities of sea ports are imperative in the country for creating a friendly environment for Japanese investment. It is good to note that Bangladesh reportedly may offer plots exclusively to Japanese entrepreneurs in Mirsarai EPZ. This would serve as a strong incentive for boosting Japanese investment in Bangladesh as currently investment proposals from Japan, worth \$1.2 billion, are pending with our Board of Investment.

Bangladesh is vulnerable to global climate change and reportedly 23 million people will be adversely affected due to sea rise in the coastal belt. Japan can assist Bangladesh with its highly efficient and environment-friendly technology including coal-fired energy. It can also transfer technology relevant to

Japan has proposed an innovative plan --the formation of Bay of Bengal Industrial Growth Belt to help Bangladesh realise its huge economic potential and expedite its growth. Bangladesh put before Japan a range of specific projects with regard to construction of Ganges Barrage, multi-modal tunnel under river Jamuna, dedicated railway bridge over river Jamuna, multi-modal Dhaka Eastern Bypass, and ecological restoration of the four rivers around Dhaka.

agriculture in meeting the challenges faced by Bangladesh. During the visit, both sides may identify the priority sectors in which Japan may provide technical assistance to Bangladesh.

Japanese assistance in Bangladesh continues to be multi-faceted, primarily in sectors such as, infrastructure, energy, climate-related projects, and river-management. During Bangladesh Prime Minister's visit to Japan, it had pledged an assistance of 600 billion yen (equivalent to US\$6 billion) to Bangladesh over the next five years. It was agreed that a Japanese delegation would visit Bangladesh to identify and discuss with the Bangladeshi side details of economic cooperation in this regard.

Japan is keen to support power sector in Bangladesh after completion of formulating the ongoing comprehensive power development master plan for attaining stable power supply up to 2030. JICA is reportedly conducting the formulation of the master plan on the basis of diversification of fuel resources. It is reported that necessary technology transfer from Japan would be carried out in the master plan.

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On the political front, according to a recent report of Kyodo News agency of Japan, Abe is expected to discuss Japan's candidacy on the UN Security Council this year with Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina as only one member-state from the Asia-Pacific region can take a seat the Council and Bangladesh and Japan are both candidates for the seat. Incidentally, Japan was elected in 2008 to a seat at the UN Security Council for 2009-2010.

It is recalled that Bangladesh secured a seat in the Security Council in 1978 defeating Japan, which was an extraordinary diplomatic triumph for Bangladesh within 4 years of its admission to the UN as a member. Against this background, Japan obviously does not want Bangladesh to contest from this regional group. At a news conference hosted by the Japan National Press Club during her trip, Prime Minister Hasina, reportedly, hinted that Bangladesh would withdraw its candidacy before the council election in 2015, saying, "For a trusted friend, Bangladesh is ready to do any sacrifice." "Definitely, we will give some good news during Abe's visit," she said.

Relationship with Japan has become one of the priorities of Bangladesh successive governments. Against this background, the visit of Bangladesh Prime Minister will be a milestone in strengthening and consolidating bilateral relations. Furthermore, both countries may cooperate in addressing regional and global challenges confronting them.

The writer is Former Bangladesh Ambassador to the UN, Geneva

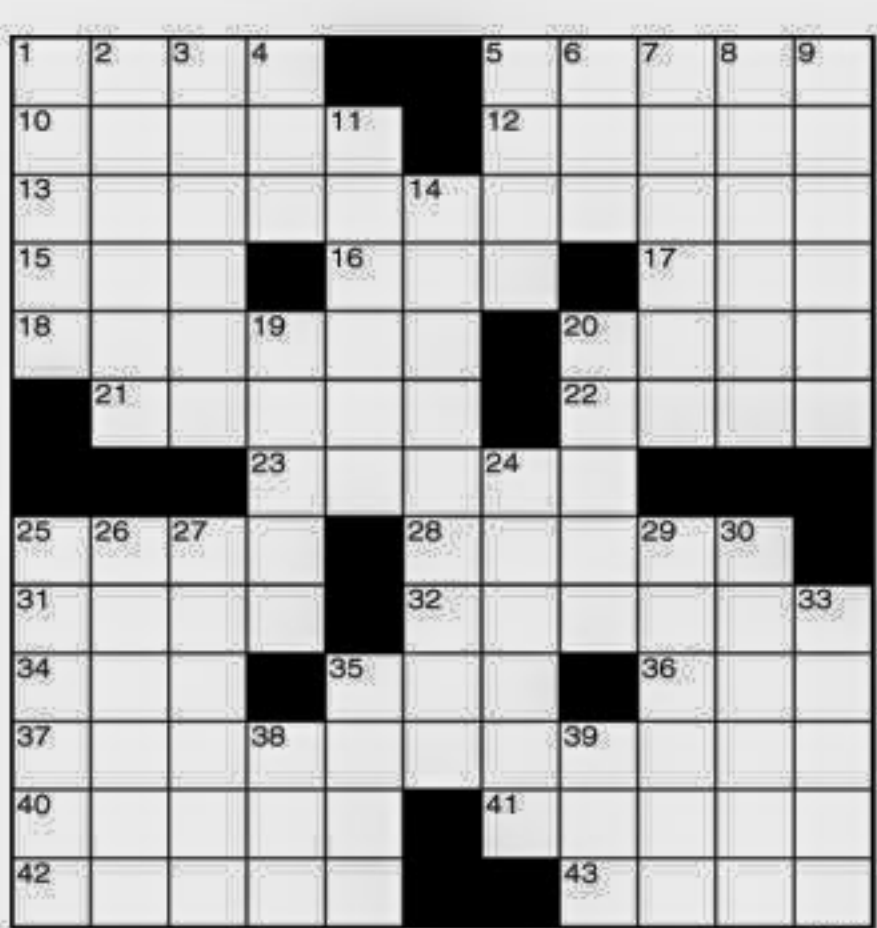
QUOTABLE Quote

A successful man is one who can lay a firm foundation with the bricks others have thrown at him.

David Brinkley

CROSSWORD by Thomas Joseph

- | ACROSS | DOWN |
|-------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| 1 Rubies and garnets | 1 Croc's cousin |
| 5 Use an aerosol | 2 Dodges |
| 10 Use | 3 Composition |
| 12 Make baskets | 4 "Sprechen -- Deutsch?" |
| 13 Look | 5 Graceful bird |
| 15 Poem of praise | 6 Signing need |
| 16 Decimal base | 7 Tire type |
| 17 Bank acct. addition | 8 Broad street |
| 18 Corned beef sandwich | 9 Seuss title character |
| 20 One of the Beatles | 11 Hidden |
| 21 Forgo frugality | 14 Pay discrepancy between the sexes |
| 22 Out of the wind | 19 Outdoes |
| 23 Goblet parts | 20 Trattoria fare |
| 25 " -- la viel" | 24 Holly-hocks or hibiscus |
| 28 Critic, at times | 25 Turkish tunic |
| 31 Picnic pests | 26 Anger |
| 32 Showed anger | 27 "Dracula" writer |
| 34 To's counterpart | 29 Wore away |
| 35 Baseball's Ripken | 30 Peruse anew |
| 36 "... man -- mouse?" | 33 Pub game |
| 37 Leave in a hurry | 35 Scratching post users |
| 40 IRS worker | 38 Finish |
| 41 Cereal grain | 39 Which person? |
| 42 Uncool group | |
| 43 Vegas number | |



CRYPTOQUOTE

QDJ SOXO RMKO FOXAOYZPQ ZD LO PDEOK -- MCK BJXOPQ U IMEO PDEOK QDJ, UC ZIO UKOM DA QDJ, RQ SIDPO PUAO PDCV. -- OPUNMLOZI LMXOZZ LXDSUCV

Saturday's Cryptoquote: I HOPE OUR WISDOM WILL GROW WITH OUR POWER, AND TEACH US, THAT THE LESS WE USE OUR POWER THE GREATER IT WILL BE. -- THOMAS JEFFERSON

Yesterday's answer

APED SLOTH
DELI PARROT
ARIZ ANGELA
GIZZARD ADS
ELAINES SIT
END BONE
AROSE LUNGS
RANT BIZ
AVA PUZZLES
BID ATACOST
INARUT URS
CERISE TREK
SEDER SYNE

A XYDLBAAXR is LONGFELLOW

One letter stands for another. In this sample, A is used for the three Ls, X for the two O's, etc. Single letters, apostrophes, the length and formation of the words are all hints. Each day the code letters are different.

BEETLE BAILEY by Mort Walker



by Don Trachte



HENRY

