

PM wins Champions of the Earth Award

An honour well deserved

WE congratulate the Prime Minister on winning the prestigious Champions of the Earth Award for her farsighted initiatives to address the challenges of climate change. In recognising the immediacy of taking decisive steps to combat the devastating effects of climate change on our increasingly vulnerable population, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has been exemplary. Under her leadership, Bangladesh is the first developing country to frame a coordinated Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan (2009) and the first nation to set up its own Climate Change Trust Fund with a significant amount from domestic resources. During her watch the Constitution was amended to include a directive to protect the environment and natural resources. Her government is trying to set up new health services to deal with waterborne diseases as a result of floods, training communities about early warning systems and promoting climate-friendly agricultural technologies and renewable energy.

While much has been achieved there is yet more to be done, and at such a moment of national pride we would like to take the opportunity to apprise the Prime Minister of an environmental concern that has been a subject of crusade for this paper: the need to save our rivers. This paper has been at the forefront in trying to stir up awareness regarding the importance of preserving our rivers that are lifelines of our cities, towns and villages. We therefore urge her to spearhead initiatives to prevent the unnatural death of our rivers and water bodies caused by encroachment.

A new Master Plan for Dhaka

Why wasn't the old one implemented?

A NEW Dhaka master plan has been drafted. And apart from saying that the old master plan was drawn up sitting at home, the minister for housing has not offered any rationale for why it wasn't implemented. The DAP of the existing master plan was a gazetted document which had taken long years to complete. The argument that the current plan, which is about to expire, is not good enough and a pragmatic DAP needs to be designed does not sound convincing.

It has been alleged by various bodies and professionals that the new plan is being formulated, keeping the experts in the dark; even the two mayors have not been made aware of the new draft plan. Allegedly, this is an effort to give undue privileges to realtors at the cost of preserving wetlands, a must for any major urban centre.

The reality on the ground is that filling up canals, wetlands and water bodies have played havoc with Dhaka's drainage systems. And in this, some unscrupulous developers and realtors have played a major role. We have seen the consequences of such mindless activity on the city very recently.

The fear of environmental activists is perhaps not entirely unfounded, that the new plan ultimately passed into legislation without an exhaustive consultative process in its formulation, will lead to disaster. We firmly believe that rushing into finalising the new plan without professional input of experts, would be merely toying with future of Dhaka city and its surrounding areas.

COMMENTS

"VIPs get it just like that"
(September 13, 2015)

Anonymous

VIPs always get extra privileges in our country. It is nothing new.

Poli Akter

Ordinary people suffer every year to reach home due to this trend.

Amina Razia

It has become a practice that a large number of tickets must be set aside for politicians, businessmen, bureaucrats, police officials and other influential people every year during the time of Eid. Common people have to go through untold sufferings as a result.

"Hajj to go ahead"
(September 13, 2015)

Rani

Proper investigation should be conducted by the Saudi authority. The loss of the lives was so unfortunate.

"Indian cattle arrive after long break"
(September 12, 2015)

Abul Naser

It's good news that cattle are coming from India. May be this time the price won't be high.

IT'S THE SOCIETY, STUPID!

M. ADIL KHAN

OUR societies are broken and yet as the phase of Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) are coming to a close by the end of 2015, the UN is promoting a new set of goals, namely the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), as the global framework of future 'development'.

During the MDGs phase, some of the goals have indeed been achieved by certain countries but lingering poverty, growing inequality, significant environmental decay and breakdown of moral fabric of most societies indicate that all is not well. Furthermore, there is also no concrete evidence to prove a correlation between economic progress and MDGs. Many argue that given the global economic dynamics and numerous home-grown initiatives, such as micro-credit including local resilience, economic development and poverty alleviation would have had occurred regardless. Moreover, one of the key and expected drivers of MDGs – foreign aid – never came anywhere near the agreed target and thus, is unlikely to have made much impact on MDGs. On the contrary, the donor community's wholesale advocacy of neoliberal economic policies – the so-called 'Washington Consensus' – established deeply the structural inequities that currently plague most societies.

In these circumstances and given the faltering track record of foreign aid and the West's exploitative and extractive interventions in developing countries, exactly what the SDGs – that rely heavily on foreign aid and good behaviour of the 'developed' countries – would achieve is difficult to predict at this stage. All we can say is that a growth strategy that is inherently predatory is unlikely to deliver equitable and sustainable development outcomes; it is like asking Al Capone to do community work within the framework of extortion policies.

Furthermore, we also need to realise that regardless of whether we call it MDGs or SDGs, 'development', which is a post-colonial economic and geopolitical control tool that might have yielded some benefits to some countries, has passed its use-by date. What we need now is to shift our focus from development to societies.

We argue that economic growth is important but agree with Nobel Laureate Joseph Stiglitz that "Maximising GDP is not same as maximising wellbeing." When referring to the devastating effects debt-led growth based on neoliberal economic policies have had on Europe, Irish President Michael Higgins also observed recently, "The current state of the European economy, with its high levels of

unemployment, poverty and increasing inequality, is a source of concern, anxiety and even moral outrage for many of our fellow citizens. . . the problem might not lie so much in a lack of the right answers to this most recent crisis of capitalism as in an absence of the right questions."

In the backdrop, in spite of significant progress in economic growth, most societies these days face intractable maladies in terms of rising inequities, crime, marginalisation of the disadvantaged, denting of democratic values, falling moral standards, etc. From the governance point of view, a rising nexus of vested interests between the state and corporations is making

perhaps, but Buddha's notion of a 'happy society' points at two very important elements that are valid even today – well, especially today – and these are, firstly, the values of mutual empathy and secondly, compassion to nature. Buddha also believed that "happiness" is not about reaching a higher material state (for example in today's terms, higher GDP, higher consumption etc.), it is about achieving a higher social and moral state.

Like Buddha, Aristotle also argued that virtues of "justice" that guarantee equity and social harmony help making people "happy" and "live well", the same way, Islam stresses that principles of Insaaf (justness) in governance is essential to building societies that are spiritually nurturing, morally rich and socially just. Similarly, Hinduism talks about Prakriti (sensitivity to nature) and Guna (self-actualisation) as foundations of "human goodness".

In sum, a "good society" agenda warrants complete re-orientation of our vision of progress from economic to social, from self to community and in terms of lifestyle aspirations from consumerism and materialism to conserving and with regard to living standards, from audacious to adequate.

Embracing these ideas into the very fabric of our societies may sound daunting but not impossible. These can be pursued through a number of secular tools though, as has been revealed above and also argued by some that re-invention and re-invocation of "constructive values of religion" in public policies may equally help in achieving norms that contribute to "shared. . . humanitarian welfare" and "ecological preservation", implying that re-education and leadership are key to re-organisation of societies. Few examples such as those of Scandinavia and few other countries such as Bhutan, Costa Rica and Uruguay reaffirm what the recently elected British Labour Party leader Jeremy Corbyn once famously said, "Alternatives are possible."

Indeed we have wasted much time by asking what the society can do for the economy and we have suffered. We need to turn this theory on its head and put society ahead of the economy and ask ourselves what the economy can do for the society, and unite globally to develop norms, values and systems that make societies equitable, sustainable and most importantly, morally nourishing where economics plays only a complementary role to form 'good societies', both within and across!

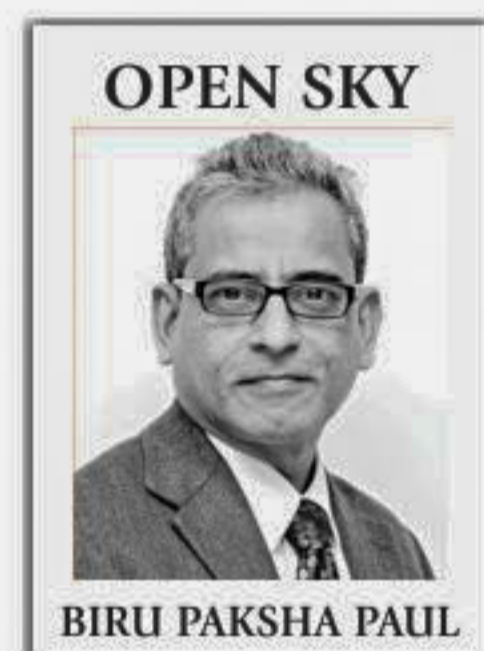
The writer is a professor at the School of Social Science, University of Queensland, Australia and retired senior policy manager of the United Nations. He can be reached at adil.khan@uq.edu.au.

In spite of significant progress in economic growth, most societies these days face intractable maladies in terms of rising inequities, crime, marginalisation of the disadvantaged, denting of democratic values, falling moral standards, etc.

governments more corrupt and despotic, and societies more Orwellian. It is thus reasonable to ask – should we continue the way we are going or should we instead change our vision of progress from 'development' to what we call 'good society' and regard 'development' as a means and not as an end; 'good society' should be the end goal.

So what is a 'good society'? Gautama Buddha conceptualised "happy society", in terms of (quoted in Prakrit), *bahujanahitaya bahujanasukaya lokanukampaya*, meaning, "Each work and life for the good of the many, for the happiness of the many, out of compassion for the world." Utopia,

Making of manpower in a market economy



BIRU PAKSHA PAUL

THE reason many people do not like a market economy lies in the acid test of harsh competition. To them, the market economy is a story of losing

jobs by being made redundant in the workplace. Liberalisation has swept through the world and so has technology. The bell rings every morning; do not miss the train. Many of us work hard to remain at the cutting edge of competition and then abruptly get catapulted out of jobs. No matter for how many years we have been doing these jobs, our experience or expertise may be obsolete any day without sufficient warning. In the backdrop of globalisation, manpower preparedness is a new area of research that warrants urgent attention to survive in a competitive world of technology and connectivity.

Modernisation is sweet but its path is cruel. A typist will collect his last paycheck in his middle age if he has not learnt how to use a computer. No one can protect this typist unless he shields himself by updating his skills every year through investing in education and training. The free market economy tolled the death knell for millions of workers who either remained myopic to what was happening around them or could not recharge the battery to empower themselves. Their farewell parties, being premature, ended in tears. Resorting to trade unions did not work either, because people have little sympathy for luddites who oppose the advent of modern techniques for their short-term

interest or incapacity.

The making of the workforce in a market economy requires continuous training. Ours is a nation that believes little in training, which is often perceived as unnecessary as it is expensive. Our excessive attention on the rapid increment of literacy rate has overshadowed the urgency of skill-based training and quality education. The consequences are mercilessly reflected on the Knowledge Economy Index of Asia, where we are floundering in the



lowest layer. Our position in the Knowledge Index is a threat to our future growth potential. According to the theory of endogenous growth, investment in skill, technology and knowledge, can reinvigorate a country's growth path which has slowed down recently. If we do not develop our workforce with adequate training and education in science and technology, the whole nation will sink into mediocrity.

Liberalisation has brought renaissance to the life of the economy. Bangladesh

could never dream of 120 million mobile sets being sold in a country of 160 million people, had there been a government monopoly in the telecom sector. We have not forgotten the bitter and painful days when we had to resort to the grace of the T&T officials or even the 'powerful' linemen for an urgent telephone connection. A poor or middle-class household could not even dream of a telephone line. Massive privatisation of phone companies have not only alleviated the sufferings of

national wealth, owing to inefficient management and corrupt practices. Phones, nowadays, are not only devices of communication, but also the engines of fast financial transactions and business management. Internet connections to smartphones are changing the definition of how we need to manage our life, communication, and even entertainment.

Many people now complete a quarter of their office work when they are stuck in terrible traffic. Farmers now know how to use the information to search for any agriculture related queries. The workforce must update itself to the changing pattern of life and the increased demand for technology. The lesson stands: be up to the mark or perish. The phrase 'survival of the fittest' could not be more relevant in regard to manpower development in order to harvest the benefits of globalisation.

Integrated national planning is needed to confront the challenges of the free market economy. Education must be revamped to address the growing demand for scientific and economic knowledge. Learning English will qualify us to attract global call center businesses. Universities should be advised to build their curricula to meet global standards and the long term target of the economy. Professional disparity in the recruitment process, that creates huge brain drain within our borders, must come to an end. The media can play a great role in this regard. Thus reshaping the national workforce to cater to the necessities of liberalisation and technological progress is imperative to empower the country with a higher 8 percent growth potential. The workforce will lose its force and manpower will lose its power without rapid modernisation of education in the competitive climate of the market economy.

The writer is chief economist of Bangladesh Bank.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

letters@thedailystar.net

Restore jute export to India

Recently India has imposed tougher restrictions on Indian importers of jute and jute products from Bangladesh. As a result, exports from Bangladesh have stopped. This is a huge loss for jute farmers in Bangladesh. We urge the government to immediately take up the issue with their Indian counterpart.

Mobarak Ali
Gopibagh, Dhaka



Police firing on EWU students

This refers to the op-ed piece "Police firing on EWU students - The use of excessive force," published in TDS on September 13, 2015. It seemed to me that the writer presented only one side of the issue. The government has the right to impose taxes on its citizens and the citizens have the right to protest. But in Bangladesh, protests often take ugly and violent forms. Who has given

students the right to block all the major roads and cause sufferings to all? This is unlawful. Students could assemble in the Suhrawardy Uddyan or any other open space and voice their concerns.

In our country everybody wants to find fault with the police. But the police were overwhelmed by the sheer number of students. I hope people will appreciate the limitations under which the police have to function.

Bazlur Rahman
Uttara, Dhaka