

BOOK REVIEW

Bangladesh Facing the Future, *Abdus Samad*.

BRAC Printers, Dhaka, 1983, 242 pages. Tk. 60 only.

Development is an objective which each and every nation strives for. To the overwhelming majority of the Third World countries economic development implies a structural and institutional transformation of entire societies and attacking the basic parameters of poverty and underdevelopment like overpopulation, malnutrition, disease, illiteracy, unemployment, low productivity and social inequality. Developing countries are, therefore, faced with a multidimensional challenge of reorganisation and re-orientation of the entire socio-economic system, the more so, if they belong to the group of newly emergent nations. When Bangladesh emerged as an independent nation in 1971 it was one of the poorest countries of the world faced with an uphill task of structural and institutional transformation of an economy ravaged by a nine-month long liberation war. Today after 12 years of mixed experience of hopes and frustrations, confidence and uncertainty, achievements and pitfalls in the given national and international context, Bangladesh continues to portray a sombre picture of poverty and stagnation.

The country is faced with the challenge of charting out practical and efficient policies which, on the basis of her past experiences, would lead Bangladeshis on to a more hopeful future. What is the nature of problems faced by the country and how should they be handled for building a better future are the questions pertinent to all concerned with the fate of the country and its people. Abdus Samad, in his book "Bangladesh Facing the Future"—attempts at providing some answers to these questions.

The book under review attempts to analyze the economic problems and prospects of Bangladesh from a historical perspec-

tive, It is divided into three parts : (1) the first ten years, (2) some fundamental problems and (3) stepping into the future,

After a scrutiny of the successive plans and their phases, the book in its first part addresses itself to estimate how much progress have been made and to explore whether the economy is on a stronger footing than before. The picture that emerges is a cause of grave concern. The author is of the opinion that except for some progress in the areas of production, expansion of transport network, strengthening of administrative and social infrastructure and broadening of trade and foreign employment, the foundations of Bangladesh economy still remain weak and is highly vulnerable to weather and adverse swings in aid and trade.

"The general economic situation remains one of pervasive poverty. Due to faulty policies, imbalances in structure of the economy have been heightened and poverty has deepened in rural areas" (p, 86), he concludes. Pointing to the fact that the agriculture sector, which is the life-blood of the country has grown the least, the author asserts that no significant progress has been made in solving the fundamental causes of the country's poverty.

In the second part of the book, the author deals in details with these causes of poverty. In nine separate chapters dealing with Population, Employment, Resources for development, Agriculture, Industry, Education, Health, Energy and Foreign Exchange and Foreign Trade, the book attempts to highlight the hindrances to progress in each sector. The exercise in this part through a detailed presentation of facts and figures presents a comprehensive spectrum of the roots of poverty and stagnation in the economy. It also puts forward some suggestions and policy measures. The chapters in this part presents a rather static picture and although most of them are equipped with a lot of information and statistical tables, there is not enough analysis on these information which might have offered some positive approach to the solution of the problems rather than presenting some normative and optimistic observations.

The final part of the book concentrates on the prospects of development in Bangladesh. An attempt is first made to explore the position of the Bangladesh economy in the world context. It then brings into focus the extent of the country's poverty and its causes viewed from a global perspective. Drawing upon the experiences from the colonial period and the troubled co-existence with Pakistan the author comes to the conclusion that poverty in this part of the world is largely the result of accumulated neglect and continuous drainage of resources. Samad suggests that people's consciousness about their rights are crucial for combatting exploitation at both national and international level. "To this end, a basic need is that they demand and receive full facts of all important happenings and there is open discussion on national issues" (p. 228). Emphasis is laid, by this, on the importance of mass awareness and participation in the whole of the development process in the country.

In the concluding chapter, the author gives stress on social harmony and justice. Political stability and social tranquility are argued to be the *sin qua non* of steady economic growth. In order that political uncertainty and social unrest is removed, it is asserted that political power must emanate from and serve the cause of the people. The author is of the opinion that the institutional framework necessary for Bangladesh should emanate from rural areas with villages as the basic unit.

Finally, the author envisages that even through Bangladesh has an extremely difficult task ahead, it can be accomplished with correct policies, united efforts and optimum use of resources. In Samad's perception, natural resources, productive physical assets, a good administrative and institutional infrastructure and a skilled manpower are the factors that primarily contribute to development of the country like Bangladesh. Efficient and productive use of existing assets and a high rate of investment for improving the existing assets and creating new assets are also crucial for Bangladesh to face the future. Last, but not the least, strong determination and forward-looking and courageous policies would guide Bangladesh to be a nice country.

To quote his words, "There is only one way to go, to shake off fatalism, to denounce mute submission to poverty and to build a better future" (p. 242).

Abdus Samad in his book has compiled several important information which would be of valuable assistance to anybody interested in the economic history and problems of Bangladesh. It is, no doubt, a valuable reference, portraying the realities of the current economic situation of Bangladesh. In reading the book, one obtains and experience of optimism out of frustration. The book does equip "the common man with basic knowledge of working of the economy" but hardly shows how "he (common man) can take the control of decision-making"—an objective to which the author optimistically committed in his preface. The book is essentially an exercise on the problems of economic development of the country. The author, however, fails to substantiate his approach to development and throughout the book presents his value judgements rather than going into any positive economic analysis.

The book has used a wide variety of sources and incorporated many useful charts and tables. However, a bibliography would have enhanced the quality of the book. The get up and printing of the book is good with very few printing errors and it is reasonably priced.

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