



Population, literacy and development - II

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On the first day of the new year according to the Christian calendar, President Ershad announced two gifts to the nation. They are the Debt Adjudication Board and the Board of Investment with himself as the chairman. The Debt Adjudication Board is designed to prevent the alienation of land by the small and marginal farmers and to review the indebtedness of the cultivator on account of both institutional and non-institutional agricultural credit and the existing rate of interest including that of the compound interest.

While the intention is undoubtedly laudable, it is not likely to work in a bureaucratic milieu not amenable to public control. It will impede the spread of institutional credit for the rural poor by the Grameen Bank and the cooperatives if they are interfered with by the Debt Adjudication Boards.

The debt conciliation boards succeeded in Undivided Bengal in scaling down rural indebtedness because the administration was responsive to public intervention. It is as much a tribute to the leadership of A K Fazlul Huq as it is to

the government is touting for the private sector including foreign direct investment is hardly capable of producing the same effect.

The continuous growth in the external indebtedness of the developing countries suggests that import substitution and export promotion have led them to adopt the production techniques and to replicate the industrial facilities inconsistent with their factor endowments.

Emulative industrialization as it is called, has left them increasingly dependent upon imports of intermediate and capital goods to sustain the process, which, in its turn, has led to the neglect of agriculture and the need to import an increasing proportion of essential food requirements which again reduce their capacity to finance the imports needed to sustain industrial investment.

Import substitution has not helped a country like India. It has merely increased the lead times as Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi said the other day. The dynamics of growth should come from within the country, calling for

much greater emphasis on self-help and self-reliance.

A proper industrial policy would anticipate the needs of the people and tailor the industrial production structure to produce the basic wage goods to meet them. Income would be generated directly in the hands of the rural and urban poor to help them satisfy the minimum needs for food, clothing, structure, medical care, industries and transportation.

The President did not mention the third gift to the people namely the compulsory teaching of English from class I to XII. The government has reverted to the position announced by the Education Minister Dr. Abdul Majid Khan on 2.9.82 in which the learned minister advocated three languages in the primary stage. The government has recently extended the duration of religious instruction up to class X.

While the decline in the standards of English teaching cannot be doubted its use in the primary stage is unwarranted. It seems the government does not attach much importance to the terminal character of

primary education which is all that the vast majority of students will even have the opportunity of attending, if at all.

Obviously the government is thinking in terms of primary education as a mere stage a stepping-stone to further education to the secondary stage and even beyond for which English would be a prerequisite. Students will now be able to answer the script in English without any fun.

Primary education should not be burdened with languages and learning literacy skills. It should teach simple skills like literacy, numeracy and inculcate the knowledge of the environment which is after life will make them more receptive to the ideas of improved agriculture; better living and informed citizenry.

Nothing shows the character of the government better than its cavalier attitude towards primary education. The eradication of illiteracy by 2000 AD even remains a distant goal as was the Unesco plan of 1960 to achieve universal literacy by 1980.