

REINTRODUCTION OF UPAZILA PARISHAD : CAN IT FULFIL PEOPLE'S EXPECTATIONS ?

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INTRODUCTION

The Martial Law Government in 1982 introduced Upazila Parishad as a tier of Local Government. The then BNP Government abolished it in 1991, while the Awami League Government reintroduced it through Upazila Parishad Act in 1998. The purpose of this paper is to review and find out if the reintroduction of Upazila Parishad will fulfil the expectations of the people in rural Bangladesh. These expectations may be summarised as follows through Political Economic, Social and Technological [PEST] analysis :

Political : (a) Empowerment of the rural people and their leaders to have an effective say in their own affairs i.e., to ensure their participation in project identification, selection and implementation.

(b) Good governance.

Economic : Rural infrastructural development, promotion of **small scale industries**, works programme for employment generation with particular focus on poverty alleviation, micro-credit for the marginal farmers and assetless people.

Social : Development of educational institutions **with** particular emphasis on **primary** and vocational education, promotion of rural housing, expansion of health and medicare facilities catering to the needs of family planning, maternity and child health.

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Technological : Modernisation of agriculture, increase of acreage under irrigation, supply and preservation of HYV seeds, construction of go-downs and cold storage for the agricultural produce, access to information technology (IT).

The review reveals [by SWOT methodology] how far the defunct upazila parishads could fulfil these expectations and unfolds the great potential of the reformed upazila parishads keeping in view the project mission.

Upazila Parishad : Focal Point of Development

The military Government of President Ershad back in October, 1982 decided through a Cabinet Resolution¹ to re-organise administration at the Thana level and make it the focal point of all administrative activities. Under the system, the Government retained the responsibility for regulatory functions and major development activities, of national and regional coverage and transferred all other development activities at the Thana level to the Thana Parishad.

The services of officers dealing with subjects transferred to the Thana Parishad were deemed to have been placed at the disposal of the Thana Parishad and they were accountable to the respective Thana Parishad. However, respective departments of the Government continued to be responsible for the appointment, transfer, promotion, discipline, remuneration of those officers.

In the First Phase on 7th November, 1982, 45 Thana Parishads were upgraded into Upazila Parishads on the basis of the Resolution of the Cabinet Division and in order to provide legal coverage to this action the Chief Martial Law Administrator promulgated on 12th December, 1982 the Local Government (Upazila Parishad and Upazila

¹ Cabinet Division's Resolution on Re-organisation of the Administration at the Thana Level. [No. DA-12(26)/82- 449, dated Dhaka, the 23rd October, 1982, Vide the Bangladesh Gazettee, Extraordinary, dated October, 23, 1982].

Administration Re-organisation) Ordinance, 1982² and the Ordinance was given retrospective effect from the 7th November, 1982. The remaining 415 Thanas were then upgraded in phases into Upazilas and when this process of upgradation was completed, the subdivision as a tier of administration of the government was abolished.

Differences between Thana **Parishad** and Upazila **Parishad**

Upazila Parishad as a structure for rural development in Bangladesh date back early sixtees. The Development Circle headed by Circle Officer (Development) [C.O. (Dev)] and the Thana Parishad comprised of Thana Level Officers and Union Parishad chairmen within the administrative limits of a Police Station (Thana) existed since 1956. Under that system the Sub-Divisional Officer (SDO) was ex-officio Chairman and concerned C.O. (Dev) was ex-officio Vice-Chairmen of the Thana Parishad. The development schemes prepared with the technical expertise of Thana level officers were discussed and approved in the Thana Parishad meetings. There was no voting system and most of the decisions used to be taken through consensus. **As** Thana Parishad members, the officers and Union Parishad chairmen had equal weightage in decision making. The big schemes selected by Thana Parishads costing above Tk. 50,0001- had to be approved by the District Approving Authority (DAA) headed by the Deputy Commissioner. There the concerned District level officers were members of the D.A.A. This rural development prior to the advent of the upazila system was thus participatory in character and both the people's representatives and government officials played their due roles in the process.

² *The Local Govt. (Upazila Parishad and Upazila Administration) Ordinance, 1982 (Ordinance No. LIX of 1982).*

However, the striking contrast between the defunct Thana Parishad and the Upazila Parishad was that a chairman elected on the basis of adult franchise was the Chairman of the Upazila Parishad and only the public representative members had the right to vote. The official members could participate in the discussions of the Parishad but could not vote on any matter. Moreover, the Upazila Parishad had autonomy in taking decisions subject to guidelines issued by the Government from time to time.

Composition of Upazila Parishad

The Composition³ of Upazila Parishad under the 1982 Ordinance was :

1. Chairman (to be elected)
2. Representative members (chairmen of the Union Parishads and Paurashavas within the Upazila, ex-officio)
3. Three women members residing in the Upazila (to be nominated by the Government)
4. And the following official members :
 - a) Upazila Nirbahi Officer, ex-officio
 - b) Upazila Health and Family Planning Officer, ex-officio
 - c) Upazila Education Officer, ex-officio
 - d) Upazila Agriculture Officer, ex-officio
 - e) Upazila Engineer, ex-officio
 - f) Upazila Co-operative Officer, ex-officio
 - g) Upazila Livestock Officer, ex-officio

³ *Local Govt. Division's Notification No. S.R.O. 10-L/84/S-VIII/2E-383/13 dated 10th January, 1984 [I'ide the Bangladesh Gazette, Extraordinary, dated January 11, 1984.]*

- h) Upazila Fishery Officer, ex-officio
 - i) Upazila Social Welfare Officer, ex-officio
 - j) Upazila Rural Development Officer, ex-officio
 - k) Upazila Mass Communication Officer, ex-officio
 - l) Upazila Revenue Officer, ex-officio
 - m) Officer-in-Charge, Police Station, ex-officio and
 - n) Upazila Family Planning Officer, ex-officio.
5. Chairman of the Upazila Central Co-operative Association within the Upazila and
6. One member (to be nominated by the Government).

Functions of Upazila

The functions⁴ of the Upazila Parishad are enumerated below :

- 1) All development activities at the Upazila level; formulation of Upazila level development plan and programmes and implementation, monitoring and evaluation thereof.
- 2) Preparation of Upazila Development plans on the basis of Union Development Plans.
- 3) Giving assistance and encouragement to Union Parishads in their activities.
- 4) Promotion of Health, Family Planning and Family Welfare.
- 5) Provision for management of environment.
- 6) Training of chairmen, members and secretaries of Union Parishads.

[†] *The Local Govt. (Upazila Parishad and Upazila Administration Reorganisation) Ordinance. 1982. Sec. 24. The Second Schedule.*

- 7) Implementation of Government Policies and Programmes within the Upazila.
- 8) Supervision, control and co-ordination of functions of officers serving in the Upazila except Munsifs, Trying Magistrates and Officers engaged in regulatory functions.
- 9) Promotion of socio-cultural activities.
- 10) Promotion and encouragement of employment generating activities.
- 11) Such other functions as may be specified by the Government from time to time.
- 12) Promotion and extension of co-operative movement in the Upazila.
- 13) Assistance to Zilla Parishad in development activities.
- 14) Planning and ~~execution~~ of **all rural** public **works** programme.
- 15) Promotion of agricultural activities for maximising production.
- 16) Promotion of educational and vocational activities.
- 17) Promotion of livestock, fisheries and forest.

Financial Management Under The Upazila System

The sources of income to carry out these functions were mainly (a) Government grants and (b) revenue income from the following sources: ⁵

- 1) Lease money of Jalmahals^G situated entirely within Upazila boundaries.
- 2) Tax on profession, trades and callings.

⁵ *The Local Govt. (Upazila Parishad and Upazila Administration Reorganisation) Ordinance, 1982. Sec.42, The Third Schedule.*

⁶ *Jalmahals are large water bodies owned by the government.*

- 3) Tax on dramatic and theatrical shows and other entertainment and amusement.
- 4) Street lighting tax.
- 5) Fees for fairs, agricultural and industrial shows and exhibitions and tournaments.
- 6) Fees for licences and permits granted by the Parishad.
- 7) Toll on services and facilities maintained by the Parishad.
- 8) Lease money from specified hats, bazars and ferries to be determined by the Government.

The above list indicates that the resource base of the Upazila Parishad was very narrow and as such the income derived from the above mentioned sources was also very meagre. The Upazila Parishad as such had to depend almost entirely on the Government for its development programmes.

The Upazila Parishad had to prepare its annual statement of income and expenditure according to Government guidelines and submit copy of it to the Government after its approval 30 days ahead of the closing of every financial year. The Government could modify it within 15 days of its submission, and in that case the modified budget was the approved budget of the Upazila Parishad.

Relations Between Government and Upazila Parishad

- a) Upazila Parishad was a creation of the Government through an ordinance.
- b) Upazila Parishad was too much dependant on the Government finance for its development. So it had to follow government guidelines for utilisation of funds.
- c) The Government could supersede the Upazila Parishad in certain circumstances.

- d) A no-confidence motion against Upazila Parishad Chairmen/members could not become effective unless and until the Government approved it.
- e) The Upazila Parishad was dependant on the Government for its manpower and remuneration paid to them.

Even then the Upazila Parishad was a democratic body under popular leadership and not an extension of the national government.

The Causes of Abolition of Upazila Parishad

The concept of Upazila Parishad system was fully established during the regime of President Ershad through Upazila Chairman elections held in May 16 - 20, 1985 despite the opposition's boycott of the elections. Thus the seeds of its destruction were thus sown from the very beginning. There was, however, partial boycott by the major political parties of the next Upazila Chairman elections held in March 13 - 24, 1990.

The causes leading to the abolition of Upazila Parishads were both political and administrative.

Political

Awami League as a political party was in principle opposed to Martial Law and as such to the Upazila Parishad system introduced by the martial law regime. It also opposed the move because the military had overthrown its own government in 1975. On the other hand, Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) also opposed to the martial law regime introducing Upazila Parishad as it overthrew and usurped power from the BNP Government.

Both the parties were doubtful about the intentions of the military regime in 'democratising' Upazila Parishad at the local level while keeping the National government under Martial Law. They apprehended that like the previous military dictators the military

regime might have a plan to create a power base through Upazila Parishads. These apprehensions subsequently turned true. The military regime formed a political party (J.P.) and installed itself in the reins of Government through parliamentary elections in 1986 using Upazila Parishad Chairman wherever possible for the purpose.

The opposition alliances (7 party alliance under Awami League and 15 party alliance under BNP) started all-out street agitation and non-cooperation movement to oust the government. They were successful in handing over power to the Caretaker Government in 1990. The caretaker Government held Parliamentary Elections within the next 3 months. BNP emerged victorious in the general elections and formed the Government. It did not take time to strike down the Local Govt. (Upazila Parishad and Upazila Administration Reorganisation) Ordinance, 1982 and abolish the Upazila Parishads in 1991.

Administration

The introduction of Upazila Parishad ushered in decentralisation of authority from the national to the local level, but it also set in motion at the same time some forces that weakened the system to a great extent.

First, it brought people's representatives to the centre stage and relegated the Thana level officials to the back stage. The district level officers who had so long supervised the activities suddenly found themselves cut off functionally. This was agonising for the officials who were so long dominating the local level administration. This loss of power made them psychologically hostile towards the Upazila Parishad and the Upazila Chairman.

Secondly, there was generalist-specialist controversy, particularly with reference to the co-ordinating role of Upazila Nirbahi Officer

(UNO). This ultimately resulted in stripping the UNO of powers to write ACRs of the Thana level Officers, countersigning their Travelling Allowance bills and granting them casual leave. This undermined the role of UNO as the Chief Executive Officer of the Upazila Parishad in respect of corporate planning, monitoring and implementation of Upazila development programmes.

Thirdly, though elections to the posts of Upazila Parishad Chairman and Union Parishad Chairmen are held as per rule on a non-partisan basis, but individually the increment belonged to certain political parties. This sometimes led to unethical rivalry and non-confidence motion against the Upazila Parishad Chairman. A Upazila Parishad Chairman could not be removed from his office as per provision of the Ordinance if four-fifths of the total number of representative members of the Parishad did not take a resolution to that effect on cogent grounds and unless the Government approved the resolution. This secured the position of Upazila Parishad Chairmen, but the clash of interests between the Upazila Parishad Chairman on one hand and the Union Parishad chairmen, on the other often caused deadlock in the functioning of the Upazila Parishad to the detriment of development and welfare of the local people.

Fourthly, the administrative jurisdiction of Upazila Chairman and the parliamentary constituency of local Member of Parliament (M.P.) were coterminous. They represented the same area and the same people, and as such each vied with each other for local popularity. In practice the local M.P. could not cater to the development needs of the local people to the same extent as the Upazila Chairman could. The local M.P., especially if he was from the ruling party, wanted to influence the Upazila Chairmen on development matters and if the Upazila Chairmen did not accommodate him, the result was often open animosity. And in that case the local M.P. used to goad the U.P. chairmen against the Upazila Chairman with disastrous consequences for the Upazila.

Fifthly, Upazila was the focal point of all administrative activities, Hence after abolition of Sub-Divisions, judiciary was taken to the Upazila level to make administration of justice cheaper, quicker and nearer to the people. Upazila Magistrate and Upazila Munsif were posted in each Upazila. The Upazila Magistrate was exclusively for magisterial work and the UNO had no judicial functions. But the administrative arrangement was such that if the Upazila Magistrate was absent from the Headquarters on official duty or was absent from duty on the ground of illness or any other ground UNO was to hold Court in his absence. Similarly, if UNO was away from the Upazila or absent, Upazila Magistrates discharged the routine duties of the UNO. This paved the way for interference of the Upazila Parishad Chairman with the criminal administration of justice at the local level which in the long run brought disrepute to the Upazila magistracy.

The last but not the least was rampant corruption that tarnished the image of the Upazila Parishad. As reported in the Press "anti-corruption cases were already instituted against 200 out of a total of 460 Upazila Chairmen (The Holiday Nov. 21, 1986)" and some Upazila Chairmen had already been removed from their chairmanship."⁷

All the above factors and political vendetta led to the abolition of Upazila Parishads, after the new government took power in 1991.

The Current Efforts of Reintroduction of Upazila Parishad

The strength of the system lay in its popularity and acceptability amongst the rural masses. As huge amount of government funds was pumped into the Upazilas, development was beginning to be visible everywhere. There were development in physical infrastructure, education, health and social services. The better service delivery in respect of High Yielding Variety (HYV) seeds, irrigation facilities, fertilizer supply and extension works resulted in noticeable increase in

⁷ *Shawkat Ali, A.M.M. Politics, Development and Upazila, NILG, Dhaka, 1986, p.x.*

agricultural production, family planning activities were stepped up and the population growth rate was rushed down. The Upazilas were humming with activities and this generated employment and slowed down the rate of rural migration to the towns and cities. Township was developing in and around Upazila headquarters. This resulted in great expectations among the local people.

The senior officers and staff who were posted to the Upazila Parishad from the ministries and the district level offices had settled down in new rural setting and environment. They had newly constructed residential quarters. Kindergarten schools were also set up for education of their children. The upgraded posts in the Upazila level offices were filled up by promotion from amongst them. Every office had lot of activities and the District level functionaries as technical supervisors had now say in the affairs of the Upazila Parishad. As responsibility to write ACRs of their subordinate officers at the Upazila level was restored to them, they felt reassured and it boosted their morale. While opposition parties like **Awami** League, Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) and **Jamat** were not opposed to democratisation and strengthening of Upazila Parishad, they were opposed to their use as a political base. The bureaucracy also realised that it is a constitutional requirement to work under the elected leadership at every unit of administration. Thus both politicians and bureaucrats were convinced about the necessity for Upazila Parishads.

It was against this backdrop that Upazila Parishads were reintroduced through Upazila Parishads Act, 1998.⁸

⁸ *Upazila Parishad Act, 1998 (Act 24 of 1998) Vide the Bangladesh Gazette, Extraordinary, dated December 3, 1998.*

Local Government Ordinance VS Upazila **Parishad** Act

It is true that the Upazila **Parishad** did not fail to fulfil the people's expectations but due to a number of operational constraints it failed to meet the target. The Upazila **Parishad** Act, 1998 was passed in Parliament in the light of the experiences gained during the functioning of the Upazila **Parishad** from 1982 to 1991. This Act as such is an improved version of the Local Government (Upazila **Parishad** and Upazila Administration Reorganisation) Ordinance, 1982. The differences between the two are :

1. The Local Government Ordinance, 1982 was an ordinance promulgated under **Martial** Law. The Upazila **Parishads** Act, 1998 is on the other hand, an Act of Parliament formulated in the light of the recommendations of the Local Government Commission and passed after proper scrutiny and deliberations in the Parliament. The inherent strength, applicability and acceptability of this Act are much wider than those of the Local Government Ordinance, 1982.
2. **All** the **Thanas** of the country (**463** now) have been declared **Upazilas** and administrative units as per article 152 (1) read with article 59 of the Constitution of Bangladesh. This constitutional provision was not there in the Local Government Ordinance, 1982. The Upazila **Parishads** could be easily nullified on basis of this legal flaw.
3. The Upazila **Parishads** previously comprised of both official and elected members. The Upazila **Parishads** under the Act of 1998 are comprised of only elected representatives of the people and should be composed of :
 - a) Chairman of Upazila **Parishad** elected directly on the basis of adult franchise.

- b) Chairman of Municipalities, if any situated within the limits of the Upazila.
 - c) Chairman of Union Parishads situated within the limits of Upazila.
 - d) One-third of women members of these Municipalities and Union Parishads elected from among themselves.
4. The functions of the Upazila Parishads under the Act are more or less the same as in the Ordinance of 1982, except that the Upazila Parishads are now required to undertake self-employment and poverty alleviation programmes on their own in addition to assisting implementation of similar programmes of the Government.
 5. The resource/income base of the Upazila Parishads under the Act has been significantly broadened further. Each Upazila will now have in addition to the existing sources of income, 1% of registration fees collected on account of property transfers and 2% of Local Development Taxes collected from within the Upazila.
 6. The Local M.P. had no legal and functional relationship with Upazila Parishad under the Local Government Ordinance 1982, but he has now been included under the Act as an Adviser to the Upazila Parishad and Upazila Parishad will have to consult him.
 7. The Upazila Nirbahi Officer (UNO) was the chief executive officer of the defunct Upazila Parishad. He will now be simply Secretary to the Upazila Parishad. This is a drastic change in his co-ordinating role.
 8. In the Local Government Ordinance, 1982 there was no mention of who will write whose ACRs. This was described in the resolution/executive order of the Government. Hence, this could be easily changed by the Government from time to time. It has

now been clearly provided in this Act that Upazila Parishad will write the Annual Performance Report of the officers dealing with the transferred subjects and their departmental superior officers will write their ACRs.

9. Personally National Implementation Committee on Administrative Reforms and Cabinet Division used to monitor implementation of administrative reforms and functioning of Upazila Parishads. These were essentially Government executive arrangements. It has now been provided in the Act itself that under the overall supervision of Cabinet Division a high powered Committee shall be formed for the purpose to monitor the activities transferred to the Upazila Parishads and issue necessary guidelines and instructions
10. The courts of Magistrates and Munsifs which were previously transferred to Upazilas now have been retained at the district level.

The Dream Vs Reality Of Upazila Parishads

Upazila Parishads are now an accepted reality and legal entity. Under the Upazila Parishad Act 1998, constitution of the Upazila Parishads will have to be completed through Upazila Chairmen elections by 27th December, 1999. The opposition political parties (BNP), Jatiya Party and Jamat demand that the Upazila Chairmen elections should be free and fair and be held under the caretaker Government. The Government is of the view, that as per constitutional and legal provisions only the parliamentary elections to be held under the Caretaker Government and the Local Government elections which are contested on non-partisan basis should be held as usual as in the past under the existing Government. The Election Commission being an independent body will ensure free and impartial polls. If all the political parties, however, do not participate in Upazila Chairmen

elections, the future of Upazila Parishads will again hang in the balance and hopes will be nipped in the bud.

The success or failure of the Upazila Parishad under this Act will depend largely on how the relationships will evolve between the Secretary of Upazila Parishad i.e. UNO and other Upazila level officers on one hand, and the Upazila Parishad as a whole and the Upazila level officers on the other. Their functional relationship will not be fully clear until the rules of business are framed under the Act with regard to control and co-ordination and for the transaction of business of the Upazila Parishad.

Section 24 of the Upazila Parishad Act, 1998 provides that Upazila Parishad will write the Annual Performance Report (APR) of the officers dealing with the transferred subjects. Since the executive powers of Upazila Parishad will vest in the Upazila Parishad Chairman, it is anticipated that he will write the Annual Performance Report of UNO and other upazila level officers dealing with transferred subjects. If that is so, there will be no single officer in the Upazila Parishad in a position to command, control and co-ordinate the officers working under the Upazila Parishad. If this is left to the elected Upazila Parishad Chairmen, it will not be possible for the UNO to get the work done by other Upazila level officers effectively. It will also not be possible on the part of the Upazila Parishad Chairman to get the work done because of his lack of experience and time. The Upazila Parishad chairman cannot be expected to devote full time to the business of Upazila Parishad. If the rules of business are framed in such a way that will allow the UNO to write their ACRs and the Upazila Chairman to countersign them, that will be more pragmatic and conducive to the proper functioning of the Upazila Parishads. But the past experience indicates that it is not to be the case.

The Upazila level officers under the new system will not be members of the Upazila Parishad. The concerned Upazila level officer having no voting right will however be able to attend, participate and ventilate his opinion in the Upazila Parishad meetings. All Upazila level officers may not be there in the coordination meeting and that may breed frustration among the Upazila level officers and in the end, they may be individually or collectively become resistant or hostile toward the business of the Upazila Parishad leading to undesirable consequences. Therefore, the rules should be so carefully framed under the Act so as to avert these possibilities.

The charter of duties for the Upazila Parishad Chairman, UNO and other Upazila level officers were annexed to the Cabinet Division's Resolution on Re-organisation of the Thana Level Administration in 1982. This distribution of work and responsibilities had no legal basis. Therefore, the rules to be framed under the Act of 1998 should, under the changed circumstances, modify, specify and elaborate their responsibilities in order to avoid any overlapping and confusion.

There was no charter of duties for the district level officers under **the old ordinance. Since the Upazila Parishads execute multifarious** development programmes the District level officers may be keen to see if the Government guidelines are being followed in allocating funds and undertaking programmes relating to their respective line Ministries and if their technical advice had been obtained and applied by the Thana level functionaries under them.

The infrastructure projects such as roads and highways, water projects etc. involve more than one Upazila. There are inter-departmental issues which also need to be resolved at a higher level. That was why Upazila Parishad Chairmen were included as members of the District Development Co-ordination Committee. This arrangement should continue until the Zila Parishad elections are held and Zila Parishads are constituted.

Every Upazila has got Upazila Development Plans. This was actually an infrastructural development plan and Upazila Parishads were to take up schemes under this plan according to needs and priority. There should however, be a comprehensive economic development plan for every union and Upazila conferring all segments of the economy. The Annual Upazila Development Programmes should be based on this comprehensive plan and integrated into the regional and national development plans. The district level officers can play a key role in integrating Annual Upazila Development Plan into Annual Development Programme (ADP) and Five-Year Plans. This should be clearly spelt out in their charter of duties.

There are Rules of Business and Secretariat instructions for disposal of business at the Secretariat. There are some rules for disposal of business at the Upazila level but these are not comprehensive and there is no time frame for disposal of business. As a result, the service delivery to the people had to suffer. Therefore, there should be a time frame for every activity-input supply, contracting, bill payment, distribution of contraceptives and disposal of applications on 'First come, First served' basis etc. These rules should be prominently displayed on the Bill Boards and office walls for public information. This will ensure transparency and accountability. If the Upazila Parishad, District level officers and Upazila level officers themselves strictly adhere to the time frame, service delivery is bound to improve further resulting in increased agricultural production, decrease in population growth rate, employment generation and above all good governance.

Conclusion

The Local Government Commission⁹ elicited opinion of people's representatives, political workers, journalists, lawyers, educationists,

⁹ *Government of Bangladesh, Local Govt. Commission : The Report on the Strengthening of Local Govt. Institutions. May, 1997, Appendix KA TO CHA Vide the Bangladesh Gazette, Extraordinary, dated September, 5, 1996.*

businessmen, contractors, labourers and the jobless people through (a) publication and circulation of questionnaire, (b) Round Table discussions and (c) through field visits and talking to the cross-section of people in different parts of the country. It also heard the opinions of the Army, Navy and Air Forces, Peasant organisations, Labour organisations, Professionals, Civil Servants, Chairman, members and employees of different local bodies and so on. The opinion obtained was overwhelmingly in favour of reintroduction of Thana/Upazila Parishad as a focal point of development. Had it not fulfilled the people's expectations during its existence from 1982 to 1991, the opinion would not have been so much favourable.

Every Upazila used to get a Government grant of Tk. 50,00,000/- on an average annually for expenditure on rural development. According to the Government guidelines¹⁰ this allocation was to be subdivided sectorwise as follows : agriculture and irrigation - 15% to 25%, small and cottage industry 5% to 10%, physical infrastructure 17.5% to 30%, housing community and sanitation development 10% to 17.5%, education 5% to 25%, health and social welfare 7.5% to 15%, sports and culture 2.5% to 7.5%, Union Parishad works programme 5.7% to 7.5% and miscellaneous (disaster management, birth and death register) 2.5% to 25%. Poverty alleviation is now one of the chartered functions of the Upazila Parishads and the Government may now think of earmarking a certain percentage of Upazila development fund for poverty alleviation programmes to the benefit of about 50% of the population living below the poverty line.

Around 90% of the rural population are farmers and cultivators. They benefited directly from the increased expenditure on irrigation and dissemination of technical know-how on improved methods of farming and pisciculture. Development of physical infrastructure facilitated marketing of their produce. The cropping intensity due to

¹⁰ Ministry of Planning, *Planning Division's Memo No. PABI/SHACHIB/85*; dated 13.7.1985.

irrigation increased employment opportunities for the landless and marginal farmers. Construction of roads and bridges, community centres, godowns, educational institutions and execution of Union Parishad works programme did not only develop the rural areas but also added to the existing job opportunities for the contractors, masons, carpenters and unskilled labourers. This increased business of the small traders as well as the educationists were happy with the increase in enrolment and literacy. Moreover, the increase in family planning activities and intensive monitoring decreased population growth rate appreciably. The local administration could respond to the needs of the local people during natural calamities and disasters better and quicker with the rapidly available funds earmarked for disaster management.

The increase in agricultural production, rapid development of rural infrastructure, expansion of educational institutions, growth of township and reduction in rural migration rate are all positive indicators of rural development and fulfilment of the people's aspirations.

The operational constraints of the Upazila Parishads have largely been removed and now the resource base has been significantly broadened under the Upazila Parishad Act, 1998. This institution has been further democratised by including one-third of the elected women members of municipalities and union parishads situated within the administrative limits of the Upazila as members of the Upazila Parishad. A high powered committee under the Cabinet Division will be in place to monitor Upazila Parishad activities. If Chairman and members of the Upazila Parishad and the Upazila level functionaries are properly trained about the powers, functions and objectives of the Parishads at the time of their induction into the office and the Governments to support the Upazila Parishads with adequate funds, there is no reason why the Upazila Parishads under the prevailing democratic environment will not be able to fulfil the people's expectations in a better way.

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