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Village statistics

President Ershad during a meeting on rural development in Bangabhaban on Sunday said that statistics on villages have to be authentic and that both planners and those engaged in implementation must be fully conversant with the real situation in the countryside. The President has, in fact, pointed to two basic weaknesses in our rural development programme. In most cases, statistics are not reliable because these are not reflective of the true situation. They have not been collected in a responsible manner and also sometimes the objectivity tends to remain hidden underneath an effort to give a rosier picture of life in the villages. In some cases also, statistics have been 'manufactured' in offices in Dhaka. The other drawback is the fact that our planners and other officials are given to deciding on what should be done in the villages in the air cooled rooms of their central offices.

Obviously these two attitudes have led to a lot of erroneous planning and unfulfilled targets and have therefore come under fire. One can expect that there will now be a change. The President has advised officials to regularly visit the villages and work in cooperation with the local leaders and the people. It has been accepted now that "Bangladesh lives in her 70,000 villages" and it is possible that these villages singly or in clusters can be made self-reliant. History tells us that in the olden times when there were hardly any centralised planning, the villages were self-reliant where every village had its blacksmith, silversmith, potter and the weaver.

One cannot advocate putting the clock back, but we can certainly reorient attitudes in planning. One of these is acquiring an on-the-spot knowledge of the rural situation. This is possible through greater association with the villages. In this process both elected and government officials will have to work together. The new decentralised administration has come as a boon for helping villages acquire self-reliance. One can, for instance, have an individual development plan and budget for every "upazila".

Another aspect of rural development should be an enhanced stress on the utilization of local resources in the uplift of the villages. One can use a lot of private initiative that is dormant in the villages. The Bengalis are known to be innovative people, but their skills have remained latent because of colonial and neo colonial exploitation till 1971.

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