

## For a gentle caring society

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THE recent uncivil characterisation of the leader of the opposition with an equivocal word by a prominent parliamentarian of the ruling party made my heart sink at the decline of decency in our country. I succumbed to brooding over the kind of Bangladesh we are leaving for our children. Human conduct is earthly, but what we see around us is only a culture of intolerance and abuse. This is creating an unwholesome environment of brazen disregard of each other. National politics has become gladiatorial. Governance has become impulsive, and confrontational. I have the feeling that we are in a state of drift. The resulting unrest is affecting the society. A sense of anger and impatience is taking over. The cause of a better Bangladesh is losing believers and has few practitioners.

The decline is a matter of concern because of its day-to-day familiarity. Few months back I came across a letter written by a foreigner lady in the columns of The Daily Star. She found the people of this country rude and abusive. Her observation was based on her experience of coming into contact with the official agencies during her visit. May be the lady wanted things to happen as they do in the western world. I elected to defer, until I was rocked by the ferocity and unremitting nature of the slurring match between the ruling and the opposition party.

My despondency is in sharp contrast to the optimism that following the Prime Minister's speech to the nation on being elected to power for the second time. There was a kindly caring note in her message delivered with dignity and firmness. She sounded much in command and conveyed a sincere purpose of burying the animosities of the past in building a common course of shared effort based on revival of the virtues of conciliation. I still remember for earnest call of restoring civility to the society and her expression of concern about the peril of hero worship. The big mandate she received makes her ideally suitable for leading the task of building a gentle caring society through national reconciliation. It is necessary because for a great country to be built, goodness has to be cultivated at the highest level. Sadly, the hopes have been dashed to the ground. On her return from surgery in America the transformation was distressing. Her baptism in fury was unlike the discreet manner with which she spoke in the post Ershad parliament. It became punch for punch, job for job. The fulminations in the public meetings see equally acerbic enactment in the public meetings see equally acerbic rebuttals of a compulsively combative leader of the opposition show that there is little mutual regard between the two. The combat we see in fact is a vicious exchange of contempt at the highest level.

Bellacose intolerance has taken hostage of political interaction. National politics is now tense and

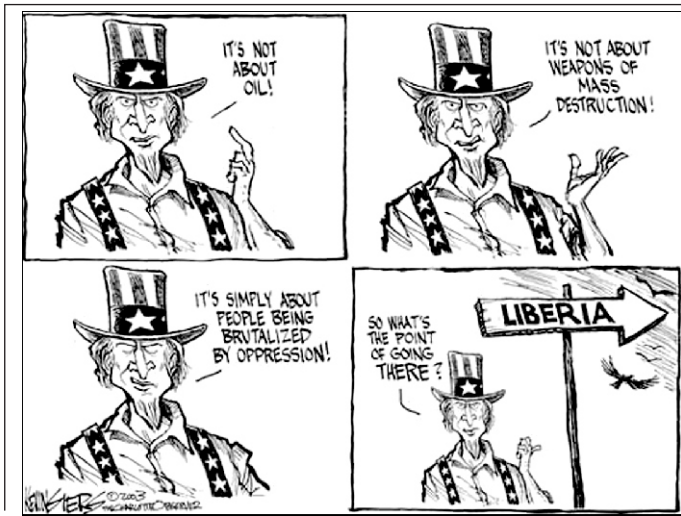
**It is true the challenges before Bangladesh are big. But can there be a mission without challenges? The challenges are many, so are the opportunities. Uniting 130 million and adding to their ability can be quite a success story. We have to believe in our future. And before that we will have to come together in a common goal, and in a shared task of building a gentle caring society.**

temperamental. The unrest is spilling over into the national life. A wholesale polarisation is disrupting bipartisan concord on issues of national interest. Almost in every aspect of national life the divide is creating antagonism. The national cause is neglected in partisan conduct. It is my observation that the country is caught in the legacy of the past. Unfortunately, the legacy is personal in nature. At the core of it lies an unremitting contempt. This has further been confounded by the rigidity of the dogmatic politics. Personal contempt makes dialogue difficult. A stubborn and irrational attitude dooms communication as an anathema. Such disdainful virulence sits on the camp followers. This is carried down to the last rank. Even the common followers become military adversaries. The seeds of intolerant discord spread far and wide across the whole country.

Hopes of a stable country in social concord and awareness are perishing in all sorts of circumstances. Governance is not held in regard. It stumbles and falters everywhere. The recent Meghna launch capsized toll of 500 lives is a tragic example of the incapacity of

governance. There is a regular pattern in the sequence of events, launch capsized, broad day light murder, gang rape, bank robbery, undiminished control of the mafias etc. An unabated disregard for the system. Even the house of the ruling party is not in order. The other day a member of the parliament from the capital confronted a state minister in the parliament with accusation of corrupt association

with a notorious film villain. When you throw muck, it is understandable you are standing in the muck. Peace in crime infested Mirpur is a matter of setting an example. That big guns can roll too. In this connection a particular observation of former Czech President Vaclav Havel comes to my mind. He said on governance, that if you want to bring order to the country, start from the top, the smaller ones will readily fall



into line. Dogmatic politics adds a stubborn streak to the disregard. It cultivates unbendingly hostile opposition. Accommodation, on the other hand, is the mark of nobility. It claims the chaos and has a peaceable effect. However only political leaders of courage and vision are capable of rising to the task of accommodation. It is not capitulation but the ability to rise above the banal. It is not stubborn belligerence but an honourable accommodation that serves the cause of greater good. Politics, after all, is all about the opportunity of serving the country for greater good.

I am again coming back to Vaclav Havel. In a recent statement he expressed his discomfort about the perils of characterising the business of governance with dogmatic nomenclature. Capitalism, socialism, communism, nationalism give governance a name and constrict its scope. Governance, in simplest term should bring into the fold the greatest number. This is what Bangladesh need. The number is Bangladesh is 130 million. And the good is so small, only 370 US Dollar. Therefore, the noblest agenda for politics in Bangladesh should be to strive together to build a gentle caring society. For this is an environment where they can differ in dignity without losing, govern well without the fear of subversion, sit in the opposition without the fear of humiliation.

There is little ambiguity about the fact that Bangladesh is caught in the

tragic legacy of the past and it carries on in its cult of hero worship. It has consigned the two major political parties to a fate of ideological captivity. The flexibility required for building on the changes of time does not leave much room in this setup bound by rigidity. Such mental makeup looks on forward movement to meet on a middle ground as blasphemy. An allegiance to the dynastic continuity of the legacy is considered as the standard political conduct. Conformity or blind devotion is the criterion by which political correctness is judged. It is an act of indirect enforcement. Dissent is brutally overpowered at the higher level and it does not exist at the grassroots level. It stunts the multiplicity of leadership, cheapens the quality and discourages originality. The nation is deprived of multiple choices of quality leaders equipped with originality of ideas needed for the time. A gentle caring society can change this all.

The cult of hero worship on the other hand is depriving our late lamented leaders of their due place above the turmoil of partisan politics. It is giving the debate a longer life and making it even more unsavoury, even more unjust. The whole nation is a hostage to the debate. A leader does not become great because his supporters speak of him with loud adulation. The greatness of a leader is an example of a lasting quality that keeps showing the vision, and keeps on building.

Let us look at the living legend of our time, who even when he is not the President of the country keeps on inspiring not only his people but multitudes of people around the world. I am speaking of Nelson Mandela. He fought the most brutal kind of discrimination in apartheid, spent over 27 years in White South African jail, a long part of it in solitary

confinement in Robbeek Island. The world would not have raised uproar, had he embarked on a selective course of dispossessing the white population of their fortunes and resources built from the proceeds of apartheid. He could have used the plea of proportionate distribution of wealth. Mandela returned the political power to the rightful owners, the 20 million black populations but proceeded with remarkable discretion in the economic reconstruction and planning of his country. Continued prosperity of South Africa needed the skill, wealth and experience of the whites, the Asians and the coloureds. It kept South Africa strong, united and prosperous. The presence of humility and dignity in his bearing and conduct made him a world icon. Then he retired with grace. And he is adored even more. Let us, on the other hand, look at what Mugabe's strident ultra-nationalism has done to Zimbabwe. His despotic rule has devastated a fine country.

The rewards of coming out of the past and the perils of personality cult are before us to learn from. It is true the challenges before Bangladesh are big. But can there be a mission without challenges? The challenges are many, so are the opportunities. Uniting 130 million and adding to their ability can be quite a success story. We have to believe in our future. And before that we will have to come together in a common goal, and in a shared task of building a gentle caring society. Without it we will remain bound to the same orbit of intolerant hostility. The time is never over to lend our hands across the divide. We are waiting.

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## Coastal water infrastructure Integrated management key to sustainable utilisation

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CURRENTLY the tendency to over exploit coastal resources is placing increasing stress on viability of the ecosystem. The growing population pressure and the related socio-economic consequences put extensive pressure on the development of land use patterns and infrastructure management for exploitation of water resources, thus risking the quality of life of our future generation. However, awareness is increasingly growing among stakeholders and beneficiaries that, it is within economic, social and environmental contexts, that the challenges presented by planning the integrated management of the coastal waters should be met.

The past projects mostly focused on the reconstruction and rehabilitation of the coastal infrastructure with truly little regard for water resources management inside the polders. Internal water resources management could further heighten the agricultural production. Composite design of the coastal system incorporating the structural and non-structural issues seems to be a step-forward solution to the ubiquitous management problem. Non-structural issues have demonstrated to be an integral part of the

coastal system, coastal livelihood and coastal environment. Lessons learned is that the government requires to shift form its present position as builder to work more as partner with firstly-NGOs and then with neighbourhood community for achieving the project goals. The objective is to "improve the performance of the water management infrastructure in the coastal area" eventually emphasizing upon and integrating and harmonising different programmes. The sustainability

1993. By that time, FAO also completed a study on coastal resources conservation and bio-diversity preservation in 1992. Late in March, 1999 the Joint Donor Mission consisting of representatives of the World Bank, the Netherlands, World Food Programme and the GoB developed a set of recommendations for initiating ICZM programme in Bangladesh. This was followed by a policy note preparation by a Secretaries Committee in September, 1999. Following the recommenda-

development of sustainable livelihoods and the integration of the coastal zone into national processes can take place. ICZM is a special type of governing in order to conserve coastal resources through control of development and management. Earlier projects have already stimulated integration process in few selected coastal polders, albeit unstructured and uncoordinated and not in as much harmony as required for a sustainable management of the coastal

tised with major weights given on pro-poor interventions where directly possible (e.g. in irrigation, flood management, coastal resources management, housing for the erosion-affected people etc) on the criteria of maximising benefits for the poor. But compensatory programmes in other sectors in conjugation with water sector will also have to be taken, as and when socially feasible, if rural poverty has to be effectively reduced. The prioritisation must be in compliance with the National Water Policy (NWP), 1999.

Initiatives that had taken root at the polder level through implementation of the coastal projects, including those of the local dwellers, are considered the starting point for a catch of the integration process. The broad objective is the integration and harmonisation of the development and management initiatives prevalent at the polder level. This may include, among others,

1. Ensuring structural stability of water management infrastructure and enhancing degree of safety of life and property of the polder population;
2. Facilitating improved drainage of the poldered area and harvesting rainwater;
3. Restoring relevant parts of the transport system, both roads and waterways that protect people and provide condition for production and marketing;
4. Organising the community based bodies including the water management organisation under the umbrella of the Polder Committees;
5. Working together in partnership approach with NGOs for acquiring supports in awareness growing, training and mobilising the neighbourhood community;
6. Coordinating with the other concerned GOs and local government Institutions in order to put in place the sustainable use of resources to be harvested, extracted or utilised not in excess of the amount which can be regenerated;
7. Developing workable financing modalities to support the integration and harmonization process;
8. Pursuing shifts of the organisation culture of the lead implementing agency;
9. Mobilising resources by adopting 'service charge' approach that suits local, climatic, environmental and social conditions.

The integration and harmonisation of various development efforts and management initiatives are competing, balancing and meeting the needs of the stakeholders and beneficiaries in sustainable utilisation of coastal water. The coastal water infrastructure is the cluster of tools for this integration and harmonisation process. The tidal stream of politics down the coastal polders on its way to integration and harmonisation is both source of social conflicts and resource for conflict resolution. A strong social will and a firm political commitment in combination are the key to achieving the synergy of the coastal water infrastructure.

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of the rehabilitated polders will continue to be at risk if current developments and initiatives to introduce improved O&M procedures involving neighbourhood community are not managed in integration and harmony.

The first initiative on Integrated Coastal Zone Management (ICZM) was a study taken up by the ESCAP Secretariat in 1986. Subsequently, another study supported by UNDP and coordinated by the Planning Commission was completed in

tions of the IDA/NEDA Preparation Mission in October, 1999 it was decided to commence a 3-year preparatory phase for development of ICZM vision and strategy that is now on the anvil. Developing a concept bringing together the on-going activities in the coastal area to integrate and harmonize the process of development and management of coastal resources is thus the need of the day.

The overall goal of the ICZM is to create conditions in which the

resources. These are small building blocks readied by limited dimensions to adopt and nurture the ICZM strategy on the ground.

The building and rehabilitation of coastal water management infrastructure, such as embankments with apurtenance in broad terms is environmentally beneficial, because they protect people, vegetation and animals against high tidal waves and cyclone surges in the coastal area. Besides, the cultivation of salt and shrimp, including fish drying, sand mining, netting fries and developing poultry and fish in the water bodies somewhere in conflict and elsewhere in harmony is the local initiatives seen on the ground. The cyclone shelters are also being used for manifold purposes by the local community. The solar energy for domestic and commercial consumption are also in place. The wind and tidal energy are the two potential resources, remain unaccessed but close behind.

However, the establishment of the coastal resources management system has caused some environment-related problems, such as alteration of tidal currents, and thus a clean impact on coastal erosion and accretion. Local navigation and fisheries have been affected by closing canals that serve as fish migration and transportation routes. Also there is a risk that development of the system may cause destruction of valuable habitats, water logging, and also social problems and conflicts, if the works are not planned, designed, implemented and managed in integration and harmony.

In this backdrop it also has to be recognised that the main driver of rural poverty reduction is agricultural growth. Around 80 per cent of the total poor live in rural areas. The larger part of their income, about 30 per cent of GDP and 60 per cent of rural employment come from this sector. The poverty rate is 53 per cent in the coastal area against 48 per cent in whole of the nation. Poverty reduction through interventions in water sector is understood to have both structural and non-structural elements, with a paradigm shift from monopoly of technology to a mix of multidisciplinary and participatory approach towards integrated water management. The draft National Water Management Plan (DNWMP) has, accordingly, proposed medium term measures to ensure adequate quantity of quality water to maintain critical levels of food production, human and animal health, bio-diversity, environment and income of the poorer sections of the communities. The future project has to be priori-