

Impact of climate change

Redemption is in accurate forecasting

It is disturbing to learn that we are still constrained by lack of accurate predictions regarding climate change that would allow us to offset its adverse impacts. This was revealed at an important workshop being held in the capital organised by the SAARC Regional Met Research Center (SRMR).

It is heartening though that the regional initiative is being exercised to address the very fundamental issue of climate change, which according to many experts is the greatest challenge to our security which will challenge our very physical existence if not addressed immediately, and if the primary cause behind it, global warming caused by the greenhouse gas effect, is not tackled at the global level.

Global warming is now a reality and an inevitable consequence of the unbridled consumerism of the west, and as usual the third world and the poorer nations are at the receiving end of its harmful effects. It is the poor that are most threatened because of the unpredictability in the changing climate, and suffer most because they are the least equipped to face the impact. And of the developing regions SAARC will be the hardest hit by this phenomenon. Bangladesh in particular stands to suffer most the ill-consequences, with 17 percent of its land mass and 16 percent of its population likely to be affected by one meter rise in sea level due to global warming.

Thus, if we are to offset its effects, apart from the global action under the Kyoto Protocol, we must ensure building up our capacities of predicting with some degree of accuracy the level and scope of changes in the climate. In this respect there is need for SAARC to network with the various research and forecast centres that have been established in various parts of the world. We should take the help of their databank and also their technological facilities to augment our capacity and for further capacity building at the local and regional level.

As for Bangladesh, given the threat we face, we must address this issue earnestly. Unfortunately, like many other pressing issues, research has been one of the major casualties of political turmoil in Bangladesh. But, apart from research and sharing of information, the likely effects of climate change must be disseminated among those most likely to be affected, and measures to reduce its effects must be formulated at the same time, lest we are caught off guard.

The curse of illegal fatwa

Where is the rule of law?

ACCORDING to a press report, for a so-called 'fatwa' issued by a local mufti in a village in Sunamganj of Sylhet, a girl was to be caned until she bled. This was a punishment to be meted out to her for having had illicit relations with a young man of the same village.

The girl is the daughter of a Freedom Fighter who ekes out a living by begging. He was also punished for the act of commission of his daughter, by having to do the rounds of a local mosque with shoes strung round his neck. To top it all, when asked, the officer of the local police station expressed his complete ignorance about the incident.

We are deeply shocked by the incident. We find the "judgment" passed by the local religious leader abhorrent and against all ethics and civil and religious norms. We cannot understand under what authority the girl's father was made to undergo such a humiliating punishment after being ostracized with his family for seven days, and going without food during that time. If anybody, it should have been the boy who should have been whipped for exploiting the girl and her father's poverty.

There are several things that need to be addressed. First, who has given the authority to the religious leader to award any punishment to the girl and her father? Why are the authorities silent when the law of the land is being violated with impunity? Secondly, it is the poor and hapless girl who is already a victim of the lascivious act of the boy who walked her up the garden path only to discard her. And now she is being disgraced, and in a way violated in public, by making her face the public punishment. Thirdly, it exposes the moral bankruptcy and hypocrisy of the society when it stands by while a poor girl is humiliated, all in the name of religion.

We must point out the fact that in the past we have turned a blind eye to such incidents where the girls were punished after having been lured to immoral acts by men. And religion had been used, wrongly, to perpetrate the shameful injustice to women.

It was time the authorities came down heavily on those who use religion to take the law into their own hands and use it to pass judgments that are repugnant, both to the letter and spirit of the religion. We sincerely hope that the government will take appropriate measures to put a stop to all such acts, if the sanctity of our religion and the ideal on which this very nation was founded are to be preserved.

A non-scientific survey



DR. ABDULLAH A. DEWAN

NO NONSENSE

The survey is certainly non-scientific. So, before agreeing or disagreeing with my arguments, why not record your own score (impassively) in each category without looking at the table, and check how close your scores are, to judge if the scores in the table represent fiction or reality.

Party in power	Politicization	Election Winning plots	Corruption	Ethnic repression	Harassing opposition	Law and order	Human rights violation
BNP(91-96)	2.5	3.0	3.0	0.0	3.5	5.5	0.0
AL(96-01)	3.0	3.5	3.5	0.0	4.5	7.0	0.0
BNP(01-06)	9.0	9.5	8.5	7.0	8.0	5.0	7.5

Ratings of BNP and AL rule (non-scientific telephone responses)

intricately tied to freedom of speech. But that does not mean that speech must be judicious. Editors and columnists are free to write what they think is the truth, and the readers will decide not only whether the truth has been spoken, but also whether a particular journalist has a penchant for the truth.

My "No Nonsense" column is not intended to be a paradigm of balanced writing. Instead, my sole aspiration is to write stories backed by whatever evidence is available. Balanced stories often intertwine simple truths, and crafty writers can make biased stories appear balanced. At the least, a balanced story can obfuscate the import of a story just as much as a biased equivalent.

In response to another issue, I must admit that knowing who reads what one writes, as well as

feedbacks from friends and foes, is also vital for keeping the interest of writing alive. An estimated 7%, or approximately 9.8 million people (based on a survey of 2,252 respondents conducted from December 2004 - January 2005) read newspapers regularly.

Assuming that the circulation of the English dailies totals 75,000 with 3 readers per household, the total number of English newspaper readers stands at approximately 225,000, or a meager 0.23% of all daily newspaper readers. If we were more concerned with the quantity, as opposed to the quality, of our readers these numbers would certainly put a dent in our enthusiasm for writing op-ed columns every week!

There is no disappointment if BNP politicians do not read my columns. Believe it or not, my

articles aren't purposely targeted for BNP politicians; they are also intended for their AL counterparts. One may not expect corrupt politicians and public servants to read about anti-corruption measures. What could be the rationale for HIV positive patients to read literature on safe sex?

The AL politicians may not indulge in blissful delight because of my criticism of BNP. Win or lose in the upcoming election, they must not countenance the thought of maintaining the same old bellicose attitude towards political opponents; instead they must strive to redeem themselves with a new image to undo and unmake all those misdemeanors instituted by BNP alliance rulers.

Public servants who are directly or indirectly connected to

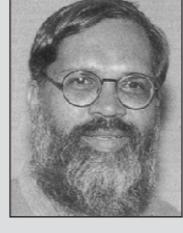
BNP's first and second term jumped from an average score of 2.5 to 9.0. The only plausible explanation for such a jump is their desire to monopolize and perpetuate power, and thus evade trial for alleged criminal violations of all kinds. This interpretation is also consistent with the 9.5 score in election-rigging plots and the 8.5 score in harassing of opposition parties.

In every category except law and order, the BNP-Jamaat alliance has taken the country to a state of kleptocracy (rule by thieves and thugs). The unprecedented rise in repressing ethnic and religious minorities (0.0 to 7.0) and human rights violations (0.0 to 7.5) may have been largely due to Jamaat's joining the BNP alliance in 2001. The major improvement in law and order (protecting life and properties from hoodlums) didn't come without cost -- it was achieved at the expense of the much cherished "rule of law." The alliance rulers are discredited as being the worst human rights violators (for example, extra judicial cross-fire killings by Rab) in Bangladesh since the country became independent.

The survey is certainly non-scientific. So, before agreeing or disagreeing with my arguments, why not record your own score (impassively) in each category without looking at the table, and check how close your scores are, to judge if the scores in the table represent fiction or reality.

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The flawed India-US nuclear deal

PRAFUL BIDWAI
writes from New Delhi

The Hyde Act contains instruments for pressurising India through periodic certifications, scrutiny of facilities, and demands that its foreign policy behaviour conform to Washington's priorities, etc. A future hostile president or Congress can abuse these instruments. The deal is bad for regional and global peace, too. It's likely to fuel not just one, but two, nuclear arms races: with Pakistan and China.

uranium enrichment, spent-fuel reprocessing, and heavy-water technologies.

- India opposed any reference to a future nuclear test. The Act says that all cooperation would be stopped if India tests.
- Dr Singh opposed annual certification of India's compliance with non-proliferation pledges. The Act merely changes "certification" to "assessment."
- India insisted on creating strategic reserves of nuclear fuel over the lifetime of its reactors. The Act only permits non-strategic reserves.
- India wanted a specific reciprocal sequence for the steps remaining in the deal's completion. These include a bilateral "123 agreement" -- to amend the US Atomic Energy Act -- approval from the Nuclear Suppliers' Group, and a safeguards (inspections) agreement with the International Atomic Energy Agency. The Hyde Act changes the sequence.
- India opposes any scrutiny of its military-nuclear facilities. The Act mandates such scrutiny.

The Hyde Act can thus be strongly opposed on procedural grounds. But if it were substantially to promote worthy causes like peace, sustainable energy and policy autonomy for India, the procedural flaws could be condoned. However, its purpose is to reward India as a new strategic ally whose elite craves America's symbolic recognition.

As Undersecretary Nicholas Burns said, the deal is the symbolic centre of India-US relations -- a collusive agreement to further narrow interests.

While craving US recognition, the Indian elite nurtures a false sense of "humiliation" because Washington slapped sanctions following India's 1974 test, and cut off fuel for the two reactors it had donated.

In reality, India wasn't "humiliated." It remained defiant, refused to sign the NPT and steadily built up its weapons capability. In 1998, India conducted nuclear blasts, citing sovereign rights. Many countries, also invoking sovereignty, imposed sanctions on India's nuclear program. These didn't hurt nuclear power generation much, given its puny size (3

percent of total).

Those who believe that the deal upholds India's rightful claim to nuclear weapons either have double standards or a faulty moral compass. Nobody has a right to own horror weapons. It's hard to argue that India was unfairly sanctioned for an honourable or noble act.

Washington offered India this special deal to recruit it as a junior partner in the field of strategic alliances, which sub-serve the US Empire project. In particular, India would help contain China.

The Act, logically, expects Indian foreign policy to be "congruent to that of the US" and demands support for American goals, including isolating Iran. This unequal arrangement will severely erode India's independence and limit its global role just when it is well placed to influence world events.

Ironically, the deal's Right-wing critics, including the BJP and much of the nuclear lobby, aren't opposed to this real erosion of sovereignty and freedom, but only to some sections of the Act. For them, sovereignty lies in mass-destruction weapons, not

policy independence or the people's interest.

That's not all. The deal will promote nuclear power. Nuclear power is costly, prone to catastrophes like Chernobyl, and leaves enormous quantities of radioactive waste, which cannot be safely stored.

There are safe, affordable and renewable alternatives, like wind and solar power, to this outmoded dirty technology.

Nuclear power in India enjoys gigantic subsidies running into billions annually. The Department of Atomic Energy has an embarrassing history of cost overruns, missed targets, and unsafe operating practices. It delivers electricity conform to Washington's priorities, etc.

However, renewable sources have performed spectacularly. Wind power capacity has ballooned to 5,500 MW, compared to nuclear's 3,400 MW -- without heavy subsidies. India's wind potential is 60,000 MW-plus.

Nuclear power is largely irrelevant to India's long-term energy security or self-reliance. Even if DAE's always-hyped up targets are achieved its contribution will only double -- to a still-marginal 6 percent by 2050. But DAE targets have never been met.

Had DAE's 1970 plans materialised, India would have had 10,000 MW of nuclear electricity by 1980 and 50,000-plus MW by now -- 15 times more than achieved. Indigenous uranium can't fuel even 10,000 MW of nuclear capacity.

Worse, the deal will help India

expand its nuclear arsenal. India can import uranium for civilian use while dedicating domestic uranium to weapons.

India will only put 14 of its 22 power reactors under safeguards. The remaining eight can be used to produce tonnes of plutonium; only 3 to 8 kg is needed for a bomb.

Military reactors, fast breeders and enrichment plants can produce even more fuel for nuclear weapons -- well exceeding anything like the minimum deterrent.

The Hyde Act contains instruments for pressurising India through periodic certifications, scrutiny of facilities, and demands that its foreign policy behaviour conform to Washington's priorities, etc. A future hostile president or Congress can abuse these instruments.

The deal is bad for regional and global peace, too. It's likely to fuel not just one, but two, nuclear arms races: with Pakistan and China.

Worst of all, by sealing the deal, India will betray its promise, reiterated two years ago, to fight for global nuclear disarmament. You don't join an exclusive club and then immediately demand that it change its rules!

The deal cannot be reformed to promote worthy objectives such as peace or energy security. It must be scrapped lock, stock and barrel.

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National Food Policy 2006

BARE FACTS

There cannot be two opinions about the good intentions expressed in the goals/objectives and strategies for implementation of the Policy. But the recent trends tend to indicate that attainment of the goals and objectives through implementation of the stated strategies will not be an easy task in the prevailing not so favourable situation.

that, according to the Preliminary Report on Household Income & Expenditure Survey (HIES)-2005, the share of food expenditure as percentage of consumption at national level is 53.81 percent. This stands at 58.54 percent in rural areas and 45.17 percent in urban areas.

The Policy recognizes that although the production of food grains (rice and wheat) has more than doubled since independence in 1971, food security at national, household and individual levels remain a matter of major concern. It poses a big question as to what extent it will be possible to fulfill the government target, as stated in the Policy, for reducing the number of poor people of the country to half by the year 2015 in accordance with the Millennium Development Goals

(2000), taking the ground realities into consideration.

PRSP has admitted that approximately half of the population lacks the resources to acquire enough food, and consequently remains below the poverty line. This means that in spite of a poverty reduction rate of around one percentage point a year since the early nineties, the total number of poor people has increased compared to the early nineties. Available data show that 60 million people in the country are now living below the poverty line.

As regards its goals and objectives, the Policy states that its goal is to ensure dependable sustained food security for all people of the country at all times. The objectives are: (1) to ensure adequate and stable supply of safe and nutritious

trade-supportive legal and regulatory environment; (i) price incentives for domestic food production;

(j) consumers' price support (open market sale, essential priorities, other priorities, large employment industries ltd.); (k) supply food grains through targeted food programs to the poor; (l) increased purchasing power and access to food by the people; (m) transitory stock management; (n) special measures for disaster mitigation for agriculture; (o) government food grain stock and emergency distribution from there; (p) measures for increased supply through private trade and stock; (q) employment-generating income growth; (r) financial incentives for agro-based industries; (s) special support for expansion of rural industry; (t) education, skill and human resource development; (u) adoption of macro policy for broad-based labour intensive growth; (v) long term national plan for ensuring balanced food in building a healthy nation; (w) supply of sufficient nutritious food for vulnerable groups; (x) balanced diet containing adequate micronutrients; (y) safe drinking water and improved sanitation; (z) safe and quality food

supply. There cannot be two opinions about the good intentions expressed in the goals/objectives and strategies for implementation of the Policy. But the recent trends tend to indicate that attainment of the goals and objectives through implementation of the stated strategies will not be an easy task in the prevailing not so favourable situation.

In this connection, the lack of sustained growth in food grain production in recent years to keep pace with annual population growth it can be mentioned. Food grain production during the past six years i.e. in 2000-01, 2001-02, 2002-03, 2003-04, 2004-05 and 2005-06 stood at 267.58 lakh tons, 259.05 lakh tons, 266.94 lakh tons, 274.42 lakh tons, 261.33 lakh tons and 275.90 lakh tons respectively against the total population of 129 million, 131 million, 133 million, 135 million, 137 million, and 139 million against the corresponding years.

Unsatisfactory progress in agricultural research due to paucity of funds (so far, allocation of funds for agricultural research has been 0.5 percent of agricultural GDP against the internationally recommended allocation of at least 1.0 percent of agricultural GDP); low coverage of cultivable land under irrigation (at present 32 percent or so of the total cultivable land is under irrigation); unsatisfactory progress in the production of non-food crops (vegetables, oil seeds, pulses and fruits) and other food items (poultry, livestock and fisheries) to meet the need of the growing population; loss of agricultural land (the country is losing about 80 thousand hectares of land annually due to rapid growth in urbanization, industrialization and other development activities); decrease in income of poor households, particularly in rural households (Poverty Monitoring Survey 2004 of the BBS reveals that in the rural areas household income for the poor decreased in 2004 from Tk 3,006 in 1999 to Tk 2,786); incapability of the ultra-poor (the destitute, sick, old and infirm), comprising 20 percent of the poor living below the poverty line, to participate in income generating activities; inadequate food safety net programs; lack of easy access to agricultural credit; maintaining insufficient government security food stocks to meet emergencies; high rate of joblessness, particularly among the educated youths;

irrationality in intra-house food allocation; unsatisfactory access to sanitation (29 percent in rural areas and 56 percent in urban areas); and large scale adulteration of all varieties of food can also be mentioned.

To conclude, adoption of the NFP-20