

Making our voices heard

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SARWAT CHOWDHURY

THE Bangladesh Environment Network (BEN), a global network of non-resident Bangladeshis, together with Bangladesh Society, New York and other Bangladeshi organisations and their international friends are gathering together near the United Nations Headquarters in New York City on the morning of September 18 for a rally on Bangladesh. This rally, with the slogan "Stop Climate Change! Save Bangladesh!" will be held between 10 a.m. and 1 p.m. at Ralph Bunche Park, at First Avenue, between 42nd and 44th Street, across from the main UN Secretariat Building.

The slogan for the Bangladesh climate change rally is strengthened by the moral argument that Bangladesh contributes very little to the global greenhouse gas emissions. According to the UNDP Human Development Report 2007/2008, the total per capita CO2 emissions of Bangladesh in 2004 were 0.3 tonnes compared to 20.6 tonnes in the US. Bangladesh's share in the cumulative GHG emissions since the industrial revolution is close to 0%.

In contrast, Bangladesh is home to some of the poorest people of the world who are the least able to recover from manifold stresses caused by climate change, including more intense and more frequent cyclones, droughts,

floods and changing conditions for agricultural production etc. In fact, the early effects of climate change can already be felt in the change in weather patterns and the impacts on the economy, human health, and socio-economic livelihood conditions in Bangladesh.

Most of Bangladesh is below an elevation of 1 meter above the sea level. According to geological surveys, a rise of sea level by 1m would mean submergence of about 15% of Bangladesh's landmass. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change Synthesis Report of 2007 notes that due to global warming the sea level, which has already risen at an alarming average rate of 3.1 mm per year from 1993 to 2003, may rise in future by about 7 mm as a result of complete elimination of the Greenland Ice sheet.

This would mean the submergence of about 70% of Bangladesh, a country with a population of about 150 million. However, Bangladesh' population is projected to grow, according to UN Population projections, to 222 million by 2050. The sea level rise estimated earlier would therefore result in 150 million Bangladeshis becoming climate refugees, with far reaching impacts in the region and the world.

While the scientific data is available; various studies and research reports on climate change adaptation and mitigation in Bangladesh have been produced

over the years, and some funds in various forms have been made available. These efforts are minuscule compared to the enormity of the challenges Bangladeshis will face due to climate change. For example, there are only two small Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) projects ongoing in Bangladesh, even though this Kyoto Protocol arrangement for emission reducing investments to be carried out in developing countries by firms of developed countries could be an important tool in Bangladesh' sustainable development.

Additionally, the performance of developed countries in terms of mitigation so far has been disappointing as well. While the Kyoto Protocol postulated a reduction of emissions by 5% relative to the 1990 level by 2012, data from UNFCCC show that if Economies in Transition (EIT) are excluded, the actual emission of Annex I countries has actually increased over 1990-2004 by 11%.

The global community and its major emitters are still struggling to negotiate some concrete steps to counter the challenges of climate change and curbing its greenhouse gas emissions that can actually make a difference in the "gloom and doom" scenario facing the poor and vulnerable of the developing world, including millions of Bangladeshis. These scenarios can easily become a reality unless drastic proactive actions are taken.

Climate change and poverty are increasingly being addressed as twin challenges in sustainable development. It is widely understood that the present development paradigm is no longer able to sustain human development. There is a need for change in our perspective for development and from that perspective,

environment and development are both win-win goals. As the UN secretary-general has very aptly highlighted: "We have witnessed three economic transformations. First came the Industrial Revolution, then the Technology Revolution, then our modern era of globalisation. We stand at the threshold of another great change: the age of green economics."

The UN Climate Change Summit of September 22 and the Copenhagen 15th Conference of Parties (COP) to be held in December are two important occasions in which to achieve some positive transformations in the global climate policy negotiations, which can have meaningful impacts on a vulnerable country like Bangladesh.

The organisers hope that the rally of September 18 will provide some direct impetus to the climate change negotiations and the international effort to mobilise support for developing countries to confront climate change. At the end of the rally, the organisers will present a memorandum to the United Nations secretary general, commending his organisation for providing leadership in galvanising the international community to tackle climate change.

The memorandum will also include a set of demands to the world community, which will include "a stabilisation goal of 350 ppm atmospheric green house gas concentration level to be adopted at the 15th COP in Copenhagen," and also "the funds provided to Bangladesh and other climate change frontier countries for adaptation be only in the form of grants, not loans, and be treated as compensation for the damage done to their prospects due to climate change."

BEN has been working in close coop-



Time to speak out.

eration with international friends at Global Citizens for Climate Action campaign to ask the global leaders to sign a global climate deal -- in Copenhagen -- that is ambitious, fair and binding. The Bangladesh rally is featured as a part of that campaign and more descriptions can be viewed at

<http://tckctck.org/events/climate-week-nyc/stop-climate-change-save-bangladesh>.

More detailed information on the climate change rally, including the memorandum with its complete set of demands is also available in BEN website <http://www.ben-center.org/index.htm> and its facebook group website (<http://www.facebook.com/home.php?#group.php?gid=51540844367>)

As part of its campaign, BEN has

declared September 18 as the "Bangladesh Global Action Day on Climate Change," and its chapters elsewhere, including Canberra, London, Sydney and Tokyo/Kitakyushu and Toronto, plan to hold rallies on that day and submit memoranda to local UN offices. BEN's sister organisation in Bangladesh, Bangladesh Paribesh Andolon (Bapa), also plans to hold a rally in Dhaka in solidarity with the BEN rallies of September 18, so that it becomes a global mobilisation of Bangladeshis.

Let us hope that together we can make our voices heard and make a difference in the fate of millions of Bangladeshis who remain extremely vulnerable to the impacts of climate change.

Dr. Sarwat Chowdhury is a member of the Climate Change and Energy Panels of Bangladesh Environment Network.

Musharraf is not facing trial

The government said that the trial process could begin only if the Parliament unanimously passed a resolution in this respect, which is a remote possibility since all the parties in the house are not asking for Musharraf's trial. Muslim League (Quaid-e-Azam), which had supported Musharraf's rule, has already made it clear that it would block any such move.

ZAGLUL AHMED CHOWDHURY

FORMER Pakistan strongman General (retd) Pervez Musharraf is unlikely to face the much-vaunted trial for violating the constitution as important foreign powers are learnt to have thrown their weight behind the former president and against his trial. Musharraf, now abroad, can relax since there has been a visible slackening in the demand for his trial, which is spearheaded by the Pakistan Muslim League (Nawaz).

Its leader, former prime minister Nawaz Sharif, who was arguably worst affected by Musharraf's seizing of power in a bloodless military coup in October 1998, was vociferous in demanding the trial of the former army chief, who had later become the president. Saudi Arabia, a close friend of Pakistan having considerable clout on Islamabad, is against Musharraf's trial. This has been conveyed to Nawaz Sharif, who had received generous Saudi treatment during his worst days.

Saudi King Abdullah recently hosted Musharraf and assured him that he would talk to Nawaz Sharif about not pursuing the demand of putting Musharraf in the dock. It appears that the king has played his role since

Musharraf himself said that he was feeling relieved because the demand for trial was no longer that strong.

Understandably, the demand may eventually die down, even though it will remain without much seriousness for the time being. The United States is also known to have reservations about the trial of the person who was their main supporter in the "war against terror" in the aftermath of the 9/11 developments.

Pakistan's Supreme Court sometime ago invalidated Musharraf's declaration of emergency and sacking of 12 Supreme Court judges in 2007. The fallout of the verdict was predictable. Demands started pouring in for the trial of the former president, who was at the helm for nearly nine years. The supreme court bench headed by Chief Justice Iftikhar Mohammad Chowdhury, who himself was among the judges dismissed two years ago, termed Musharraf's declaration of emergency and sacking of the judges as "unconstitutional" and, thus, illegal.

Musharraf took over power on October 12, 1998 in dramatic fashion when he was sacked by Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif while he was on an official visit to Colombo. Even the PIA passenger plane carrying him was instructed



Still free!

not to land at Karachi airport. But things had gone entirely in his way as troops and officers loyal to him made no mistake in ensuring his safety, and thereby his rise to power. However, he did not impose martial law although the armed forces called the shots and the elected government of Nawaz Sharif was toppled.

The supreme court validated his taking over of power, but asked him to stage national elections within three years, which army chief Gen. Musharraf did. An elected parliament came in and civilian prime ministers -- first Zafarullah Khan Jamali and later Shaukat Aziz -- gave a semblance of democratic rule. Musharraf had by then become the president with the political support of a faction of Pakistan Muslim

League (Quaid-e-Azam). He said that the cup of democracy in Pakistan was 99% full, but the hollowness of such a claim was obvious since the real power lay with him and he was still in uniform, in addition to being the president.

Gen. Musharraf was largely free from trouble for most of his rule as both the main politicians were abroad -- Benazir Bhutto was in self-exile while Nawaz Sharif was sent to Saudi Arabia from prison while serving a sentence. The United States and the Saudi Arabia brokered Sharif's release. Finally, when the national elections neared, President Musharraf felt increasingly wary since any balloting would have been somewhat meaningless without the two main political leaders -- both former premiers.

He probably reached some broad understanding with Benazir's PPP, but kept Nawaz at arms length even though both had returned to Pakistan. Clearly, Nawaz was more hostile to Musharraf as it was his elected government that was toppled by the army chief. In the polls the PPP won, largely riding the popularity and sympathy caused by the tragic assassination of charismatic Benazir Bhutto, and at one stage Musharraf had to relinquish the presidency because of unfavourable circumstances.

The ruling PPP and Nawaz's Muslim league were against Musharraf's undemocratic rule, but Nawaz was anti-Musharraf for obvious reasons. As opposition leader he kept on demanding actions against Musharraf for various acts including sacking of the judges, a demand to which the Zardari government paid scant heed.

Dismissed Chief Justice Iftikhar Mohammad Chowdhury got back his job as the government was forced to reinstate him and several other judges because of the agitation launched by Sharif and independent minded lawyers. Once Chowdhury went back to his earlier position, it was a more or less a foregone conclusion that Musharraf may have tough time and judiciary would not take him kindly.

The ex-General was largely seen as a dictator when he was in real power, barring the last few months of his presidency. But it must also be said that he had some popular support because he had brought the country back from miserable economic conditions and also steered Pakistan well in the difficult situation caused by the Afghan war. That the demand for his trial following

the verdict of the Supreme Court will see the light of day remains doubtful. Whether Pakistan's powerful army led by Gen. Ashfaq Kayani, who was appointed to the position by Musharraf himself, will agree to the trial is also uncertain. Besides, the ruling PPP and the main opposition Nawaz's Muslim league may not fully see eye to eye on the issue.

The government said that the trial process could begin only if the Parliament unanimously passed a resolution in this respect, which is a remote possibility since all the parties in the house are not asking for Musharraf's trial. Muslim League (Quaid-e-Azam), which had supported Musharraf's rule, has already made it clear that it would block any such move.

Saudi Arabia facilitated Nawaz Sharif's release from prison when he was sentenced to imprisonment by Musharraf's government. King Abdullah even went to the extent of granting him comfortable exile in Jeddah. Now, the same king is trying to help the other man, who is now in trouble. Nawaz Sharif can hardly turn a blind eye to the Saudi King while pressures are also there from the Western countries, which considered the former dictator as a key ally for their interest as far as the Afghan and other issues are concerned.

As such, Pervez Musharraf is unlikely to face trial as per Article 6 of the Constitution, although his tough opponents may seek to keep the pot boiling on the issue just for the sake of doing so

(Zaglul Ahmed Chowdhury is a senior journalist and analyst of international affairs.)

Shopping for a new policy on Iran

U.S. options could include stepping up sanctions -- among the senior Bush officials Obama kept on is Stuart Levey, the Treasury undersecretary who imposed tough restrictions on Iran -- but the administration is likely to stall as it debates its policy.

MARK HOSENBALL and MICHAEL HIRSH

THE Obama administration has accepted a long-awaited Iranian offer to negotiate, but responded sceptically to it. It was "not really responsive to our greatest concern," Iran's nuclear program, says a State Department spokesman. Tehran proposed talks on a range of issues last week but indicated it wouldn't discuss shutting down its uranium-enrichment program. Israel has sig-

nalled an end-of-year deadline for military action, but U.N. Ambassador Susan Rice said last week that President Obama would be "taking stock" with permanent members of the U.N. Security Council (plus Germany) later this month.

Meanwhile, quarrels concerning the ultimate aim of Iran's secretive nuke program have become so heated that some U.N. officials are making comparisons to the proliferation of misinformation in the run-up to the U.S.

invasion of Iraq. In a private e-mail sent last week to nuclear experts and obtained by Newsweek, Tariq Rauf, a senior official with the U.N.'s International Atomic Energy Agency, wrote that the mainstream media are repeating mistakes from 2003, when they "carried unsubstantiated stories on Iraq and WMD -- the same mistakes are being repeated re IAEA and Iran." Rauf added, "The hype is likely originating from certain (known) sources."

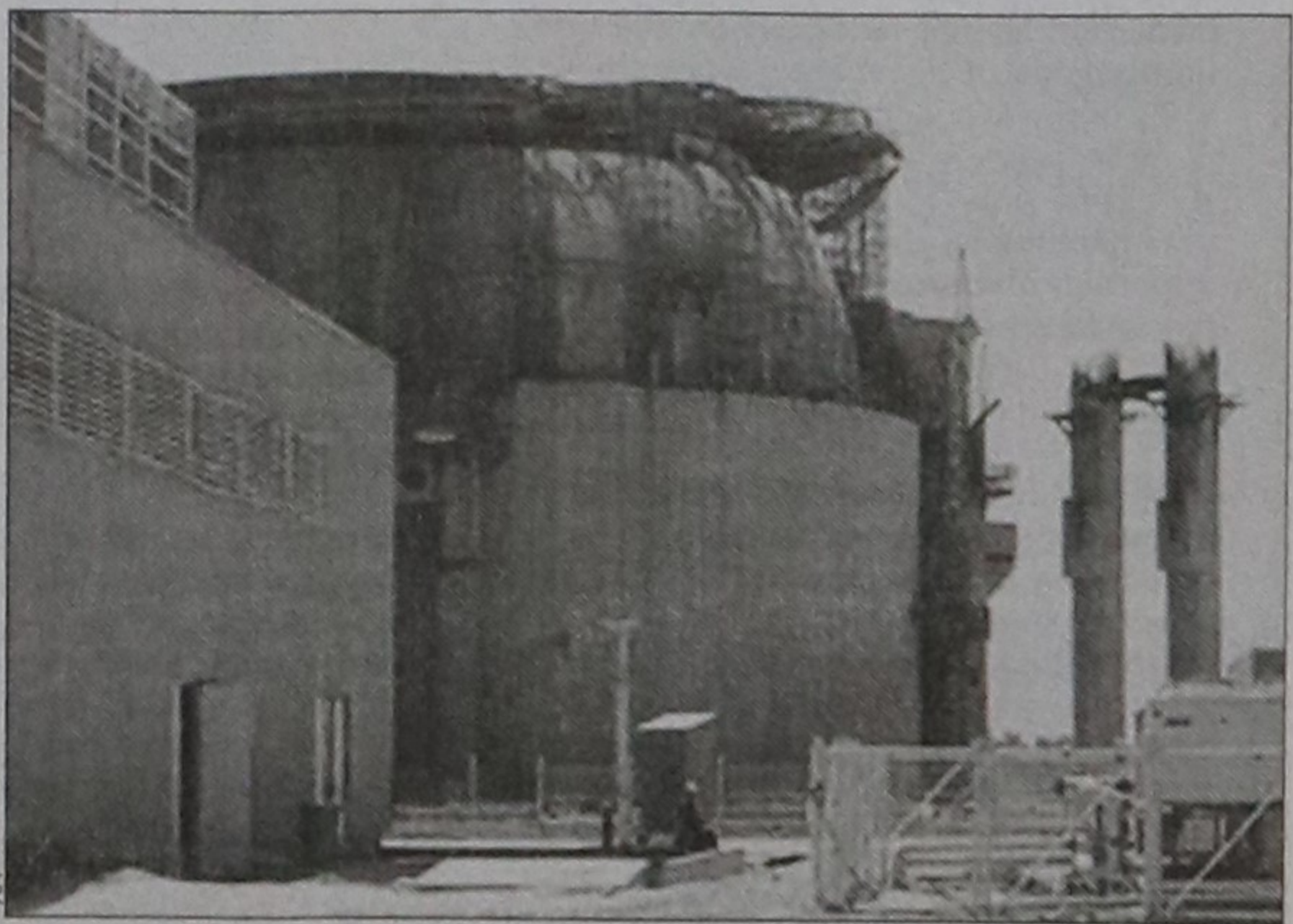
The message does not specify the sources, but U.S. and European officials have previously accused Israel of exaggerating Iran's nuclear progress. ("I think there's a growing understanding and awareness that Iran is a threat to world stability," says a spokesman for the Israeli Embassy.) Asked to elaborate on Rauf's accusation, an IAEA spokesperson says, "The comments in his e-mail were made in

a private context."

Western intelligence agencies are sharing reports about Iranian efforts to acquire weapons-related technology but disagree about what they mean.

Most officials doubt Tehran is pursuing nuclear technology entirely for benign purposes. Israel doubts it, too, and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has signalled that his patience is limited. Rice said no one is giving up on diplomacy, adding, "We have other tools." U.S. options could include stepping up sanctions -- among the senior Bush officials Obama kept on is Stuart Levey, the Treasury undersecretary who imposed tough restrictions on Iran -- but the administration is likely to stall as it debates its policy.

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A target for Israel?