

## Sheikh Hasina on climate change effects

*Technology transfer and resource availability are key in meeting challenges*

PRIME Minister Sheikh Hasina's call in Stockholm for a realistic fund to be established to help countries like Bangladesh deal with the effects of climate change in the face of a dire need to scale up finances for the purpose has been timely. And it's because of the all too loud alarm bells sounded in recent times about the dangers to which the least developed countries of the world are exposed. We believe the Bangladesh leader was speaking for all vulnerable nations when she suggested that the finance they need should not come in the form of loans. In other words, climate change adaptation financing, in her view, must be distinct from and also in addition to ODA targets of gross national incomes for developing as well as least developed countries.

The suggestion comes against the backdrop of realities as they happen to be in Bangladesh today. As Sheikh Hasina pointed out in Stockholm, climate-related factors will result in 40,000,000 people in Bangladesh losing their means of livelihood, with the additional fact of 20,000,000 more being displaced by 2050 owing to natural calamities generated by climate change. The picture is thus not rosy for Bangladesh. Neither is it for other countries. Which is why it becomes important that LDCs be given affordable access to technology by developed nations to tackle the oncoming crisis. For Bangladesh, the problem has not merely been one of energy efficiency. It has also been about a greening of energy sources; and it all boils down to issues of funding. Resource constraints have held it back from pursuing the development goals necessary for its socio-economic development. And now comes new climatic changes. Now, one severe effect of climate change will obviously be of people getting uprooted from their land and finding themselves in the unenviable position of having turned into climate refugees. There are already the portents here, particularly related to the threats which life along the country's coastal regions is faced with. In similar manner, millions more across Asia and Africa will be displaced as a consequence of climatic factors.

One way of tackling the issues nations, especially LDCs, are up against is to set up a new legal regime to guarantee the social, cultural and economic rehabilitation of climate refugees. It is an idea whose time came quite sometime ago. For the world, especially the developed part of it (and it was largely responsible for the climate change phenomenon), it is now time to act on it. Globalisation is not merely a coming together of nations in the sense of economic interdependence. It is also a call for collective survival strategies in the face of calamities.

## Land survey in the CHT

*The right timing for it*

THE administration's decision to conduct land survey in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT), has now come under the scrutiny of experts and advocacy groups.

The purpose of conducting any land survey is to demarcate the boundaries of the landed properties under both private and public ownership. Experts at a recently-held seminar called for first settling the prevailing land related disputes between the indigenous population and the settlers, who hail from the Bengali community in the plain lands before conducting the survey.

In the case of CHT, there is the question of rights and stakes of both the tribal people and settlers from the plain land. It is to be noted that a large chunk of the tribal population comprises of returnees from their refuge in the Tripura state of West Bengal in India. Then there is also the issue of the tribals who stayed back. So adding to those the issue of Bengali settlers from the plains, the entire problem of land settlement gets knottier with the possibility of claims and counter claims. All these necessitates adoption of a very prudent approach towards its solution. One cannot lose sight of the fact here that the tribal people's involvement in the process is best guaranteed if done in accordance with the CHT peace accord which underscores the need for resolving land disputes and has laid down broad principles for this purpose. The land commission is tasked with this job which can be most effectively performed if elected regional council, district councils and the circle chiefs are associated in the process. It is, therefore, essential that the local body elections in the CHT are held sooner rather than later.

Since peace and development are the ultimate goal in the region, especially with the present government in office, which had also inked the peace deal with the representative body of the tribal population when it was in power in 1997, the administration would do well to involve the indigenous people's representatives in the important decision-making processes. That would make the work of dispute resolution and survey more credible and acceptable to all concerned.

## Time to bury the hatchet

Divided, corrupt and incompetent, we are like a rider without hands on the rein and feet on the stirrup and the horse is in a mood to gallop. Competence and superior political performance are only way to keep the horse in canter as long as possible.

M. ABDUL HAFIZ

THE country's two top political leaders, Sheikh Hasina and Madam Zia, were to address a national convention from the same platform to give their perspectives with regard to poverty alleviation on the International Poverty Alleviation Day -- thus initiating a united approach to fight the scourge. It was big news, and had been eagerly awaited.

At the eleventh moment Madam Zia unceremoniously made a volte-face in spite of her gracious consent only two days before. She, of course, gave a spurious set of excuses for not even turning up at the venue of the meeting.

The concerned people who were convinced that things were not going well in the country due to a plethora of political malaise -- the prominent one being the chronic disunity among the political forces -- were profoundly disappointed. A wet blanket was thrown over their hopes by Madam Zia, who also embarrassed the organisers. The nation was deprived of the healing touch it so badly needed, which could have been produced and a fresh beginning made with the two leaders burying their hatchet at long last.

In the meantime, the much-vaunted AL set up has not come up to the public's expectations and its performance has been dampening at the best. Amid continuing gloom the country has indeed dipped to a new low almost on all fronts. The widespread graft stories that we are introduced to by media outlets are good enough pointers to its depth and dimension, and few have anything more to add to them.

The prime minister's speech on poverty alleviation is also a grim pointer to its existence in the society when she confesses that poverty alleviation is a far cry unless corruption is eradicated from the country. We cannot agree more with this home truth. One, however, wonders as to what is stopping the prime minister from eradicating the menace!

But its not just corruption, there are also the accompanying concomitant vices like extortion, grabbing and forceful occupation. Managing tenders of the lucrative contracts has been a fast growing culture among the opportunistic elements of the power-wielding political parties and their front organisations. Raw violence is their weapon, which is lethal enough to keep their political masters at bay. It's fast becoming akin to a jungle and its rules.



The gap needs to be bridged.

The list of festering fronts is long. Does one with his or her eyes and ears open really need it? They would find many strange developments unfolding before them. It all began with the still unresolved tragedy of Pilkhana, which was followed in quick succession in the form of devastating fire in Bashundhara Shopping Mall, and now in the smouldering fire in the NCTB godown. A tense situation is obtaining in the country as extra-judicial killings continue.

The power wielders may be right in claiming that there was a conspiracy behind all these events. But the intriguing thing is that such crimes routinely take

place when a credible government is in place. The seismic event of Pilkhana shook the whole nation except the government itself, which did not make serious effort to close ranks with other political forces. As a result, blunder after blunder is piling up to snowball into a real crisis.

Divided, corrupt and incompetent, we are like a rider without hands on the rein and feet on the stirrup and the horse is in a mood to gallop. Competence and superior political performance are only way to keep the horse in canter as long as possible.

Brig (retd) Hafiz is former DG of BIISS.

## Parliament boycott also repeats

Victor Hugo died in 1885. If he were alive today and could know about the boycotting culture in Bangladesh's Parliament, he would have surely left behind another pithy saying -- parliament boycott also repeats itself in Bangladesh and always constitutes farce.

A.N.M. NURUL HAQUE

THE famous French novelist Victor Hugo said that history repeats itself, first time as tragedy, then as farce. Only it's hard to tell which phase constitutes the tragedy and which the farce.

Victor Hugo died in 1885. If he were alive today and could know about the boycotting culture in Bangladesh's Parliament, he would have surely left behind another pithy saying -- parliament boycott also repeats itself in Bangladesh and always constitutes farce.

In an unfortunate development, the parliamentary system of democracy in Bangladesh continues to fail to live up to its potential, with MPs from both the major political parties -- AL and BNP -- boycotting parliament sessions by rotation on various pleas since the restoration of parliamentary democracy in 1991.

The opposition parties in the Parliament had boycotted nearly half of the total sittings in the last three Parliaments without any reason convincing enough to the nation. It would not be unjustified if one says that both AL and BNP had cheated the nation, claiming that

they had ruled the country under parliamentary system of democracy.

Being in the opposition bench, the AL had boycotted 135 sittings out of total 400 sittings in the fifth Parliament, spreading from 1991 to 1996, over petty political rows.

As a tit for tat, the BNP, which was in opposition bench in the seventh Parliament from 1996 to 2001, had stayed away from the Parliament for 163 out of total 382 sittings of the House over trifling issues.

The AL responded to its landslide defeat in the 2001 election by announcing a boycott of Parliament, and Sheikh Hasina along with her 55 MPs remained absent for 77 sitting days in a row. AL had stayed away from Parliament for 223 out of 373 sittings in the eighth Parliament.

In the inaugural session of the ninth Parliament, the opposition MPs joined in on only 21 out of 39 working days while the opposition leader Khaleda Zia attended only three sittings. The BNP-led alliance MPs have been on boycott since January 28 over a seating arrangement row in the House, and have continued doing so even during the ongoing third session.

Both AL and BNP promised in their

election manifestos that they would never boycott parliament, whether they sat in the treasury or the opposition benches. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, on more than one occasion since her party's resounding victory in December 29 polls, said that her government would not only listen to the views of the opposition but would also work with the opposition to lead the country to the way of prosperity.

The people became enthusiastic by this change shown by the leaders of the House and opposition regarding their parliamentary performances. Now the responsibility lies squarely with both the leaders to make the Parliament a platform where issues of vital national importance will be discussed and decided upon.

Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB), that keeps a tab on the working of parliaments in emerging democracies, has come up with a set of recommendations, including amendments of the constitution, to re-fix the maximum duration of absence from the house from 90 consecutive days to 30 days and for cancellation of membership of Parliament in order to bring an end to the pervasive culture of boycotting the parliamentary sessions, which deserves serious consideration.

The quality of democracy prevailing in a country is ultimately abridged in the performance of its parliament, and sophisticated parliamentary practice develops an accommodative attitude and respect for the opponents' viewpoints by the treasury bench, as the opposition is a crucial component of the parliament.

Though Bangladesh is a parliamentary democracy, the history of our national Parliament had sadly been a story of dashed hopes and aspirations in all these years after democracy was restored in 1991.

The AL and BNP, which have been ruling the country by rotation since 1991, have been entrapped in a vicious circle of parliament boycotting. When one party sits on the treasury bench, it blames the other for boycotting the parliament.

The same party, when it sits on the opposition bench, blames the treasury bench for compelling them to boycott parliament. In such a political game played by the AL and BNP over the years the nation remains the only loser. The people really want an end to this game.

All these bring forth a pertinent question: How long will the nation have to bear a dysfunctional parliament without the opposition, and pay remunerations, perks and other facilities to those MPs who boycott the Parliament for months?

Parliament, the heart of democracy, must function properly to make laws that reflect changes in situations and time to materialise the democratic dreams of the people.

The nation's aspiration for the efficacy of Parliament will remain a mirage unless both the ruling and the opposition leaders have national interest on top of their political agendas, ignoring their narrow, partisan and personal interests.

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## The recession's real winner

The Chinese economy will grow at 8.5% this year, exports have rebounded to where they were in early 2008, foreign-exchange reserves have hit an all-time high of \$2.3 trillion, and Beijing's stimulus package has launched the next great phase of infrastructure building in the country.

FAREED ZAKARIA

ONE year ago, the leading governments of the world saved the global economy. Remember October 2008: Lehman Brothers had disappeared, AIG was teetering, and every bank was watching its balance sheet collapse. Around the world, credit had frozen and trade was grinding to a halt. Then came a series of moves beginning in Washington -- bank bailouts, rescue packages, fiscal stimuli, and, most crucially, monetary easing. It is not an exaggeration to say that these measures prevented a depression. But the crisis has still fuelled a major slowdown that has affected every country in the world.

The great surprise of 2009 has been the resilience of the big emerging markets -- India, China, Indonesia -- whose economies have stayed vibrant. But one country has not just survived but thrived: China. The Chinese economy will grow at 8.5% this year, exports have rebounded to where they were in early 2008, foreign-exchange reserves have hit an all-time

high of \$2.3 trillion, and Beijing's stimulus package has launched the next great phase of infrastructure building in the country.

Much of this has been driven by remarkably effective government policies. Charles Kaye, CEO of the global private-equity firm Warburg Pincus, lived in Hong Kong for years.

After his last trip to China a few months ago he said to me: "All other governments have responded to this crisis defensively, protecting their weak spots. China has used it to move aggressively forward." It is fair to say that the winner of the global economic crisis is Beijing.

Almost every country in the Western world entered the crisis ill prepared. Governments were spending too much money and running high deficits, so when they had to spend massively to stabilise the economy, deficits zoomed into the stratosphere.

Three years ago, European countries were required to have a budget deficit of less than 3% of GDP to qualify for EU membership. Next year, many will have

deficits of about 8% of GDP. The US deficit will be higher, in percentage terms, than at any point since World War II.

China entered the crisis in an entirely different position. It was running a budget surplus and had been raising interest rates to tamp down excessive growth. Its banks had been reining in consumer spending and excessive credit. So when the crisis hit, the Chinese government could adopt textbook policies to jump-start growth. It could lower interest rates, raise government spending, ease up on credit, and encourage consumers to start spending. Having been disciplined during the fat years, Beijing could now ease up during the lean ones.

And look at the nature of China's stimulus. Most of US government spending is directed at consumption -- in the form of subsidies, wages, health benefits, etc. The bulk of China's stimulus is going toward investment for future growth: infrastructure and new technologies. Having built 21st century infrastructure for its first-tier cities in the last decade, Beijing will now build similar facilities for the second tier.

China will spend \$200 billion on railways in the next two years, much of it for high-speed rail. The Beijing-Shanghai line will cut travel times between those two cities from 10 hours to four. US, by contrast, has designated less than \$20 billion, to be spread out over more than a dozen projects, thus guaranteeing their failure. It's not just rail, of course.

China will add 44,000 miles of new

roads and 100 new airports in the next decade. And then there is shipping, where China has become the global leader. Two out of the world's three largest ports are Shanghai and Hong Kong.

China is also well aware of its dependence on imported oil and is acting in surprisingly farsighted ways. It now spends more on solar, wind, and battery technology than US does. Research by the investment bank Lazard Freres shows that of the top 10 companies (by market capitalisation) in these three fields, four are Chinese. (Only three are American.) It is also making a massive investment in higher education.

"For the last decade, as China's economy kept growing at unprecedented rates, most Western analysts kept discussing when it would crash," says Zachary Karabell, the author of a smart new book, Superfusion, on the Sino-US economy. "Now with China surging ahead through this crisis, all they can discuss is, when will China stall? It's as if they see the facts, but they can't quite make sense of them." China's strange mixture of state intervention, markets, dictatorship, and efficiency is puzzling. But it's time to stop hoping for China's failure and start understanding and adapting to its success.

Fareed Zakaria is editor of Newsweek International and author of The Post-American World and The Future of Freedom: Illiberal Democracy at Home and Abroad. ©Newsweek International. All rights reserved. Reprinted by arrangement.