

'Wild roller coaster ride' at COP15: Us vs them

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MOAZZEM HOSSAIN

THE caption in the title is not mine, it is at the courtesy of chief of the UNFCCC, the sponsor of the Copenhagen summit, otherwise known as COP15. Indeed, he was absolutely right after observing the 12 days of negotiations at the summit. In this piece, however, my interest unlike other commentators is to inform the readers how the COP15 was conducted, since I have some professional interests on the subject. I am now in the middle of a book project on climate change and growth in Asia and have been coordinating the project taking in board international experts at several universities and NGOs including Dr QK Ahmad, the head of the BUP and president, Bangladesh Economic Association.

What I saw in Copenhagen was certainly extraordinary. The summit started with discipline but finished in absolute chaos, at least from the view point of NGOs and observers. Who can blame the UN or the host government? It was due to the arrival of President Obama in town, the security blanket had been all over the place. The Bella Centre (the summit venue) which allowed more than 8000 delegates and observers in the first 10 days, allowed only handful in the last two days. Except heads of governments and their entourages, none was allowed. This was unprecedented and certainly a wild roller coaster ride.

Coming back to the sub-title of this piece, I am absolutely convinced, the whole episode has been played around

'us vs them'. What does it mean? The summit's main objective was to save the planet from self-destructing before this century ends with keeping global warming under 2C, which in turn would help in keeping the rise of sea levels by 1 meter or less and so on. While every major player had been showing absolute determination in achieving these goals by reducing emission in a big way, but at closed door meetings things were different. It was all about "us vs them." Everyone wanted to put hands on the pie. No one was interested in placing binding cut of emissions on the table except the NGOs. Let us summarise the roles of the major players below:

Us vs them: Corporate lobbyists and NGOs

At the start of the meeting, it appeared that the NGO movement came to the summit with full force and well prepared. Indeed, they showed their strength and intellectual capacity in the negotiations. The campaign for a reasonable binding agreement by 193 nations had been well articulated and quite visible throughout the Bella Centre and outside since so many NGOs had participated. The most visible display was on making Copenhagen into 'Hopenhagen'. The whole atmosphere for the first 10 days was quite promising and full of optimism although with a roller coaster negotiations. Something really big would come out of the summit that was what everyone hoping for. Unfortunately, something else had been brewing indoors in the corridors of the Bella Centre.

Although in the outside, the corporate lobbyists (us) showed quite a bit of integrity with the NGOs (them), they had always something else in mind and worked hard to reach an outcome, going neither here nor there. At the end, by the time the NGOs realised this they left Copenhagen on the 10th day out of frustration. However, it does not mean the NGOs have given up. I am sure they will comeback again with full force in Germany in six month's time and in Mexico City in 12 month's. It appears that some did not leave without marking a scar on the face of Copenhagen. This place is now known as 'Brokenhagen'. The Danish environment minister had to resign as chair of the local organising committee since she was too close to the developed nations compromising the neutrality of the host. This resulted in Danish prime minister taking over the role at the fag end of the summit.

My own personal observation is, the summit is not at all doomed. One must not forget that corporate lobbyists were also strong in the hey days of "no smoking" campaign in the '70s and '80s. Ultimately, they lost to people power. Millions of people had been saved from smoking and related diseases due to smoking-free campaign over the last thirty years. I am convinced this time also at COP16 things would be different due to the lessons learned at COP15.

Us vs them: US and China-India

Throughout the conference it was clear that there was a huge division in this UN sponsored summit. On the one side, the wealthy and powerful developed north (US/EU led), and on the other, the weak and divisive south (G77 led by Sudan). In between, there are some least developed nations who played both as a part of G77 or in some occasions in their own (Maldives immediately comes to mind). However, in the concluding two days when the heads of governments began



We are all suffering because of this.

arriving in the Bella Centre, the whole atmosphere started to change. It was no longer north vs south anymore. It was more about big emitting nations: the mighty US (us) and emerging China-India (them) together with Brazil and South Africa. At one stage the heat was so intense that prime minister Wen Jiabao of China failed to show up in meetings with President Obama. Out of this, it was recognisable that there had been a major difference erupted between these two leaders on the issue of transparent international monitoring on China's emission control and reaching a binding agreement. At the end, the 12 paragraph accord looks like a win-win outcome for both "us" and "them".

Both the monitoring and binding clauses have been out. Thus, the world will have to wait another 12 months for a lasting and meaningful accord.

Having said that, in my opinion, one cannot and should not embroiled too much with the accord which the UN regarded it as to "take note." According to the language of the UN, the accord containing 12 paragraphs is not a legal but a political document. To the layman, this sounds like Greek, to say the least. There is, however, for the least developed and vulnerable nations such as Bangladesh, some commitments have been reached for the short to medium terms. An adaptation fund of \$30 billion until 2012 has been promised

by the north. Additionally, President Obama outlined a \$100 billion a year fund after 2020. Indeed, these are sensible outcomes for the frontline vulnerable nations whether from South Asia, Africa or the South Pacific.

In my opinion, at the end, this is not all doom and gloom. No need to despair. One should start preparing for Germany and Mexico City out of the lessons learned in Copenhagen or "Brokenhagen." At least, the UN must be reminded that, in the future the NGOs cannot be thrown out of the final negotiations table which must be ensured by the respective governments.

Dr Moazzem Hossain is the author of Democracy's Roller Coaster Ride in Bangladesh.

Yes, cadet colleges do serve national interests

Many ex-cadets are involved in poverty reduction projects, HIV/AIDS awareness campaigns, healthcare, relief operations after any disaster, etc. Therefore, it wouldn't be fair to say they are absent in this sector.

EKRAM KABIR

I was heartening to see the article "Wistful memories and unfulfilled promises" by Mushfiqur Rahman in The Daily Star on December 15. I was greatly attracted to the theme of Mr. Rahman's piece. The first half of the article describes how, as a cadet of Faujdharhat Cadet College (FCC), he had spent his six years from 1959 to 1965.

However, in the last half, the writer highlights some points that seemed to be critical of FCC and, for that matter, of all cadet colleges. Though I may have focused on FCC only, I think what he said can be true for all cadet colleges in Bangladesh.

I have some observations regarding the writer's comments. However, I'll not remain focused on FCC only, but will try to offer an analysis from the point of view of all cadet colleges, as there's hardly any difference between FCC and other such colleges.

When Mr. Rahman becomes critical of cadet colleges, he says: "Sadly, I have come to the conclusion that FCC and similar schools have simply failed to live

up to the aspirations and expectations of the nation." He should have elaborated this comment a bit, because it seems a bit harsh on the entire cadet college system.

No one has actually done any survey to assess whether these colleges served their purpose or lived up to the expectations of the nation. If you look at the history, these colleges were established for training the country's youth in such a way that their moral becomes high, they have balanced mental capacity, vision, physical toughness or fitness, leadership quality, as well as the capacity to run the administrative machinery of the country.

Being completely different from all other secondary and higher secondary educational institutions, the objective is to build every cadet in a way so that they can face any situation at any time. The idea to set up cadet colleges came from the erstwhile Pakistani military administration that needed bright people to join the military. In a nutshell, they wanted these colleges to work as factories for supplying bright officers to the army.

Now if one says cadet colleges have

not lived up to their expectation, he or she is gravely mistaken. For a long time, these schools have been supplying extremely bright officers in the army. I don't have any doubt that these colleges still provide very bright cadets for Bangladesh Military Academy.

When the writer says "other dirt-poor institutions may not have produced Rhodes Scholars like FCC but they have produced a longer list of chiefs of staff, professors, VCs, secretaries and acclaimed professionals" I beg to differ with him. Cadet colleges have come a long way since their inception at Faujdharhat in 1958. The number of cadet colleges is presently 12, and they have produced all types of professionals that there are in this country.

One should feel good on seeing how well ex-cadets have done in their professional capacities. Cadets have become big industrialists and employ a huge number of people. They have gone for foreign office, NGOs, government offices as well as the media. The banking sector in Bangladesh is full of ex-cadets; they are even holding leading positions in foreign banks.

If you want examples, the Bangladesh Bank governor, CEO of Citibank N.A., high-ranking officials in Standard Chartered Bank, leading garments businessmen and many former chiefs of army staff are all ex-cadets. There were at least two ex-cadets in last caretaker government's cabinet. If one runs a

survey among all ex-cadets, he should get a very commendable outcome. Well, if you talk about politics, this is the only arena where cadets are absent.

Cadet colleges have produced a large number of academics who are working at universities both at home and around the world. The "unfortunate" aspect that Rahman could've mentioned in his article is surprising number of cadet college-educated academics who are working at foreign universities. I have many friends who are now teaching at foreign universities. What the government can do now is bring back these highly qualified academics to local universities.

The writer says he has "benefitted enormously from my FCC experience." However, a true cost-benefit analysis made from a national perspective will reveal some unpleasant truths, he goes on to say. It's true that cadet colleges spend more money for cadets than the normal educational institutions do for their students. Bangladesh Bureau of Educational Information and Statistics says in fiscal 2005-2006, government expenditure on a student of a cadet college was 13 times the amount spent on a student of a government college and almost 10 times the allocation for a non-government college student.

But does it mean that cadet colleges are wasting money? If you say "yes" then you must also say "the army is more privi-

leged than the civilians." Let's look at this from the other end: the cadets get what students should normally get while students of government colleges are being deprived of the proper contribution from the authorities. When a class-seven student gets to study in a cadet college, s/he has to sit for a highly competitive exam and qualify to study there.

While "it is entirely justified to re-examine current funding policy," it also warrants to assess the budget for cadet colleges. The budget for them has not increased that much since the time when there were only four cadet colleges. National leaders say that they want to improve the quality of education at non-cadet colleges and make it similar to that of cadet colleges. This may sound like rhetoric, but it proves that cadet colleges are examples before others.

If you say that FCC has not yet produced a national cricketer, it's not FCC's, or for that matter, any cadet college's fault. The government has always neglected in recruiting national players from cadet colleges. This writer has requested Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) several times to visit Inter-Cadet College Sports Meets to see how cadets fare in games and sports. BCB never cared to initiate anything on this. No one, other than cadet college authorities, has any idea how a cadet can excel in games and sports also and can contribute

immensely to national teams. Cadet college authorities, however, don't have access to the authorities that steer games and sports in this country.

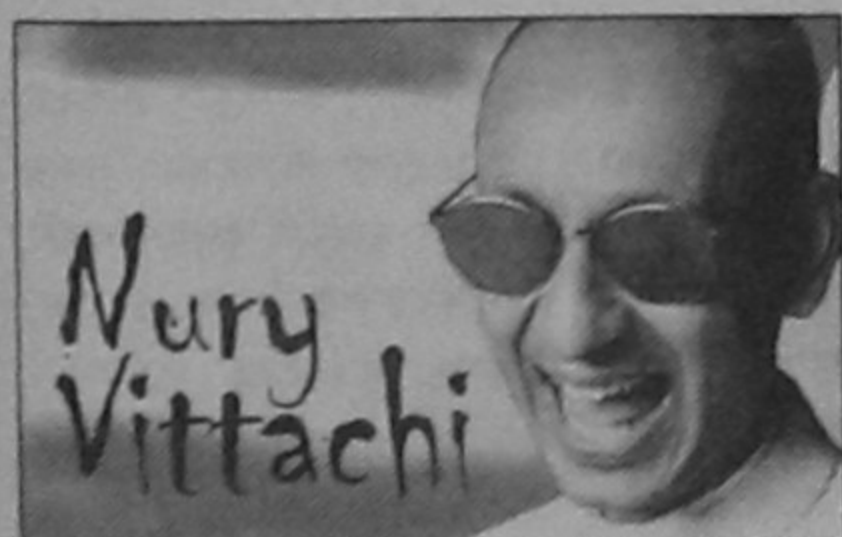
If someone talks about ex-cadets' charitable works, he should have a close look at what ex-cadets' associations are doing on that front. Many ex-cadets are involved in poverty reduction projects, HIV/AIDS awareness campaigns, healthcare, relief operations after any disaster, etc. Therefore, it wouldn't be fair to say they are absent in this sector. These "distinguished graduates" have not only done well for themselves but have also banded together in many national causes.

No one has ever run any study to evaluate the performance of these colleges. Before slamming any conclusion on the performance of the cadet colleges, one needs to research on what actually the graduates of these colleges have contributed to national causes.

Times have changed since 1958 when the first college was established. One should also feel the need to assess whether these colleges need to be upgraded to match the current and future needs. This is the area that observers and analysts need to focus, but saying that these colleges have not come to aid national interest would be a gross injustice to cadets' contribution since 1958.

Ekrum Kabir is a journalist. He graduated from Jhenidah Cadet College in 1984.

Jerks are off the hook



IT is no longer a crime to be a total sleazeball in South Korea. Phew! I know many guys will be breathing a sigh of relief at this news.

Until now, any male who pretended to be a sincere, marriageable person in a bid to get a woman he was trying to seduce to drop her guard, and other things, could be hauled off to jail.

For 56 years, South Korean women having been going to the police station to

say: "My vile, evil boyfriend led me to believe that he was going to marry me so I let him have his wicked way. Then he changed his mind." The man would be locked up for two years.

But a team of nine judges in South Korea recently decided that this sort of sleazy seduction technique was not a crime, but just the sort of thing guys do. In most of the rest of the world, such men are not jailed, but allowed to get on with their lives, with their only punishment to be labeled jerks, sleazeballs, cads, bounders, etc.

The judges' final verdict, with six for and three against, read: "The government should refrain from interfering in men's sexual activities of tempting women in an unharmed manner." Court spokesman Noh Hee-bum told reporters that men who think they have been

harmed by this law could ask for state compensation. "Excuse me, I've been traumatized by having been called a total sleazeball by loads of women, can I have a very large amount of money please?"

The odd thing is that women's groups in South Korea have approved the change.

I asked women at the bar why they thought this was. "Men are sleazeballs," a feminist said. "Women know this. We'd rather handle it ourselves than have the law try to handle it for us. It's too condescending to have judges sort it out."

I felt I had to defend the male sex. "Not all men are sleazeballs," I said. "Oh yeah?" she said. "Then how come the most popular sportsman in the world is Tiger Woods?"

There's no answer to that. So what should a woman do if she has

been seduced and then abandoned? Well, in some organisations, "being dropped by a jerk" is counted as an official illness.

At Hime and Co, a Japanese cosmetics company, women aged 20 to 29 get two days off if they tell the human resources department that they have been traumatized by the unhappy ending of a love affair. They are then granted 48 hours off work to weep, eat chocolate and leave obscene messages on the guy's phone. Women aged 30 or more get three days.

A similar scheme is running at a firm in Shanghai. Gu Jun, professor of sociology at Shanghai University, told the Chinese press that such a move helps build a harmonious culture. I'm not sure that the guys would agree.

Meanwhile, there should be a temporary drop in the number of predatory

jerks preying on women around the world. If they have got any sense, they'll all be in South Korea, trying to see if they can get compensation. If Elin Nordegren

is reading this and wondering where her husband Tiger is, try Seoul.

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