

Signboard-only NGOs being de-licensed

A unified authority, oversight mechanism necessary for the sector

THE latest news on the NGO front is that the government has decided to cancel 20,000 inactive Non-Government Organisations (NGOs) out of 55,000 registered under the Social Welfare Ministry.

It is an eye-opener to how unwieldy the sector has become, thanks to the ease with which these could be set up. Most such voluntary organisations are not even properly managed. They commit many irregularities. Little wonder several of them have now fallen into disuse.

We appreciate the Social Welfare Ministry's effort, however belated, to streamline the sector. But one wonders why so many organisations remained registered so far in the first place. The process of phasing them out should have started much earlier.

Problems arise over regulating the NGOs within any definite policy framework as they can be registered by as many as seven authorities, apart from the Department of Social Welfare. The list of authorities includes NGO Affairs Bureau, the Department of Cooperatives, Office of the Registrar of Joint Stock Companies and Firms, Micro-credit Regulatory Authority and Departments of Women and Children Affairs and Youth Development.

Naturally, the sheer number of the NGOs and their registering authorities make the task of keeping an effective oversight on them a formidable one. This issue has to be addressed.

Considering the overall picture prevailing in the NGO sector, especially regarding its administration and oversight, the need for urgent action to streamline it cannot be overemphasised. It is important that some semblance of order is established in the sector without any delay.

Reports have it that some organisation passing for NGOs committed fraudulence, while others deviated from their stated aims and objectives.

This is not to detract from the fact that there are several NGOs that have helped improve our social development indicators earning good names for themselves and the nation.

To remove the existing confusion in the sector, there is hardly any alternative to bringing the NGOs under a unified authority. At the same time, an effective oversight body that would conduct auditing on both the financial and performance aspects of the NGOs should be created. This would ensure the accountability and transparency of the NGOs and remove public misgivings about some of them. These reforms should be carried out in view of the very great role that the NGO sector can play in carrying forward the development agenda alongside the government.

Test match performance against India

Down the slippery ladder -- again and again!

AFTER their fine showing against the West Indies and Zimbabwe, of course not two of the greatest teams in the world today, our cricketers caved in without much of a fight against the mighty Indians. While there was a semblance of contest in the first Test in Chittagong, when the strong Indian battling line-up failed to click in the first innings, the second Test in Dhaka turned to be a straight mop-up operation for the visitors.

There were occasional flashes of brightness, though, which kept the local fans on their toes. In Chittagong, some very good bowling by Skipper Shakib and pacer Shahadat restricted the Indians to a modest 243. Yet, the small total turned out to be a big one for our brittle batting line-up. The Indians managed to bowl their rivals out without conceding a lead, and then launched an all-out attack to set a huge target for the local boys. Though Mushfiqur Rahim scored a well deserved century, the outcome of the match was never in doubt.

So, the expectations were not low when the second Test began at Dhaka. But our batsmen, except the ever consistent Mahmudullah Riad, collapsed before the spectators could settle down. It is this kind of meek capitulation that the players must learn to avoid while facing stronger sides. They played shots, some of them quite risky, when their only job was to occupy the crease and let runs come in the singles and twos. Aggression can never be a substitute for technique in Test cricket. A perfectly executed cover drive or a huge six can please the crowd momentarily, but cannot help control a match.

Opener Tamim Iqbal played brilliantly in the second innings in Dhaka when the team was actually struggling to avoid an innings defeat. But his dismissal at the fog end of the day was big disappointment for the local fans. Tamim made the Indian bowling look ordinary, but the fans will still ask why our batsmen could not take the pressure of this not-so-menacing bowling attack.

Were the players under some kind of psychological pressure? What was particularly heart-tearing for them is whereas they had expected a lead of 150-200 runs after the 2nd innings they slumped from what was 291 for 4 to 312 all out!

We hope the players will learn to stay before they can flay the opposition bowling.

Bravo for the stance, but implement it

If we are tolerant to acts which endanger the very existence of the city we live in, the air we breathe, the water we drink, the road we walk on, the greenery we cherish it is no longer a virtue, it is a sin.

SYED MUNIR KHASRU

RECENTLY, many of us saw the bold stand by the minister for works and housing and the Rajuk chairman against land grabbers, encroachers, and owners of illegal structures. When we are used to seeing the bullies and godfathers silencing everybody with money, muscle, and power, these messages of firmness are a welcomed change in a culture of impunity.

Year after year, we have read article after article on these unscrupulous businessmen who have treated the land of Bangladesh like their paternal property. They can occupy, evict, grab, demolish, and build whatever they desire with the aid of a section of corrupt government officials and law enforcers. With their sinful acts, and no respect for rule of law, they have proven that they are beyond the law or accountability.

There are countless stories of people who are either poor and weak or honest and helpless, who have lost their properties and even lives to these pirates of both the land and the water. These merciless gangsters have been thriving on the misery of common people for long. From choking up the much needed water bodies through illegal occupation, from cheating people through fraudulent transactions to unauthorised construction, from using ill gotten money for so called industrial ventures to using media as a means to harass people who stand in their way, these people are a social menace and disgrace to the community. Yet, many of us choose to pretend ignorance or, as the saying goes, "where money speaks, truth is silent."

From some unscrupulous lawyers who can sell their conscience for a couple of extra bucks to some intellectuals, and journalists who don't mind being in their payroll while preaching idealism to the nation in different forums, seminars, and talk-shows, the land grabbers have managed to buy almost everyone who serves their evil design.

We, the ordinary citizens, are a silent witness to this orgy of plunder, loot, and theft as those who could have done something have hardly done anything. Money



It will take more than words to remove them.

and power have managed to wrestle their way into a system where honesty and courage are mostly penalised instead of being rewarded.

Against such a depressing background, at least some people have stood up for the rule of law and prevalence of justice, and they deserve all the support we can provide. If nothing else, let's lend them our moral support by boycotting land, apartments, properties, products, goods, services that come from those nefarious and wicked sources. The housing minister already has pleaded for such support, and he deserves it from us in his

defiant stand against the organised and largely entrenched criminals.

How long can we afford to be passive and silent when we are losing rivers to the greed of the land sharks, when public roads become narrow alleys due to their encroachment, when there is no parking space due to violation of building code and resulting traffic mess, when small landowners surrender their precious land after being encircled by this mafia, when speaking against them

uphold the laws of the land.

Under normal circumstances, tolerance is a virtue. However, if we are tolerant to acts which endanger the very existence of the city we live in, the air we breathe, the water we drink, the road we walk on, the greenery we cherish it is no longer a virtue, it is a sin. Let's each of us do his/her part by being united in our support to public representatives and officials who have shown the courage to defy the godfathers.

is called yellow journalism. It has to end somewhere and now is the time, and each of us has a role to play in his/her own small way.

The housing minister and the Rajuk chairman have taken a praiseworthy and bold stand. Both of them have publicly stated their willingness to see the end of it in a game which we all know entails high risk in all possible forms. While we criticise corrupt officials, it is also important that we, the citizens, stand by those who have publicly demonstrated their commitment to be firm in their resolve to

Let's boycott goods and services of those whose money comes out of people's misery and nature's tears. If we don't, then the day is not too far away when the ground below our feet will also shrink. Let each of us come forward and speak aloud instead of being either bought or cowered. We Bangladeshis are courageous people. Let's prove it in our acts, no matter how small or big, and save the land and the country from the goons and thugs.

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Are we ready?

We're learning from the Haiti earthquake that emergency responses warranted by earthquakes are quite different from all other natural disasters, and the first emergency responders must be home-grown to save lives and minimise sufferings.

ABDULLAH A. DEWAN

THE January 12 earthquake of 7 magnitude, with its epicenter 16 miles west of the capital and largest city Port Au Prince, that struck the Caribbean country of Haiti for 15 seconds devastated nearly one-third of the country's population of 9 million, killing

The quake didn't discriminate between the poor and the rich -- and even killed the archbishop and many senior politicians. Lack of heavy equipment to clear debris off the blocked roads and rescue trapped survivors, or even to dig mass graves for the dead piled up on roadsides, compounded the miseries. There was no government to restore



Unprepared and unprotected.

200,000 or more and displacing over a million.

The tremor levelled the UN building and killed dozens of UN employees. In a country without a building code, it obliterated whole neighbourhoods of sloppy concrete structures, flattened hospitals, wrecked the port, turned the airport's control tower non-operational, and smashed key institutions -- including the presidential palace and the national cathedral.

power lines and dismantled phone services. Hardly anything is operational in the aftermath of the earthquake.

Within hours of Port-au-Prince crumbling into an apocalyptic ruin, US sent in an aircraft carrier with 19 helicopters, hospital and assault ships, and the 82nd Airborne Division with 3,500 troops and several hundred medical personnel. The army brought the country's small airport back on an operational standing and President Obama pledged an initial \$100

million dollars in emergency aid.

Six days later, several warships arrived at the port and now nearly 15,000 US army personnel are engaged in rescue, rehabilitation, and security operations. In the meantime, President Obama assigned his two immediate predecessors George Bush and Bill Clinton to lead the US humanitarian response.

The UN, international aid organisations, the EU and all its partners and many other nations have mobilised resources to stabilise the humanitarian catastrophe as quickly as possible. So far, over \$1 billion in donated funds has been raised, and many more billions will be needed for rebuilding.

Interestingly though, there were no kind words from conservative televangelist Pat Robertson. Appearing on "The 700 Club," he preached: "They were under the heel of the French, you know Napoleon the third and whatever. And they got together and swore a pact to the devil. They said 'we will serve you if you will get us free from the prince.' True story. And so the devil said: 'Ok it's a deal.' And they kicked the French out. The Haitians revolted and got themselves free. But, ever since, they have been cursed by one thing after another."

One may wonder if Robertson is alluding to the fact that a majority of Haitians believe in and practice some forms of voodoo, although Roman Catholicism is the official religion of Haiti.

At the White House, President Obama saw divine intervention differently. He wondered: "After suffering so much for so long, to face this new horror must cause some to look up and ask, have we somehow been forsaken?" Obama vowed that America would not forsake Haiti, because its tragedy reminds us of "our common humanity."

Pooja Bhatia, a journalist who lives in Haiti, wrote in the Times: "If God exists; he's really got it in for Haiti."

George Packer of the *New Yorker* wrote: "Haitian history is a chronicle of suffering so Job-like that it inevitably inspires arguments with God, and about God. Slavery, revolt, oppression, colour, caste, despoliation, American occupation alternating with American neglect, extreme poverty, political violence, coups, gangs, hurricanes, floods -- and now an earthquake that exploits all the weaknesses created by this legacy to kill tens of thousands of people."

Before the earthquake, former presi-

dent Bill Clinton, the UN special envoy to Haiti, had expressed optimism about the country's prospects for investment and growth; after the earthquake he emphasised Haiti's new national economic plan as a sound basis for rebuilding.

Experts predict that the January 12 earthquake may be followed by similar or even stronger ones of the magnitude of 8 or more in the future. This prediction is borne out of both scientific measurements and past records.

The *New Scientist* reported that not all the pressure and energy built up in the faults running through the Caribbean region were released by this earthquake. Several experts believe "stress transfer" along the affected fault segment is likely to trigger a chain of quakes. This prediction refers to Haiti being struck by earthquakes in 1751 and 1770, when three successive large earthquakes cropped up within the time span of 20 years (*Digital Journal.com*).

Satellite measurements also reveal that the Caribbean plate is moving east over the Atlantic plate at a rate of two centimetres per year. "Measurements over several decades show that the sum of all earthquakes that strike on 'splinter faults' on the Caribbean plate, like Tuesday's [January 12], have accounted for around half of the energy associated with this movement, leaving the other half stored up in the system."

It's true that earthquakes cannot be predicted. The last time Haiti was struck by a destructive earthquake was in 1770. As a result, the Haitian people had hardly any notion of the extent of damage an earthquake could inflict.

Of the 39 major earthquakes that occurred since 1906, each killing 3,000 and more people, China withstood 7, Iran 5, and Japan 4. Bangladesh has not been struck by a major earthquake in recent memory. While preparing for potential climate change devastation, we've to make contingency plans for all other eventualities -- including earthquake. We're learning from the Haiti earthquake that emergency responses warranted by earthquakes are quite different from all other natural disasters, and the first emergency responders must be home-grown to save lives and minimise sufferings.

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