

Addressing dumping issue

Scientific waste management holds the answer

At a recently held meeting of the citizens' right movement, the pro-environment groups, lawmakers, labour leaders and government ministers, they called for engaging the residents of the areas near the river in saving it. Of course, heightened awareness of the people, their continuous vigilance and active involvement undoubtedly constitute an important element of protection to ward off the potential polluters and encroachers. The promise from the government level to cooperate with such popular moves in saving it is also reassuring.

We appreciate these sentiments. But unless agents of encroachment and pollution are effectively tackled, no sustainable solution to the problem can be found.

For all we know, the encroachers and those who dump waste in the Buriganga river have been continuing with their activities, despite all the moves taken so far by the government and the pro-environment groups to stop them.

The encroachers, who are to blame for narrowing of the river and creating obstructive structures in it, apart, the other major cause of its getting filled up is the garbage dumped regularly by the Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) and the effluents released by the tanneries of Hajaribagh area and other river-bank industries in particular.

We would like to stress that the government needs to put its foot down to stop the major sources like the DCC and the tanneries that unload their rubbish or effluents into the river. Especially, urgent steps would be necessary to relocate the tanneries to a place far away from Dhaka.

While plugging the sources that keep depositing fresh loads of pollutants, let's draw the attention to the ongoing dredging operation that is proceeding haltingly. While removing the earth from the riverbed and not quite knowing where to dump it, we are not basically clearing the river as such.

Therefore, the task of protecting Buriganga or any other river for that matter from the various agents of pollution as well as cleansing it of the garbage already in it has to be done in such a way that it does not create new problems.

That means, the success of the effort to keep the river clean depends crucially on a proper system to manage the wastes being generated day in, day out. So, nothing short of a scientific waste management system can take care of such a Herculean task.

It all demands that experts put their heads together to evolve a strategy for saving rivers where all the operational components of river preservation work in coordination under as unified an authority as possible.

Medical university in disarray

Eliminate corruption, ensure fair-play

Parliamentary subcommittee has found Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University reeling under all sorts of anomalies for years. The committee has recommended in its report, submitted to the parliamentary standing committee, that 313 staff of the university were recruited in violation of service rules.

The news is disturbing if only because it shows how corruption has made inroads deeper into the heart of the country's premier medical education centre. The committee has also found that many doctors and employees of the university were promoted on grounds that had nothing to do with their professional excellence. Finally, there are serious allegations of corruption in the procurement process which caused huge financial loss to the university.

The picture we get from the parliamentary subcommittee's observations is indeed bleak. The university is known as an institution where our doctors can get advanced training in different branches of medical education. That is necessary to have an adequate number of good doctors who can reduce local patients' dependence on treatment abroad. But when the university itself is reported to be steeped in abysmal corruption and irregularities, it is hard to believe that it will deliver results.

However, the observations of the parliamentary subcommittee seem to be based on a retrospective assessment of the university's performance. The subcommittee has found out what went wrong at the university in the seven or eight years before the present AL government came to power. What is obviously needed is streamlining of the university's administration to enhance the level of the services rendered by it. The wrongs done in the past will have to be addressed but issues like merit and efficiency must be kept above party interests at all times. Moreover, the university has to function being influenced by extraneous factors.

As for recommendations, we saw in the past that very few of them were implemented. Committees were formed and asked to suggest what should be done, but the suggestions almost never led to any change in practical terms.

Medical education is certainly an area which should have no place for partisan activities. But the report on the BSMMU does indicate that the university has for years been controlled by the supporters of the ruling party, regardless of which party it might be. There is ample scope for improvement here. The present administrators of the university can set an example by rising above partisan considerations to make it a corruption-free, merit-based institution.

It's time for India to step up

Sheikh Hasina has taken great risks, both political and otherwise, for herself and her party in committing what she has to India. Much will depend on how India responds in tangible manner.

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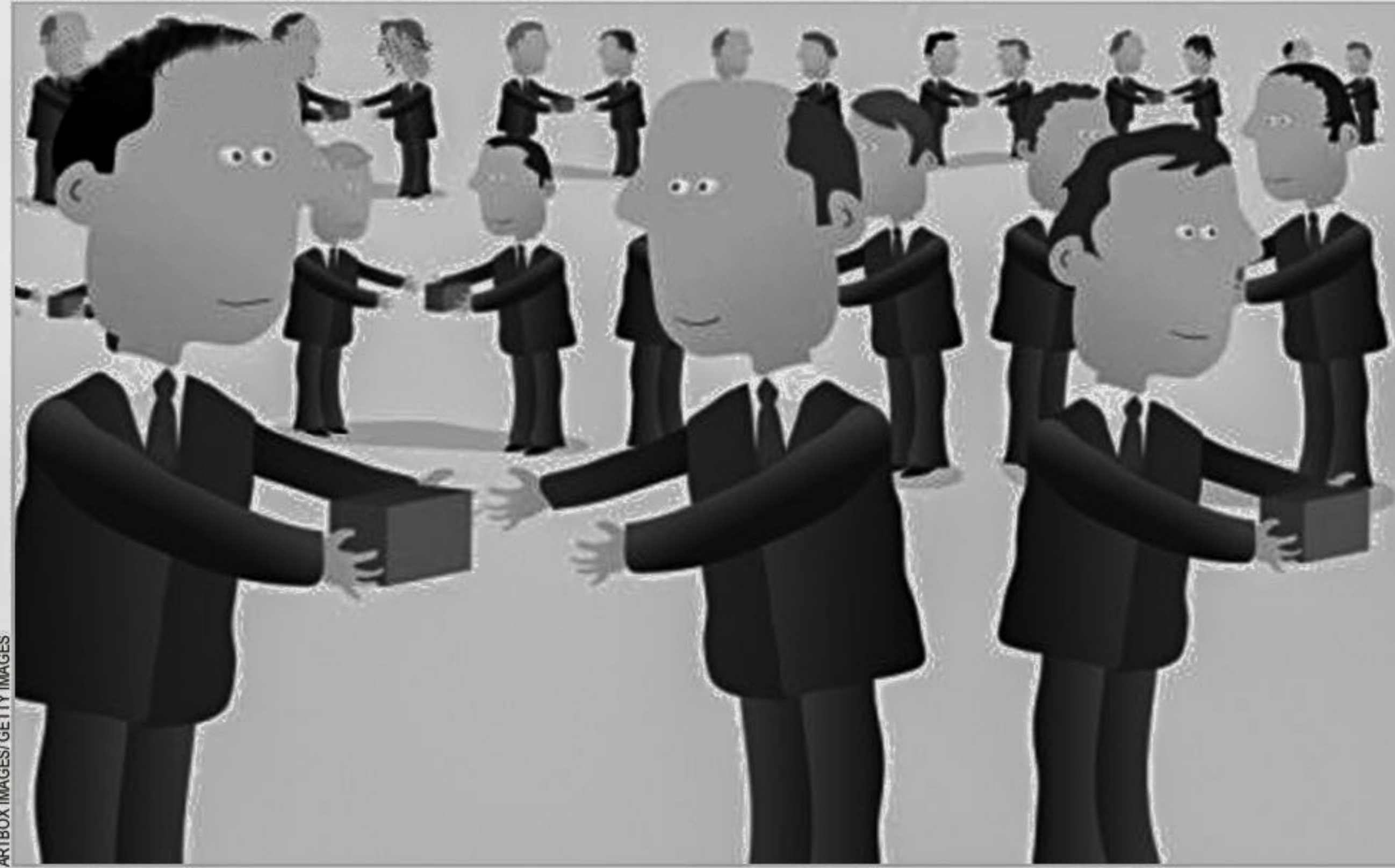
MOST of the critiques related to the PM's India visit have been affected by a predetermined mindset. Either everything was bad or it was a grand success. However, a more objective assessment would suggest neither was the case.

Diplomacy requires visible results; at least the public demand that the diplomatic forays produce tangible outcomes for it to be considered a success. While people are also fully cognisant of the fact that, in interstate relationship, there has to be give and take; they would not stand for a situation where one party takes ten and gives one.

The general impression is that it is Hasina who has taken several steps forward to reach out to India to bring about a thaw in the relation, which was in a frozen state at best. The question is will India reciprocate in equal measure, if not more, behooving a bigger neighbour. At the same time the risks Hasina has taken in generating a new era of relationship between Bangladesh and India cannot have escaped one's notice. The justification of her actions rest on the way the details of the agreement are worked out between then two countries, and even more importantly, how India addresses the unresolved issues.

When it comes to diplomacy and foreign policy India remains "the" factor not "a" factor for Bangladesh. That is a reality that many may not cherish but will have to live with. While history modulates the mind it hardly helps to be weighed down by baggage of history -- we cannot conduct foreign affairs in the 21st century with a mindset of the 20th. But it would be a folly to bin the experiences and the lessons of the past because on it will be formulated our bargaining strategy with our neighbours. And taking calculated risks is statesmanlike, but the results may take time to emerge in concrete form. The question is will all that have eventuated between the two countries ensure Bangladesh's national interest and fulfill its objectives in the long run?

The policy regarding foreign insurgents on our soil is based on a principled stand with which some may take issue, but it has



Is it a fair give and take?

helped allay India's apprehension that had till recently considered Bangladesh a greater security threat than Pakistan, a view that was not made a secret of during formal and informal discussions by Indian diplomats and scholars. And this stemmed from what was perceived by India as a disconnect between the then government's articulated policy and the ground realities vis a vis ULFA.

The policy has been acted upon by Bangladesh in a very tangible manner but some apprehend that there is a potential risk of violent riposte from ULFA. I for one would discount any such possibility since Bangladesh remains a natural fall back position for any NE insurgent group, and ULFA leadership is well aware that neither governments nor policies are permanent. But one cannot discount that political leadership may still be targeted by foreign

dissident groups with axe to grind.

All manner of apprehensions are being expressed regarding the use of the two ports by India. Some consider the vision of making Chittagong port an international transport hub a chimera. The ports' capacity may not be able to cope with the fast

Therefore, if Bangladesh has acted fast to alleviate India's immediate security concerns on its eastern border why can't India do likewise to ensure that no more Bangladeshis fall victim to BSF firing.

When Bangladesh has agreed to provide India additional outlets to the Bay of Bengal India should to deliver immediately on its

growing volume of our own trade, according to critics of the policy, although as per figures available, more than 60 percent of the capacity of the two ports in the average remains unutilised.

The issue of transit, aka corridor, aka connectivity, call it what you will, strikes different chords in different people. The point at issue here is not so much the issue of Indian connectivity. Many link it with the continued lack of connectivity with Bangladesh's enclaves within India. And use of ports to some means granting India connectivity, particularly to its NE.

While Bangladesh has done her bit to improve bilateral relations, India should act fast to make the gains for Bangladesh from the recent understanding perceptible. Frankly, it is not so much the newer gains but the old unfulfilled assurances that India need to act quickly upon.

commitment to allow Bangladesh uninterrupted link with Angarpota and Dahagram?

Sheikh Hasina has taken great risks, both political and otherwise, for herself and her party in committing what she has to India. Much will depend on how India responds in tangible manner. For some, the proposed monetary aid and promise of 250 MW of electricity by India doesn't mean very much. In this regard an Indian scholar's advice to the Indian government that, "India's assurance of it being a reliable and genuine partner for mutual cooperation and benefit be unambiguously conveyed by addressing many of Bangladesh's genuine concerns; India's commitment towards Bangladesh needs clear illustrations," gives a good pointer as to how India should act.

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A second Kaptai dam?

The Bangladesh government has an obligation to inform its own people about any project, which will affect them directly. In turn, its people have the right to know what will happen to them, if another lake is created for doubling of electricity production.

KABITA CHAKMA

THE news heading "Another Kaptai dam for power generation: Govt seeks US help," reported in *The Daily Star*, on Friday January 22, made me consciously question: Am I reading this correctly? Is it a hoax or a mistake? Or is it a joke?

The story that followed was: "The government sought assistance from the USA in power sector for building another Kaptai dam for doubling hydropower generation from the lake waters in Rangamati hill district."

Questions arise immediately: Why hasn't there been any information on this in any news media? Why haven't local communities been informed about such a large project?

Shortly after the news was released,

phone calls, e-mails, poured in from many Jumma and some non-Jumma expressing grave concerns:

"Another dam in CHT? Using US money at the expense of Jumma land? Who knows how much Jumma land will be grabbed and then the power will be used to run factories in the plain land?"

"I wonder whether the state minister for environment had any consultation with the people of CHT before requesting for help to US government?"

"If this proposal for a second Kaptai dam is a serious proposal -- it seems so preposterous, I still have trouble believing the government would propose such a thing."

"The last dam cost us very very dearly."

"We should act immediately before its too late."

We have since learnt that even local institutions, like the Rangamati District

Council and the CHT Regional Council, are looking for information on the project proposal. It has been confirmed that not a line was ever published about the project until the government sought financial assistance from the US on January 22.

Does the government really believe that another Kaptai dam is a justified, viable, sustainable development proposal?

If the government believes in another Kaptai dam project, why has the government been clandestine about the project? Why hasn't the government discussed the project with either the locals or their representatives? Why hasn't the government discussed the project in any public forum?

The Bangladesh government, as a democratic constituency, has an obligation to inform its own people about any project, which will affect them directly. In turn, its people have the right to know what will happen to them, to their homesteads, farms, woods, lives and livelihoods if another lake is created for doubling of electricity production.

There are now more questions than answers, more distrust than trust in the government. One key question arises: is this another act of treachery against the

indigenous Jumma of CHT by its own government?

Our memory of the existing Kaptai dam, built in the 1960s with the assistance of USAID, without public information and local consultation, has not been erased from Jumma's collective memory. It continues to haunt thousands of Jummas of different generations.

It made 100,000 people (more than a quarter of the Jumma population) homeless and jobless. It destroyed 40 per cent of the most valuable agricultural land of the CHT. It also triggered over two decades of undeclared war.

There remain ongoing issues regarding the economic injustices against the hill people as an outcome of the inequitable sharing of electricity from the first Kaptai dam. Only a tiny amount of the promised compensation for the first dam was ever delivered and even today, about 50 years later, nearly 95 per cent of the electricity produced by the Kaptai dam is used for the development of the plains, not the CHT where the electricity is produced. Hence, there is a substantial economic debt owed to the peoples of the CHT by the state.

For the near 50 years of the existence of the Kaptai dam the CHT has suffered from a lack of electrical power. One would justifiably think that CHT should have the first priority of use of the electricity of the Kaptai dam and the surplus should go to the national grid. But instead, electricity produced by the Kaptai dam is delivered directly to the national grid, while electricity is returned to CHT only through Hathazari, a station at Chittagong district.

A respectful relationship between the CHT people and the state will remain difficult without addressing the existing economic injustices involved in the unfair distribution of electricity production. Depriving the CHT of the benefit of the electricity can only exacerbate the injustices against the CHT people.

If there were ever to be another dam in the CHT, two steps seem necessary:

Firstly the financial, moral and ethical injustices that arose from the first dam be made good.

Secondly, the local people, their institutions and representatives must be substantially (not tokenistically) involved in the inception, planning, decision-making levels of the project and in its delivery and in maintenance.



What will be the price that Jumma people will face?

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