

Recharging groundwater

A step in the right direction, but hardly enough

WE must thank Dhaka WASA for displaying some wisdom insofar as tackling the problems of depleting groundwater table is concerned. It should be complimented for initiating a project to artificially recharge the aquifers in and around the capital which we feel holds the potential of overcoming water scarcity as well as environmental concerns. We wonder why it had not been resorted to sooner.

However, the idea of a pilot project gives one the impression of an insufficient scale unless it is to determine the best technique of artificial recharging and leads to adequate and extensive replication. We feel that, given the pressing nature of the problem, the authorities must go for a large scale project including that of harvesting rainwater in the form reservoirs, in order to replenish groundwater on a sustained basis, as well as being utilised as a surface water source. All these can and should be implemented within a reasonable period of time. All this necessitates a comprehensive water management and use plan that is sadly missing.

Rain water harvesting is not new to us and in this context one could make use of local expertise and experience in addition to tapping in on regional experiences. One could also go for technical expertise from outside the region to enhance supply of water, both ground as well surface.

There is a critical need for a quick reduction in our over-reliance on groundwater; and this would involve reclaiming and saving the rivers and canals from illegal occupation as well as pollution. This would need the efforts of other government agencies as well to be implemented fully. And it would also entail recycling the waters through treatment plants. And that means having many more water treatment plants than WASA has at present.

We will never have enough water to drink and wash unless we ensured refilling the natural underground containers, and reduced the level of ground water extraction. Without that we are going to be faced with a raft of problems, with multifarious consequence like that of subsidence of land, among other things.

Everest conquered again

Tremendous feat by Musa Ibrahim

MUSA Ibrahim, a young journalist working with us, has now a stunning feat to his name -- conquering Mount Everest. This is great news as he is the first Bangladeshi to have reached the dream peak, which Edmond Hillary and Sherpa Tenzing reached way back in 1953. They were proud that the flag of mankind as a whole and we are carrying the flag of Bangladesh as our national flag in that snowy, rather desolate, mountaintop.

Mountaineering is more than a sport as it needs great stamina, concentration, single mindedness and skill to climb up the rugged and hostile terrain, where a moment's lapse or loss of concentration can be fatal. The history of the conquest of the Everest is replete with examples of how the fearless mountaineers, unruffled by repeated failures, made their way to the highest peak in the world. Many of them lost their lives since the Everest expeditions began in the 19th century.

The peak still attracts the adventurer never happy with leaving the mysteries of nature unresolved. The great mountains known as Himalayas are particularly fascinating to them. The mountains have stirred the imagination of poets and writers for centuries. However, they are no longer the serene place for mystics and those preferring communion with nature in a quiet atmosphere. The sporting mountaineers, overwhelmed by the sheer beauty and mystery of the mountains, are there to break the silence.

Musa Ibrahim should now be a source of inspiration to our budding mountaineers. He has proved, in a most convincing manner, that our youngsters are capable of achieving anything and everything. Mountaineering as a sport can be very exciting and rewarding too. After all, to be the first Bangladeshi to set foot on the Everest is a matter of immense pleasure and satisfaction. Our happiness is a shade more special because he belongs to The Daily Star.

Musa's success should also bring mountaineering, a none too popular sport or pastime in Bangladesh, to limelight. It is a field where energetic and dynamic young men and women can shine. There is absolutely no reason to think that we are not good enough for it. Yes, Musa Ibrahim has shown us the way which, we believe, many more local mountaineers will follow.

Spitting of venom begins

The sight, the sound and the sarcasm were all falling into shape to create the horrific spectre called Bangladeshi politics. It was full of anger, full of hatred and full of empty air. It is old wine in new bottle. BNP's politics proved for the umpteenth time that it could not mature beyond bad mouthing Awami League. Somehow, its fate depended on the mistakes of Awami League. It could give nothing new to the nation.

SHAHNOOR WAHID

I was watching and listening to Begum Khaleda Zia the other day and felt kind of strange seeing her desperate attempts to attain the impossible, that again so soon in the day. There, in the heat and dust, she exhaustively went on spitting venom in the air to smite her enemy down; twisting facts conveniently to serve her purpose; carefully ignoring the pestilence she had left behind for this government; losing no breath in terming the present government a failure; and last but not least ... demanding fresh election so that she could grab power once again.

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As I was listening, I could not help but wonder whether we were suffering from amnesia. Have the brain cells containing memories of Begum Zia's stint in power been surgically removed? Has the phantom of Barbarian barbarity been exercised by some powerful clergy? Has a colossal vacuum cleaner sucked up the records of blatant misuse of power by the 4-party alliance government and its henchmen?

I wonder, were those numerous reports on administrative and political corruption, land grabbing, graveyard grabbing, forest grabbing, public toilet grabbing, river grabbing, amassing of black money, "khamba" scandal and so on all false and fabricated? What about relief materials,

such as corrugated iron sheets, wheat and rice unearthed from MPs' village homes or ponds? Did the electronic camera tell lies?

What about the astounding sums found in bank accounts of people who hardly could write a cheque correctly? Were the bank accounts not palpable evidence? Were they fabricated by the caretaker government or the army or the ACC? What about private cars worth Tk.2/3 crore belonging to people who travelled by autorickshaw five years back? If those were not bought with black money then why had the owners abandoned them on roadsides?

Did Osman the forest-eater eat alone? Only Tk.1 crore was recovered from his house but was it all? Didn't the bigger shares of black money go to the political leaders and department heads? What about the allegations of her "own people" taking big chunks from every local and foreign deals? Is that only myth we are dealing with? What about the Arabian Night's tale of the "Hundred Suitcases" that the Genii carried to a secret destination in Dubai or Abu Dhabi? All just tales?

Begum Zia knew very well what many of her ministers, MPs and party workers did throughout the five years of the 4-party alliance rule. She allowed the student front and other workers carry out silent repression in their respective localities and as a result of which no Alami League worker could do business there or even stay at home at night. Didn't many of the Hindu community members live under threat for casting votes in favour of Awami League?

Have we forgotten what was done to the country's constitution in the name of the so-called 14th amendment? We know very well what game was played with the judiciary in the name of separating it from the administration, or what game was played



Begum Khaleda Zia.

in the name of re-fixing the age limit of the judges, and so on. We also remember the making of the voter list with more than one crore false names in it.

My question to begum Zia is, what's the hurry for the change of the government? A clever politician would wait and see. Let the government enter its third or fourth year and then make your assessment. Well, you need not do anything. People will do it for you. You need not disrupt civil life in the capital by organising huge meetings at Paltan or calling hartal.

If the present government cannot live up to the expectation of the people; if they cannot deliver at the end of the day; if they falter and fail to fulfil the election pledges then people will vote them out of power. So, why push people to the path of confrontation? Why stab at the back of the economy by calling hartal? What will you achieve by shutting down the wheels of economy?

Do not underestimate the people. They always give correct verdict on the performance of the government -- they did at the end of the tenure of Awami League's first government and they also did in the last

general election. But, please keep it mind, people are not ready now for any disruption or violence for change of government.

BNP's politics should not be limited to going after Awami League. Rather, it should do in-depth research on major national and international issues so that it can formulate better policies if it comes to power in future. As for now, the chairperson should organise the house and streamline the party.

BNP has already done great damage to itself by taking back someone like Babar -- who has this huge negative image in the entire country. He has no acceptability to even an imbecile! So, why increase your liabilities? What can Babar give to BNP that any decent, intelligent member cannot? I have this strong hunch that late Ziaur Rahman, had he been alive today, would not have allowed a person like Babar to come within ten feet, let alone give him any important portfolio. BNP has a lot of soul searching to do besides spitting venom.

Shahnour Wahid is a Senior Assistant Editor of The Daily Star. He can be contacted at shahnourwahid@yahoo.co.uk

We are one



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A.N. M. NURUL HAQUE

"If 1989 saw the end of the 'Second World' with Communism's demise, then 2009 saw the end of what was known as the 'Third World.' We are now in a new, fast-evolving multi-polar world economy in which some developing countries are emerging as economic powers, others are moving towards becoming additional poles of growth, and some are struggling to attain their potential within this new system -- where North and South, East and West, are now points on a compass, not economic destinies," said Robert B Zoellick, the President of World Bank (WB).

In a speech ahead of the spring meeting of the WB, Zoellick said that the global economic crisis of 2009 and the rise of developing countries in the global economy were the death-knell of the old concept of the Third World as a separate entity just as 1989 was for the Second World of communism. This has profound implica-

tions for a multi-polar world.

Zoellick, in his speech entitled "The end of the Third World? Modernising multilateralism for a Multipolar World," also said: "Poverty remains and must be addressed. Failed states remain and must be addressed. Global challenges are intensifying and must be addressed. But the manner in which we must address these issues is shifting. The out-dated categorisations of First and Third Worlds, donor and supplicant, leader and led, no longer fit."

These remarks were welcomed by activist groups who have long campaigned for a greater voice for developing countries in the institutions that oversee the world economy. The proclamation of the end of Third World is in fact an acknowledgement, a rather belated one, because of the fact that the geopolitical configuration of the world has totally changed from what it was in 1944, when the Breton Woods system was introduced. And the advocacy of modernising multi-lateralism for a multi-polar

world has focused on the urgent need of reforming the WB and IMF.

The WB president has forcefully drawn world's attention to the prevailing mismatch between the world economy and the emerging geopolitics. He recalled Woodrow Wilson's "words on paper did not realise their lofty ideals" in the League of Nations as it was practically formed and run. He noted: "Arranging a new sharing of responsibilities among mutual stakeholders in international systems will not be easy." "But happen it must," he insisted. Otherwise, the world will be in danger.

The concept of Third World arose during the Cold War to define countries that were not aligned with either capitalism and Nato -- which along with its allies represented the First World -- or communism and the Soviet Union -- which along with its allies represented the Second World. This definition provided a way of broadly categorising the nations of the earth into three groups based on social, political, and economic divisions.

Although the term Third World continues to be used colloquially to describe the poorest countries in the world, this usage is widely disparaged since the term no longer holds any verifiable meaning after the fall of the Soviet Union deprecated the terms First World and Second World. However, there are still scholars who use this term on purpose to point out and challenge the huge gap between the poor and the rich of the world.

The validity of the term Third World has been placed in question over the past decade with the increasingly acknowledged "West-to-East" economic power shift. The older concept of the Third World no longer applies in the new multi-polar world, and new approaches are needed to take account for the interests of developing countries.

The developing countries are growing to represent an ever-increasing share of the global economy and providing an important source of demand for the recovery from the recent global economic crisis.

The First World is poised to decline with global economic power shifting from the West to East. According to the latest predictions of the Conference Board, a global network of leading business figures, the next few years will witness a dramatic acceleration in the shift of economic power eastwards.

The Board said that the global economy would expand by 3.5 percent in 2010 and the emerging and developing economies would account for a much larger share of

the global pie -- as much as two-thirds by 2016.

This was occurring not only in China and India, but also in South East Asia, Latin America, and the Middle East. Africa could also one day become a pole of global growth. Zoellick noted that developing countries, therefore, deserved greater recognition in the management of the global system and that proposed solutions in financial regulation, climate change and crisis management must reflect their interests.

Indeed, Zoellick noted that Asia's stock markets accounted for 32 percent of global market capitalisation, ahead of both the US and the European Union, and that its share of the global economy in purchasing power parity (PPP) terms had risen from 7 percent 30 years ago to 21 percent in 2008.

The developing world's share of global GDP has increased from 33.7 percent in 1980 to 43.4 percent in 2010. Developing countries are likely to show robust growth rates over the next five years and beyond.

The changes in the global economy and multilateral system have significant implications for the WB and IMF. The WB and IMF must pursue a policy of constant reform, changing to adapt to rapidly shifting circumstances in order to best serve the interests of the poor in the developing world. "Economic and political tectonic plates are shifting," Zoellick noted, and added: "We can shift with them."

Since the establishment of the WB in 1946, its presidents have all along been the White House's choice, with Europe always choosing the IMF heads -- which is undemocratic.

In a reflection of the growing shift in world economic growth and power, China and India increased their voting rights in the WB with China rising up to third place and India to seventh place. Only the US and Japan are now ahead of China, while Germany, France and UK are those left with more voting rights than India.

With the present world order remaining unchanged, a multi-polar world is not possible. The development committee of the WB, which met on April 25 in Washington, however, decided to increase the financial capacity of the WB and its governance structure as a sign of support for the shift in influence to developing countries. The WB and IMF must be made democratic for facing the challenges of the multi-polar world.

A.N.M. Nurul Haque is a columnist of The Daily Star. E-mail: annmhaque@hotmail.com.