

Khaleda's speech

Vague generalizations only, no sense of direction

ON Tuesday last we were given out the BNP's riposte to AL's end-of-two year performance report presented by the Prime Minister last week. The speech by the PM was largely self-congratulatory followed by a call for patience and the reply to it by Begum Zia was full of sweeping generalisations without substantive pronouncements on any particular issue. Overall, it gave no sense of direction nor any alternative vision for future.

If Begum Zia thought that the PM had resorted to falsehood and distortion it was for her to point out exactly, for the benefit of the public, as to what the lies were and where the distortions occurred. Surely, everything that the AL has done could not have been bad, and we feel that the BNP would have done everyone and itself great service by acknowledging the achievements of the AL in the last two years and pointing out where it had failed, and where indeed the BNP could have done a better job and how.

While we had criticized Hasina for not being self-critical enough in the appraisal of her government's performance, we feel that the BNP has done nothing to acquit itself as a responsible opposition either. We wonder what message the BNP was trying to send out and for whom? If it is for the public should she not be aware of the fact that the public is already aware where the ruling party's failings have been. That is all too known and what the public would be interested now is in knowing how effective an oversight role has the opposition been playing without participating in the parliament. Is she, in the very least, doing justice to her own constituents who had voted for her party?

It was not only natural but also incumbent upon the leader of the opposition to have the right of reply. But when it comes through a press conference, one expects a more objective and direction-oriented statement rather than the ordinary run-of-the-mill speech that we got. It was amateurish, particularly to extent that she was not even prepared to take questions from the journalists.

The leader of the opposition could have not been less convincing in offering excuse for continuing to abstain from the parliament. She will do the country a lot of good if what she articulated to the press were said in the floor of the house and she held the government to account in the parliament. Unless that happens, her critique of government performance will remain a mere statement.

We would be remiss if we did not point out that the government has done disservice to its creditability as a protagonist of right to information and freedom of speech by reportedly preventing the private TV channels from carrying Begum Zia's speech live, as claimed by the Leader of the opposition.

Killings at the border

We express serious concern at its frequent occurrence

THE recent killing of two cattle traders and a teenage girl in separate incidents in the border area in the past few days is most unfortunate. While border guards on both sides have the responsibility of preventing cross-border crimes such as smuggling of illegal goods and human trafficking, this trigger-happy attitude, especially on the part of the Indian Border Security Force (BSF), has often proven irresponsible and ended in tragedy. The story of 15-year-old Felani is a case in point.

From flag meetings to director general-level conferences, all have been positive. Border guards and delegations from both countries have constantly agreed to improve relations between the two forces, strengthen border patrol and maintain a normal and peaceful atmosphere on the border. However, despite steady protests on the part of the Bangladesh side and continued reassurances from its Indian counterpart and higher authorities, the reality has been quite different, with frequent killings by the BSF occurring.

Rather than hasty firing, heightened and efficient security measures should be the way to catch criminals. As most cross-border movements of a dubious nature occur at night, floodlights and other sophisticated equipment should be set up for the job. Unprovoked and indiscriminate firing is not the solution. The Bangladesh Guideline for Border Authorities 1975 stipulates the duties of the border forces as authorised to arrest criminals and hand them over to the other side; this consideration and tolerance must be reciprocated. A Joint Record of Discussions was also signed by border guards of the two countries last year to ensure the exercise of restraint by both forces, in an attempt to prevent killing of innocent civilians on the border.

The profession of friendship between the two nations and their leaders is, unfortunately, not reflected in the border patrol activities, which have been the cause of several deaths as well as a constant, palpable tension in the border areas. The decisions taken at the highest levels must permeate the ground level in order to prevent deaths on the border as well as a deterioration of the amiable relationship between the two countries. Strengthened border patrol can only be achieved with communication and cooperation from both sides. In this case, India should be taking the first step, for, while policies have been friendly enough, practices are yet to prove as friendly on the ground. Meanwhile, peace on the border remains a promise pending.

Sustainable energy mix

SHUDDHASATTWA RAFIQ

AT the outset, I would like to convey my deepest gratitude to The Daily Star for bringing up a timely proposition like renewable energy technologies into the forefront of discussion by organising such a stimulating colloquium on January 7. I would also like to give my heartfelt thanks and regards to the pioneer energy scientists of our country who are working in internationally acclaimed academic and professional organisations.

In the colloquium, they offered several long-term and short-term solutions to future energy fix for Bangladesh, which will work as guidelines. In this write-up, I share my thoughts in the context of Australian energy sector experiences.

Although the Copenhagen Accord laid out a framework for global emissions reduction, many countries were displeased with both the details of the agreement and the manner in which it was reached. The Accord was also not legally binding, with countries agreeing only to "take note" of it.

Copenhagen served only to create a weak agreement and put off all the tough decisions until the Cancun Summit in 2010. Because of this, expectations leading into COP16 were relatively modest. Few countries sent their premiers, and concerns were raised as to whether the UN was still the best place to tackle global issues. The negotiations crisis was acknowledged by United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Changes (UNFCCC) Executive Secretary Cristiana Figueres in her address to delegates at the summit's opening ceremony. "The stakes at this particular conference are very high," she said.

The commitments achieved at the Cancun summit were fairly modest. There was a general agreement that echoed the Copenhagen Accord, urging developed countries to cut emissions and asking developing countries to start limiting their emissions growth. A consensus was reached on limiting global climate change to 1.5°C, if possible, rather than the 2°C stated at Copenhagen. The green climate fund, which aims to mitigate climate change by providing \$100 billion a year to the developing world by 2020, was also re-emphasised as a major priority.

I mentioned the Cancun summit to point out the above-mentioned consensus that emerged from the summit. The importance and timeliness of the colloquium topic stem from

these consensuses. If the countries, specially developed countries, commit themselves to limiting global temperature rise to 1.5°C, then they would have no other alternative than to focus on promoting alternative energy technologies through their R&D investments and adoption of renewable energy sources.

Furthermore, if they commit to

other energy sources.

IEA (Energy Technology Perspectives 2009) reveals that intensified use of coal would substantially increase the emissions of CO2 unless there was very widespread deployment of carbon capture and storage. Therefore, for renewable energy technologies to be feasible on a commercial basis two prerequisites have to be met.

China and India are making efficient use of fossil fuels and investing in renewable energy technologies. One such technology is thorium-based power plants. India has the second largest deposit of thorium, and has started developing thorium-based power plants. Being a nuclear source, thorium is not subject to harmful nuclear reactions. This is one source

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provide \$100 billion a year to their developing counterparts for climate change mitigation initiatives, then Bangladesh would be a major recipient of that fund. Hence, discussions and research endeavours on renewable energy sources are on the horizon and coming up fast.

I strongly agree with Dr. Mohammad Farooque and others that in designing the future mix of renewable energy technologies for Bangladesh "cost is the key question." Unfortunately, given the price levels of all the existing renewable energy alternatives, and the fact that there is very little commitment from the developed countries on carbon pricing, the greenhouse gas emitting fossil fuels remain the cheapest and most widely used energy source.

As pointed out by International Energy Administration (IEA), (2009, CO2 emissions from fuel combustion: Highlights. Paris.), global CO2 emissions increased by 0.9 Gt between 2006 and 2007, primarily due to an increase in use of coal by developing countries. Coal is expected to satisfy much of the growing energy demand of developing countries, such as China and India, where energy-intensive industrial production is growing rapidly and large coal reserves exist with limited reserve of

First, effective implementation of pricing for environmental externalities, at least in the developed countries. Second, the invention and introduction of new, reliable, and cheap renewable energy technologies. This is the reason that our energy scientists have not proposed large-scale renewable energy technologies.

Even after increased concerns about climate change and global warming, China's import of coal, oil and gas from Australia is increasing every year. While Queensland is experiencing the biggest flood of the century, the Australian government is focusing on policies to attract more Chinese investment in coal mining in central Queensland region. Instead of investing on R&D projects in renewable energy technologies they are promoting projects on energy efficiency.

Short-term solutions of electricity conservation suggested by our scholars show that it is time for developing countries like Bangladesh to spend every possible opportunity on boosting up economic growth through increased energy efficiency to bring millions of people above poverty level, which countries like China have already initiated. Therefore, economic feasibility of a technology source should be the foremost priority at this stage of our economic journey.

that we could consider in the shorter longer term, and eventually other feasible alternative energy sources will emerge. Once carbon pricing through emissions trading becomes a reality the whole cost benefit analysis of energy sources would take a completely different look.

Regarding incentives on renewable energy adoption, the Australian experience is not good. Under the Renewable Energy Target (RET) Scheme enacted in August 2009, the Australian government started subsidising small-scale installation of solar PVs on households. However, because of the failure of the policy and its implementation to reach the expected level of renewable energy adoption in 2009-2010, the government announced changes in the RET through which it has withdrawn their support on small-scale incentives for small scale renewable energy systems like solar panels and solar water heaters.

We need to learn from countries like India, China, Malaysia, etc. On one hand, we need to be very mindful about our economic reality, and on the other we need to take the best possible advantages from global opportunities and our large market.

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| The New York Times EXCLUSIVE

Pakistan coalition salvaged, at a steep price

SALMAN MASOOD And J. DAVID GOODMAN

Pakistan's governing party patched its coalition government back together on Friday, barely holding onto power, but at a price that officials in Washington had feared: the collapse of reforms critical to stabilizing the nation's economy.

The bargain underscored an increasingly urgent problem for both Pakistan and its international backers, especially the United States, which has pushed the government to improve its tax collection and make hard economic choices to ensure the nation's solvency. If the government wants to survive, the week's turmoil indicated, that path may be impossible.

The Obama administration did not publicly criticize Pakistani officials for the deal on Friday, apparently deciding that a worse outcome would have been a collapse of the government when the United States was depending on it for help in fighting the war in Afghanistan.

For the time being, then, Pakistan may remain dependent on international assistance, including billions of dollars in military and civilian aid from the United States, even as fewer than 2 percent of Pakistanis pay income tax, with many wealthy members of government among those who pay nothing. The country's tax revenues will remain among the lowest in the world.

American officials and the International Monetary Fund pushed the effort to increase tax revenues and end costly state subsidies for energy, not only to close gaping budget shortfalls, but also to expand services and the government's presence in the lives of Pakistanis.

The absence of strong civil institutions has left a wide opening for hard-line mosques and militant groups to

expand their power by providing the things the government does not, like education, health care and speedy justice.

The power of Pakistan's industrialists and landed elite in Parliament made raising income and agricultural taxes a treacherous route for the government, despite pressure from the monetary fund.

Instead, the government led by Prime Minister Yousaf Raza Gilani and his Pakistan Peoples Party chose to raise fuel prices as the fastest and easiest way to increase revenues, before it struggled with more difficult tax reforms. Now even that tack has failed.

"The message international donors have received is that if the government cannot absorb the pressure on petrol prices, then how can it take up major economic reforms?" Ashfaq Khan, dean of the business school at the National University of Sciences and Technology in Islamabad, told the local news media.

The increase in fuel prices was deeply unpopular, hitting the poor hardest, and fraught with political risks of its own. "All the political parties saw this as an opportunity to show they are on the side of the people," said Marvin Weinbaum, a scholar in residence at the Middle East Institute in Washington and a former State Department analyst on Pakistan.

The first to exploit the discontent was the Muttahida Qaumi Movement, or M.Q.M., a party based in Karachi that broke with Prime Minister Gilani last weekend in part to protest the fuel price increases.

This week the leader of the opposition, Nawaz Sharif, echoed the call to reverse the price increases and other reforms and threatened to bring down the government with a no-confidence vote.

All week Mr. Gilani struggled to save his coalition. On Thursday he announced that the government would resume its fuel subsidies. By Friday he had extended the economic concessions still further in a meeting with M.Q.M. officials, promising that his government would put off efforts to increase tax collection as well.

The move was enough to regain the support of the M.Q.M. Raza Haroon, a senior party leader, announced Friday that his party would rejoin the coalition for the sake of democracy and the country.

But the deal is sure to ruffle the International Monetary Fund and American officials. The monetary fund has promised Pakistan more than \$11 billion in loans to tide the government over. The country has received \$7.6 billion so far, but the fund has extended the time for its next payment and has not given Pakistan any further installments since May.

"The extension will provide time to the Pakistani authorities to complete the reform of the General Sales Tax, implement measures to correct the course of fiscal policy, and amend the legislative framework for the financial sector," the monetary fund said through its press office on Friday.

Pakistan's Prime Minister, Yusuf Raza Gilani, right, talking with Eshratul-Ebad, the leader of Muttahida Qaumi Movement, in Karachi.

Although American officials on Friday refrained from criticizing the deal, Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton had taken the lead in pushing Pakistan on its tax collection, a problem that has become even more urgent as the country struggles to recover from devastating summer floods. International donations have remained well below the estimates of

the billions of dollars needed to repair the flood damages.

But on Thursday, Ms. Clinton did not hide her displeasure with the reversal of the fuel price increases, saying it was "a mistake to reverse the progress that was being made to provide a stronger economic base for Pakistan."

The Pakistani government appears to have calculated that the country is too strategically important for the United States and the monetary fund and that even though Pakistan has balked on reforms, the international community would come through with support.

A senior Pakistani government official, referring to President Asif Ali Zardari, said, "Nobody realizes that the government of President Zardari is essentially performing a juggling act."

Some analysts feared that the move by the Prime Minister Gilani's government would leave it vulnerable to further challenges by elements of its coalition and opposition parties and efforts to extract still more concessions.

Repairing the coalition, however, will help dissipate some domestic political tension, which deepened this week with the assassination of Salman Taseer, who was a major ally of Mr. Zardari and the governor of Pakistan's most important province, Punjab.

The assassination, carried out by an elite police officer who was assigned as a bodyguard for the governor, raised deep concerns for the United States about both possible infiltration by extremists in the country's security forces and Pakistan's extremist drift.

Salman Masood reported from Islamabad, and J. David Goodman from New York.