

GROUND REALITIES

Managing climate fund

Strong oversight bodies needed

TRANSPARENCY International (TI) last Saturday called upon all countries to ensure transparency in utilizing climate funds for fighting the impacts of global climate change.

In a seminar held in Dhaka the TI boss Huguette Labelle launched globally a TI report on research findings of risks in the management of climate funds. She made it clear that climate change governance will face old corruption risks like policy capture, conflicts of interest, mismanagement of public resources and creative accounting. She in particular emphasized on the necessity of strengthening the governance system to tackle corruption risks.

Broadly speaking, there are two aspects of the climate fund issue. The international community who promised funds to the affected countries should make it available without unnecessary delay. Funds which were pledged almost two years ago have not been received as yet. The promised fund should be immediately disbursed as new and additional amounts and not under any regular development assistance programs. These are funds to compensate damages faced by the countries that are least responsible for climate change. There should be no strings attached, plain and simple.

The obligation to properly use this fund by the recipient is no less important. Management of fund is a huge task. This demands full attention of the departments responsible for fund utilization. The TI has appropriately suggested monitoring of climate funding by oversight bodies comprising of independent professionals and access to information by public.

Our government should take necessary measures to have a sound management system in place to ensure proper handling of the fund. This can be done by involving the members of the civil society, climate experts and financial professionals in oversight bodies to play their due role in local government decision making and spending to ensure transparency in the management of funds. Not only that, the oversight bodies will have to ensure reporting on climate projects systematically at every step from planning to implementation.

Since there is a genuine concern over risks of corruption involving the climate financing, strong and transparent management all the way is the only answer.

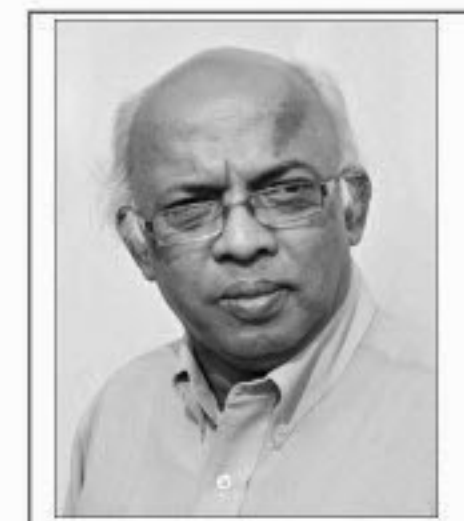
Returnee migrant workers

Their rehabilitation is prime need

THE resumption of the repatriation of Bangladeshis fleeing from Libya and gathered on the Egypt-Tunisia frontier is surely good news. Indeed, it builds on the earlier steps taken by the Bangladesh government and the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) to bring home as many as 35,466 Bangladeshi citizens from conflict-torn Libya. The latest repatriation move by the IOM will bring back to the country 900 of our citizens. This is in addition to the 186 who arrived in Dhaka last Sunday and another batch of 186 who were reported to be on their way home from Egypt on Monday. It is now a fair assessment that quite a good number of Bangladeshis still remain on the Egypt-Tunisia border. Hopefully, they will all be home in the coming few weeks.

One must note with appreciation the superhuman efforts put in by the IOM and the Bangladesh authorities towards bringing the Bangladeshi migrant workers home from Libya. The chartered flights operated by the IOM and the Bangladesh government on a cost-sharing basis as well as flights by Bangladesh Biman were a satisfying affair given the constraints the IOM and the home authorities worked under. In many ways, the efforts expended in helping our workers out of a bad situation should be a precedent to follow should a similar crisis occur anywhere in future.

That said, it is of critical importance that the tens of thousands of workers now back home or on the way should be shown a way out of the bind they are caught in. Almost all of these workers have spent a fortune seeking employment abroad and the crisis in Libya has compelled them to return with nothing to show for. It remains for the manpower export ministry to devise plans -- and swiftly -- by which they can be rehabilitated or even sent to other countries on employment. The private sector can come in too with job offers as well as financial assistance on an emergency basis. Unemployment leads to family and social turmoil. Let that spectre be warded off here.



SYED BADRUL AHSAN

THE government would like us to think that it will soon be going for a restructuring of the Securities and Exchange Commission.

That is good news, especially when you know how a group of individuals of dubious reputation have swindled thousands of people out of their money at the stock exchange. Had democracy in Bangladesh been more transparent and more accountable, a fairly good number of heads would have rolled by now. And had we the people had a little more of assertiveness in us, the finance minister and the governor of Bangladesh Bank would have resigned or been asked to go by now. Restructuring, you see, is a huge canvas. When you speak of shares, of scams, of course you need to correct conditions. That being the truth, ought it not to have been the moral responsibility of those presiding over the institutions at fault to show the way to recovery by first giving up their jobs voluntarily?

Yes, restructuring is what we need at the SEC. But, then again, try thinking of an area in present-day governance in Bangladesh where restructuring is not called for. Home Minister Sahara Khatun, who keeps informing us that the rule of law will prevail, sends shocks down our sensibilities when she refuses to see the predicament the security forces have put a sixteen year-old Limon into. The matter, she notes, is for the court to decide. Decide what? That a con-

certed attempt by the Rapid Action Battalion and the police to convince the country that Limon, now without a leg and possibly without a future, is a proven criminal is the truth? In a land where governments can with ease withdraw cases against their own on the dubious ground that those cases were all filed with political

at his or her fingertips, who can deal intellectually with the outside world, who has a decisive say in how foreign policy should be shaped and conducted and whose idea of presenting Bangladesh to the outside world certainly does not come within the purview of perennial travel. You need restructuring at the min-

ical system based on imperiousness of power.

Democracy may be a flawed affair, here and everywhere else. It may test our patience to the extreme. But that is no reason for the political classes to derive advantage from the loopholes in it and so thwart our collective aspirations. It is not restructuring when elected local government bodies are subjected to emasculation only because lawmakers wish to have a say, a big say, in local activities. When local government is undermined, there is the insidious danger of central government getting to be unwieldy, authoritarian and bereft of ideas. Government, like individuals, must work on the principle of shared responsibilities. A concentration of power in the hands of a national government or in the hands of a single individual throws up huge commotion. When the feeling grows that cabinet government has dwindled to being prime ministerial government, you know that the moment for a restructuring of the system is at hand.

The principle of restructuring must be expanded, beyond the SEC, to cover all those organizations and institutions where competence has been a casualty in all the years since the return of elected government in 1991. Shed some non-performing ministers, recall all ambassadors and high commissioners who have done poorly, reduce the size of the cabinet, bring the security agencies under control. That will be restructuring.

And restructuring the constitution? The political parties? Let that be a thought for another day.

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Ground Realities could not appear last week. The writer says sorry.

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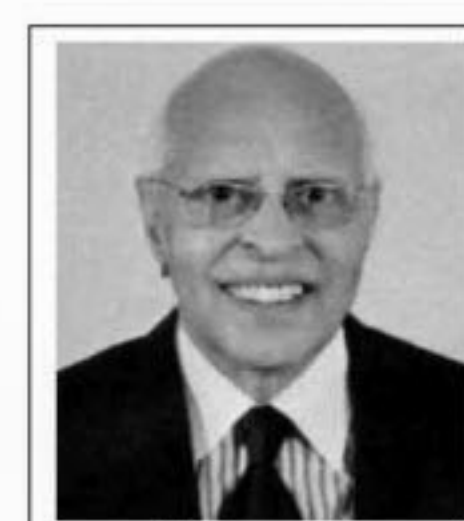
motives, we suddenly have a genuinely innocent young man the state is determined to taint with criminality.

Restructuring, then, is what we need at the Home Ministry. There is something called a cabinet reshuffle, a political process Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina should have gone into long ago. A reshuffle is a wonderful way for the electorate to know which cabinet members have been doing well and which have been faltering. With nearly half already gone of this government's term in office, the nation has some pretty well-placed notions of which of our ministers have done well and which of them should either have been transferred to other departments or dropped altogether. Which takes us back to this matter of restructuring. There should have been a change at the Foreign Office, where a disadvantaged country like ours is in sore need of a foreign minister with diplomacy

istry of commerce. If traders and businessmen can so easily flout the directives of the minister or pay scant or no attention to price lists nailed to the post by the government, a new search for a new minister in that position is called for. Restructuring must be undertaken all the way. The authority of the Anti-Corruption Commission was publicly diminished when Hasan Mashhud Chowdhury walked out of the job and when politicians began talking darkly of the necessity of clipping the ACC's wings. How do you tackle corruption if the corruption-battling body must seek the approval of the powers that be to go ahead with a prosecution of the venal and the dangerous in government? Any move that even remotely seeks to have the executive branch of government intimidate institutions whose independence must be guaranteed spells danger for the state. And it does because it leads to a polit-

BOTTOM LINE

Foreign policy shift in Egypt



BARRISTER HARUN UR RASHID

A fresh wave of new policies in foreign affairs under the interim military-controlled government is unfolding in Egypt. Egypt,

under former President Mubarak, had abandoned the key role as interlocutor in the Middle East by being too close with Israel.

Instead, Turkey which has been playing the peace-making role in the Middle East has increased its diplomatic and economic influence in the region. Egypt now wants to reverse its old policies to reclaim the role it once enjoyed in the Arab World.

The 1979 Peace Treaty with Israel is being opposed by majority of Egyptians and, although Egypt has not annulled it, "We are opening a new page," Ms. Menha Bakhom, a spokeswoman for the foreign ministry told The New York Times. "Egypt is resuming its role that was once abdicated."

It seems that three policy shifts have taken place:

- A rapprochement with Iran;
- Brokering a unity deal between the Palestinian party Fatah and its rival Hamas; and
- Opening the Rafah border with Gaza.

Foreign Minister Nabil el-Arabi said last month that the country was ready to "open a new page" with Iran, with which it hasn't had a full diplomatic relations since 1979.

Foreign ministry spokeswoman Ms. Bakhom reportedly said: "We look at Iran as a neighbour in the region that we should have normal relations with. Iran is not perceived as an enemy as it was under the previous regime."

After the overthrow of Mubarak, Iran hopes to "witness further expansion of relations," Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Salehi said in response.

While Egypt has indicated that it wants normal diplomatic relations with Iran, a regional power, it has also been at pains to reassure Gulf States that this will not come at the expense of their security.

For the first time in years, the Hamas leaders were invited to the Egyptian foreign ministry instead of

importing weapons that could be used against the Jewish state. The policy, implemented by former President Hosni Mubarak, had been unpopular in Egypt and was one of the targets of the protest movement that forced him out of office in February.

The blockade cut off most civilian traffic and restricted trade with the territory, whose residents say they face shortages in some goods as a result. Israel came under interna-

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meeting merely at a hotel or the intelligence agency. This demonstrates that Egypt is prepared to meet Hamas as a diplomatic partner rather than a security risk. Hamas leaders reportedly met interim Egyptian President Field Marshal Mohammed Tantawi.

Egypt, on April 27, had brokered a draft accord between the Palestinian party Fatah and its rival Hamas. Israel is purportedly less concerned about Egypt's role in brokering a pact between Fatah and Hamas which it has attempted several times before than the relative secrecy of the negotiations.

The accord aims to end a division lasting almost four years, create a unified administration and pave the way for Palestinian elections. It follows protests in March in which thousands of Palestinians, inspired by the popular uprisings in Egypt, Tunisia and Libya, called for national unity.

Earlier, under Mubarak's regime, Egypt had cooperated with Israel to impose a blockade on Gaza that Israel says is necessary to prevent Hamas and other Islamist groups from

tional criticism a year ago after a naval commando raid on an aid flotilla headed for Gaza left nine Turkish citizens dead.

Egypt has already eased restrictions on movement across the Gaza border since the fall of the Mubarak regime. But free passage of goods and people into Gaza would be seen as a major security threat by Israel, which has argued that even with Egyptian co-operation on blocking arms shipments, Hamas was able to import weaponry into the territory and would do more without it.

Nabil al-Araby, Egypt's foreign minister, told Al-Jazeera that his country would take "important steps to help ease the blockade on Gaza in the few days to come," and described Cairo's previous decision to seal the border as "shameful." It appears that Egypt may permanently open its crossing into Gaza to ease the blockade on the territory.

It is not clear how comprehensive the opening of the crossing at Rafah will be, but Mr. al-Araby's remarks follow a spate of others indicating a

potential shift in foreign policy which is being closely watched in Israel.

Israel is concerned about increasing calls in Egypt for the abrogation of a peace treaty signed between them in 1979. The Peace Treaty reportedly reduced Israel's defence expenditure from 23% of its GNP in the '70s to 9% today and it has made serious cuts in the army. The relationship with Egypt allowed Israel to withdraw from Gaza in 2005 since Egypt covered Gaza from the south.

It is worried about signs of a rapprochement between Egypt and Israel and that Egypt is upgrading its ties with Hamas, classified as a terrorist organisation by Israel, the US and the European Union. Israel cites a new "lenience" towards Hamas, which has been exemplified in part by Egypt's apparent unconcern about Hamas prisoners who escaped from Egyptian jails during the uprising in February.

The foreign policy shifts in Egypt has completely changed the security of Israel. Dan Schueftan, director of National Security Studies Centre at the University of Haifa, is quoted by media to have said: "If the cornerstone is removed or even in doubt, the overall picture for Israel changes and threats become much more realistic than before."

Egyptian analysts say that Israel's arrogance has given rise to the Hamas in Gaza, the Hezbollah in Lebanon, Iran's influence in Iraq and alienation of Turkey toward Israel.

Egypt's revised foreign policy, by striking a more independent path, would gain a measure of power and influence within the Arab World. Emad Gad, a foreign policy analyst at Al Ahram Centre for Political and Strategic Studies said: "This is a new feeling in Egypt, that Egypt needs to be respected as a regional power."

The writer is a former Bangladesh Ambassador to the UN, Geneva.

THIS DAY IN HISTORY

May 4

1942

World War II: The Battle of the Coral Sea begins with an attack by aircraft from the United States aircraft carrier Yorktown on Japanese naval forces at Tulagi Island in the Solomon Islands. The Japanese forces had invaded Tulagi the day before.

1945

World War II: The surrender of the North Germany Army to Field Marshal Bernard Montgomery.

1990

Latvia proclaims the renewal of its independence after the Soviet occupation.

1994

Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and PLO leader Yasser Arafat sign a peace accord regarding Palestinian autonomy granting self-rule in the Gaza Strip and Jericho.