

Arab uprising breaks barrier against autocrats

Says US university professor

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The uprising in the Arab world clearly indicates that a psychological and historical barrier has been broken against the autocratic and dictatorial regimes, many of whom used power through illegitimate means, said Ussama Makdisi, professor of history at Rice University, USA.

"The salient point of the uprising is that the people are saying 'enough is enough' and demanding their democratic rights today," he noted while giving a talk on "Tahrir: Before & After -- Making Sense of the Recent Arab Protest" at The Daily Star Centre yesterday afternoon.

He said the second most important point is that people across the region are rejecting the domination by the US and Israel. They are also rejecting the idea that they do not have any power to change situation.

The protest in each country was different but the commonality is that the Arabs are mobilising a major popular protest against regimes that have lost legitimacy, regardless of whether the regime is pro- or anti-American, pointed out Makdisi.

Through the protest, they are demanding immediate change not just of the leaders, but of the system, he mentioned adding that one cannot, however, predict what is actually going to happen there.

He said the Arab people want democratic rule to take root but was not sure whether democracy will be established in the region through this uprising.

"But in this part of the world, the problem is people face Arab regimes which are reactionary, they also face Israel and US which have been consistently for decades anti-democratic in the Arab world," added Makdisi.

Of Lebanese and Palestinian descent, Makdisi was born in the US, grew up in Lebanon during the civil war and returned to the US for higher studies.

He is the first holder of the Arab-American Educational Foundation Chair of Arab Studies at Rice University. He has authored a number of books on the history and politics of the Middle East. One of his famous books is "Faith Misplaced: The Broken Promise of US-Arab Relations, 1820-2001."

Makdisi is the nephew of the late literary scholar and Palestinian rights advocate Edward Said.

In his lecture, he briefly explained the historical perspective of the Arab world, the regimes and the role of the US, Britain and France. He also talked about the US-Arab relations, sectarianism in the Middle East and the presence of Israel in the region.

In the early 20th century, the British and the French divided the Arab countries on the basis of religion to gain control of their natural resources. The US followed the same policy later on, he observed.

He said the Arab struggle for freedom and self-determination is going on for nearly a century in different forms.

Columnist Syed Abul Moksud, Dr Hamida Hossain, former ambassadors Harun-or Rashid and Ashfaqur Rahman, BNP leader ZA Khan, Associate Editor of The Daily Star Shah Husain Imam, Maj Gen (ret'd) Nuruzzaman and former inspector general of police Nurul Huda attended the function, among others.

Senior journalists of The Daily Star were also present. The lecture was followed by a lively question and answer session.

Editor and Publisher of The Daily Star Mahfuz Anam moderated the discussion.



Participants at a talk on "Tahrir: Before & After -- Making Sense of the Recent Arab Protest" at The Daily Star Centre in the city yesterday. PHOTO: STAR

Strict management can improve traffic situation 25pc

Speakers tell discussion

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Planned management of the existing roads and its strict enforcement can resolve only one-fourth of the horrendous traffic problem in the city, said noted engineers and planners at a discussion yesterday.

Only a multi-modal transport system including roads, waterways and railways can provide a long-term transport solution to make a metropolitan city sustainable, not merely a road-based facility, they said. Mass transport system, including rapid metro rail and buses, is the ultimate solution, they added.

Mukto Akash, a monthly magazine, and Bangladesh Association of Construction Industry (BACI) organised the discussion at Bangladesh Institute of Planners.

"Engineered management is crucial, not the length or total amount of roads," said Prof Md Shamsul Hoque, a technical expert involved with half a dozen ongoing transport projects in

the city.

It can enhance the road's functional capacity by 50 to 100 per cent, he said this while he was presenting a keynote paper.

Hoque said enforcement of peak hour management, signal coordination, bottleneck-free junctions, access control, one-way, tidal-flow operation (dedicating road space in keeping with demand) and control of land use can bring a relief to the present situation.

Operational capacity of the Dhaka roads is significantly reduced with the heavily-clogged junctions (intersections), as they determine the capacity of a road corridor, he said, adding that there are many avoidable bottlenecks that reduce the junctions' capacity.

Though a vital precondition, there is no example of carrying out traffic impact assessment before approving a development scheme in the city, he said.

Enforcement of management alone can improve the traffic situation by 25

percent, said Mubasshar Hussein, president of Institute of Architects Bangladesh, adding that the same people, who violate traffic rules across the city, obey them in the cantonment area.

"Hundreds of flyovers and overpasses will not improve traffic situation in Dhaka," he said.

He demanded relocation of Dhaka cantonment and headquarters of Border Guard Bangladesh (erstwhile BDR) from heart of the city to achieve an overall traffic solution.

Md Nurul Huda, chairman of Rajdhani Unnayan Karttripakhyia (Rajuk), said neither the master plan of 1959 nor that of 1995 (the current one that expires in 2015) could be implemented for a planned Dhaka due to organisational weaknesses of Rajuk.

Prof Jamilur Reza Chowdhury also spoke at the discussion chaired by BACI President Shafiqul Alam Bhuiyan.

Dr Kamal for national unity against graft, terrorism

UNB, Dhaka

Gono Forum President Dr Kamal Hossain yesterday called for national unity based on 1972 constitution against corruption, terrorism and sickening politics.

"The country needs healthy politics. We won't sacrifice our principle and ideology for temporary gains or winning votes," he told a press conference in the city.

Dr Kamal said his party never pursued the politics of sycophancy as "We do politics for establishing rights of the people and their welfare."

He said the country is now plagued with various problems. "A nation cannot move forward by suppressing the reality," he said.

He stressed that the national consensus should be built against those who are committing corruption and those who are patronising it.

INT'L AUTISM CONFERENCE BEGINS TOMORROW No exact figure of autistic children in Bangladesh

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The two-day international conference on "Autism spectrum disorders and developmental disabilities in Bangladesh and South Asia" begins in Dhaka tomorrow (Monday) to raise awareness on the neuro-development disease.

President of Indian Congress Party Sonia Gandhi will grace the inaugural session, to be held at Ruposhi Bangla Hotel, as the chief guest.

Second Lady of the Maldives Iham Hussain, Speaker of the National Assembly of Pakistan Fehmida Mirza, First Lady of Sri Lanka Shiranthi Rajapaksa, and the health minister of Bhutan will be present as special guests.

The conference is jointly organised by the Centre for Neurodevelopment and Autism in Children of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University (BSMMU) and US-based Autism Speaks in association with World Health Organisation (WHO), speakers told a news conference at BSMMU yesterday.

Saima Wazed Putul, daughter of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, is convening the conference to be attended by specialists from 12 countries, they added.

The speakers said autism is still a neglected disease in Bangladesh and there is no exact statistics how many children are affected with

autism in the country.

About 10 percent of the country's people are challenged, said Ranjit Kumar Biswas, secretary to the social welfare ministry. Of those, one percent is estimated to be autistic accounting to around 1.5 lakh people, he added.

He also said currently one stop service is being provided to the autistic children in a very limited way in 15 districts including diagnosis, counseling, and physiotherapy.

"It will be extended to 35 districts soon along with a resource centre in Dhaka". The government also plans to extend homebound intervention for the autistic children to 17 districts, he added.

Health Minister Prof AFM Ruhul Haque, Information Minister Abul Kalam Azad, Social Welfare Minister Enamul Hoque Mostofa Shaheed, and BSMMU Vice-chancellor Prof Pran Gopal Datta also spoke at the press conference.

They also informed that a three-day training workshop will follow the two-day conference. The training sessions will be held on July 27-29 in different auditoriums of BSMMU and will be attended by about 370 participants from across the country, including parents of autistic children, therapists, psychologists, and teachers and students of psychology.



Students and teachers of Tejgaon College in the city's Farmgate area form a human chain in front of the college yesterday demanding trial into the killing of six students at Keblarchar in Bardeshi village of Aminbazar on July 18. PHOTO: STAR

Call to execute HC order to ensure safe food

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Different rights organisations at a human chain yesterday demanded the government strengthen market monitoring to save foods from adulteration and contain food price.

Paribesh Bachao Andolon (Poba), Nagarik Odhikar Sangrakkhan Forum, and Green Mind Society jointly held the programme in front of the Faculty of Fine Arts, Dhaka University.

Quoting a High Court order that directed the government to take stern steps against the businessmen creating artificial crisis of food, to lead mobile court, and to monitor market regularly, the speakers demanded

proper implementation of the order.

Their other demands include formulation of a permanent body to ensure safe food, sentencing people engaged in food adulteration to at least life in prison, regular mobile court drive at food storages and factories, and setting up of a control room to obtain information from the people.

President of Nagarik Odhikar Sangrakkhan Hafizur Rahman Mayna presided over the programme addressed among others by Abu Naser Khan, Atik Morshed of Poba, Amir Hasan, Mohammad Faruq of Green Mind Society, Kamal Uddin, Ishrat Jahan Baby, and Mohammad Selim.

Prime minister condemns Oslo blast

UNB, Dhaka

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina condemned yesterday the twin attacks at Norwegian capital Oslo and in Utoeya island that left at least 92 people dead Friday.

In a message the premier said, "There is no country of terrorism, it is an international problem and we should face it unitedly."

Hasina also conveyed sympathy to the bereaved family members and prayed for the eternal peace of the departed souls.

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