

BARE FACTS

Managing climate funds

Efficient utilisation and transparency indispensable

THE efficient utilisation of climate funds has arisen as a major issue, especially taking into consideration their purpose, not to mention the large amount of allocation -- Tk. 1400 crore domestic allocation to the Climate Change Trust Fund and \$10 million donors' contribution to the Climate Change Resilience Fund. The majority of it is to be spent under the management of the government with the rest allocated to non-government organisations. The key, however, is its efficient spending and transparency to go along with it. Indeed, the flow of the funds will depend on how purposefully and effectively we use it. A transparent set of guidelines is essential. The purposes, carefully identified and allotted, must be clearly delineated and the needs of the most affected and vulnerable areas must be given top priority. The implementation of projects and programmes must be rigorously supervised. Finally, an efficient monitoring and reporting mechanism to ensure that everything has been followed through must be in place. This should reach, along with the operators, the beneficiaries as well, for in this method of cross-checking will be the best form of evaluation.

Concerns about the allocation of various percentages of the funds to different bodies are already being expressed at various consultations, a form of exchange which we welcome as a means of encouraging dialogue and knowledge-sharing. We do hope that the concerns expressed in such forums will be taken into consideration and, indeed, reconsiderations made, where necessary. The management of climate change is not only an environmental but an economic, social and humanitarian issue. Any defalcation or corruption of the funds allotted for this cause should be dealt with even more culpably. It is a matter of saving the nation and its people from disaster. We now have the financial means; now we must make best use of it.

The vanishing acts

The administration has a lot to answer for

IT is very disconcerting that people are disappearing in thin air and nobody has any idea of their whereabouts. One wonders where the 17 people, who were picked up by the law enforcing agencies and untraceable for the last 9 months, according to a human rights body, are. According to another rights watch body, 22 persons remain untraceable in eight months since January 2010.

This phenomenon is certainly worrying and we strongly endorse the sentiments of the rights body as well as the Chairman of the NHRC, that the matter has taken an alarming proportion after the assumption of office by the AL led grand alliance.

Our worry stems from the fact that allegedly these people were picked up by the law enforcing agencies, and some of them have ended up as dead bodies dumped on roads. We fail to understand how one can go missing after being apprehended by the law enforcing agencies. Is it not mandatory to register every arrest and if they were not arrested what was their status when picked up by the police? We feel that this is a gross violation of rights of individuals and given that so many remain untraceable, some of who are political party men, the culture of impunity has been allowed to odiously manifest in the activities of those that are supposed to give us guarantee of life and security.

Even if we consider that these are all missing persons, we wonder whether the police have done their duty of conducting proper inquiry into the circumstances. If so what have they come up with? We have reasons to believe that the police did not record missing person complaints which some of their family members wanted to lodge.

This is a pathetic picture of our commitment to rule of law and human rights. We feel that a clarification by the ministry of home is in order and that must be done quickly. Every single person, that has gone missing, allegedly after being picked up by the police or RAB, must be



M. ABDUL LATIF MONDAL

ALL available indications suggest that the two major political parties -- the ruling AL and the opposition BNP -- are ready for a showdown on the caretaker government (CTG) issue. While the ruling AL has ruled out the possibility of holding the next election under the CTG, the opposition BNP insists on the next election under the CTG. The latest confirmation about holding the next election in time without CTG came from the Prime Minister and AL President Sheikh Hasina on October 1 when she addressed a press conference on her return from New York.

On the other hand, Leader of the Opposition and BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia said on September 27 that the next general election will not be held unless a CTG and a neutral Election Commission (EC) are in place. She further said that election under a party government had never been fair in the past and would never be fair in the near future.

The people, who have seen the fallout of the confrontational politics of these two major political parties, are worried about the fate of democracy in the country.

Democracy has not taken root in the past forty years of independence. It suffered in the very first years of independence when multi-party parliamentary democracy was replaced with one-party rule in January, 1975. The next ten years, with the exception of three years

between 1979 and 1981, saw unconstitutional rule of army generals.

Reintroduction of parliamentary democracy in 1991 has not as yet demonstrated success in giving democracy a strong foundation due to confrontational politics of BNP and AL that have been ruling the country in succession since then. These two parties have also not learnt any lesson from the happenings of 1/11 when an army-backed CTG assumed power to rule the country for two years from January 11, 2007.

The people see a "go it alone" attitude in the ruling AL that came to power following its landslide victory

The Daily Star shows that 82.1% of the participants support BNP's demand for restoration of CTG to hold the next general elections.

The opposition BNP has, since the very beginning of the 9th Parliament, adopted the policy to boycott the parliament on this or that excuse, conveniently forgetting the role to be played by it in a parliamentary democracy. Since the opposition functions as the watchdog in a parliamentary democracy, it could agitate for realisation of its own demands as well as for discussing matters of public interest both inside and outside the House. This stands substantiated when we look at the

a political statement made outside the House and should not be taken very seriously. Further, the PM made it abundantly clear on October 1 that the door for dialogue is still open.

The government is on record as asking the opposition to come up with a better proposal for an interim government. The PM has agreed with the opposition for reconstituting and strengthening the EC through discussions. All these suggest softening of the attitude of the government.

It needs no repetition that the onus for making the dialogue successful primarily lies with the ruling AL. It should be sincere in resolving the present impasse with the spirit of democracy without resorting to any repressive measures. It will definitely increase the image of the government in the eyes of the people. This, however, does not undermine the role of the opposition BNP in extending its full cooperation to the government for finding out an acceptable solution to overcome the present political impasse. Both the ruling and the opposition parties should sit at the table to devise a proper solution to the CTG issue and thus avert an unwanted conflict.

Both the ruling AL and the opposition BNP must feel the pulse of the people. The people are not at all ready to see any confrontation between BNP and AL. They are convinced that if the two major political parties fail to reach a consensus on the modalities of the next general election, the fate of the hard-earned democracy will again be stake. So, no more war of words, please!

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in 2008 national elections, which seems to have forgotten that a parliamentary democracy cannot function successfully without the cooperation of the opposition.

The ruling AL has abolished the CTG system for which it led a sustained movement in 1995 against the then BNP government. The AL leadership says that the provision for the CTG has been scrapped in line with a Supreme Court verdict, ignoring the fact that the apex court allowed two more national elections to be held under the CTG and that the overwhelming majority of the people of the country favour the CTG. A recently conducted online poll by

activities of the opposition in Lok Sabha of India, the largest parliamentary democracy in the world.

Political leaders and civil society members have stressed that AL and BNP should reach a consensus through dialogue on holding the next general elections in a free and fair manner in order to avert a crisis. At the same time, they worry that general elections without a CTG in place might not be free and fair.

Some critics say that the PM's recent refusal to sit with BNP, describing Khaleda Zia and her colleagues as "thieves and thugs," has closed the door of dialogue between AL and BNP. Others say that it is just

PRAFUL BIDWAI COLUMN

The fake Rs 32-a-day poverty line



PRAFUL BIDWAI

THE United Progressive Alliance government has scandalised the Indian public by repeatedly telling the Supreme Court that it cannot commit itself to providing enough food to the people at affordable prices. Its latest affidavit, filed through the Planning Commission, says the per capita urban poverty line estimated by an expert committee (headed by the late Suresh Tendulkar) is Rs.32 a day at current prices; it's Rs.26 for villages.

The government can at most provide subsidised foodgrains to those below this income through the Public Distribution System.

This has attracted ridicule from public-spirited scholars, and even from an otherwise apathetic media. You cannot buy a thali for less than Rs.15-20 and a small cup of for under Rs.5 in Indian cities. A person simply cannot meet her/his needs of food, shelter, healthcare, clothing, education, and even consumer durables with Rs.32, as assumed by Tendulkar

How anyone can survive even at an animal level of existence on Rs.26-32 a day remains a mystery to all but people like the Planning Commission's Deputy Chairman Montek Singh Ahluwalia. He accuses critics of misunderstanding the "factually correct" affidavit.

To add insult to injury, he has offered affordable food not to 31% of the people, entitled under Tendulkar, but to 41%.

Through such statements, high functionaries mock at the poor. Take Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's response to the Supreme Court's appeal a year ago to give free foodgrains to the poor rather than let them rot in godowns.

Dr. Singh said the Court "should not go into the realm of policy... I respect [its] sentiments.... But quite honestly, it is not possible in this country to give free food to all the poor people."

It's relevant to ask if it's the government's "policy," a domain it guards jealously, to maintain mass hunger and deprivation, and ensure that 48% of Indian children remain malnourished, as they do despite two highest-GDP-growth decades in India's recent history.

India persists with the existing (mis)targeted PDS for people Below Poverty Line (BPL), which excludes almost half the deserving poor, but includes many non-poor people.

The whole malaise is traceable to the official preoccupation with measuring poverty on the brutal criterion of the daily calorie intake needed for animal-level survival -- originally, 2,400 calories in villages, and 2,100 in cities.

The concept has become a grotesque mockery through its conversion into a standard for food

"The proposed poverty lines have been validated by checking the adequacy of actual private expenditure per capita near the poverty lines on food, education and health by comparing them with normative [sic] expenditures consistent with nutritional, educational and health outcomes."

The Tendulkar report is replete with such gobbledegook and absurd assessments. Shamefully, such spurious poverty measures have been officially sanctified to work out food entitlements by arbitrarily dividing people into BPL and non-BPL categories.

Given such fundamental flaws, it's imperative to de-link people's food entitlements from poverty measures. India must altogether abandon "targeting."

In South Asia, under-nutrition is

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entitlements -- to perpetuate animal-level existence for hundreds of millions.

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If official data is recalculated district-wise, poverty estimates rise by 50 to 100% for many states. This fits with the decrease in per capita cereal and pulse consumption, noted in NSS data.

The Tendulkar committee, headed by an arch-neoliberal, used circular arguments like the following:

more widespread than income poverty, however measured. Therefore, the topmost priority must be to tackle malnutrition through a universal PDS.

Evidence shows that states like Tamil Nadu and Kerala, which have moved towards universalisation, have plugged leaks in the PDS and increased food delivery to the poor. The "targeted" PDS, based on false BPL benchmarks, perpetuates hunger.

There is a larger political lesson here. India's current growth model is doing nothing to put more income into the hands of the people. According to NSS data, employment grew annually by a paltry 0.8 percent between 2004-05 and 2009-10 -- way below the annual increase of 2%-plus in the labour market. Self-employment actually declined.

This represents a terrible regression. The latest census reveals a

growing trend towards greater migration, without a definite destination. Falling agricultural incomes, growing debt, and rising displacement from dams, mining and industrial projects, are driving out millions of rural people.

The swelling of this reserve army of labour has resulted in a larger rise in the urban population than in the rural population over the past decade -- for the first time since 1921. These migrants survive precariously amidst unspeakably bad working conditions, and often move from one city to another in a few months or weeks.

India is no longer insulated from the global Great Recession. The slowdown's effects are being felt in export-oriented industries, particularly in Information Technology-related sectors. This will further slow down job generation, increase economic distress, and deepen poverty.

Meanwhile, the government is toying with plans to give yet more sops to the super-rich through "second-generation reforms," including rampant privatisation, dismantlement of such minimal labour protection as exists, greater liberalisation of foreign investment in retail trade and military production, and major tax breaks. There are proposals to set up special industrial zones, and give banking licences to Big Business.

This will further widen income and regional disparities, and aggravate social discontent. Inflation, close to 10%, is already fuelling discontent. But Dr. Manmohan Singh says the high prices of vegetables, milk and meat represent the "success" of official policies, which have resulted in higher incomes. Nothing could be more self-delusional.

"Second-generation" neoliberal policies, coupled with failure on the food front, could provoke popular disgust and do to the UPA what "India Shining" did to the National Democratic Alliance in 2004.

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THIS DAY IN HISTORY

October 4

610
Heraclius arrives by ship from Africa at Constantinople, overthrows Byzantine Emperor Phocas and becomes Emperor.

1227
Assassination of Caliph al-Adil.

1853
Crimean War: The Ottoman Empire declares war on Russia.

1957
Space Race: Launch of Sputnik I, the first artificial satellite to orbit the Earth.

1958
Fifth Republic of France is established.

1992
The Rome General Peace Accords ends a 16 year civil war in Mozambique.

1993
Russian Constitutional Crisis: In Moscow, tanks bombard the White House, a government building that housed the Russian parliament, while demonstrators against President Boris Yeltsin rally outside.