

Why deny opposition space?

Their right to assembly and voice dissent should be protected

WE are extremely disturbed by and dismayed at this undemocratic attitude of the government. Using disproportionate police force, the government foiled opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP)'s scheduled mass procession on Sunday by confining them to their central office.

In democratic parlance, such highhanded manner of dealing with opposition's political programmes is not acceptable.

It is hypocritical on the ruling Awami League (AL)'s part to try to justify what it has done by denying the opposition its constitutionally granted democratic right to voice dissent through assembly and processions.

And it cannot also get away with this behaviour using the argument that the present opposition, when in power in the past, also foiled its political programmes using similar tactics.

The government, of course, is duty-bound to protect the people's life and property. But that does not mean that the ruling party should pre-empt any legitimate attempt at taking out a procession or holding rally in absence of any previous announcement from the government banning public gathering or meeting in the city.

Actually, the government is acting hypocritically, when one of its front body, the Awami Jubo League, was holding a meeting protesting what it termed the opposition's violent politics, while at the same time the members of the police were laying a virtual siege to the central party office of the opposition.

Complete denial of a space to the opposition to voice its protest amounts to stifling a legitimate voice of dissent. They are an elected opposition, not a pushover.

The argument of pre-empting violence also is often self-defeating, because repeated denial of the opposition to exercise its democratic rights may impel it to resort to violence, both covert and overt.

When would the nation be spared the repetition of the same follies that party in power commits to the detriment of democratic norms?

We hope good sense will prevail and the government will desist from using such highhanded tactics to deny the opposition their legitimate right to dissent.

Triple jeopardy for environment in brick fields

Adopt safer means to burn bricks

ABOUT 8,000 brick fields with half of them having no registration are presently operating in the country and nearly 33 per cent of the fuel used for the kilns derives from trees. Worse still, in some areas such as Cox's Bazar, the ratio of using logs is 100 per cent. As we know it, using logs for baking bricks is a gross violation of environmental laws. While we are not unmindful of the need for attaining self-sufficiency in producing bricks, we are truly worried at the trend of illegal use of logs for this what with its potential threats to environment. Therefore, we recommend immediate intervention on the part of the government to stop all illegal practices in this sector.

Fallout of using logs in this industry is manifold. The first and foremost of them is deforestation since most of the fields collect wood for consumption from forests, thus exposing local communities to various natural disasters and subsequent changes in the ecological balance. The most outdated method of producing bricks results in carbon emission which pollutes the air badly and contributes to global warming. To top it off, many fields use topsoil to mould bricks. This process is turning vast tracts of land sterile.

The present situation calls for an alternative means that is scientific as well as friendly to environment. Hence, we welcome the recently launched United Nations Development Programme that is seeking to introduce an environment-friendly technology known as Hybrid Hoffman Kiln method.

Effective implementation of the project, however, requires financial assistance to set up an institution that will provide training and technical know-how to the brick field owners. Therefore, the government should cooperate with the UNDP to procure more funds and make the

THIS DAY IN HISTORY

December 23

962
Byzantine-Arab Wars: Under the future Emperor Nicephorus Phocas, Byzantine troops stormed the city of Aleppo.

1793
The Battle of Savenay, decisive defeat of the royalist counter-revolutionaries in Revolt in the Vendée during the French Revolution.

1921
Visva-Bharati University is inaugurated.

1947
The transistor is first demonstrated at Bell Laboratories.

1970
The North Tower of the World Trade Center in Manhattan, New York City is topped out at 1,368 feet (417 m), making it the tallest building in the world.

1979
Soviet war in Afghanistan: Soviet forces occupy Kabul, the Afghan capital.

CROSS TALK



MOHAMMAD BADRUL AHSAN

that it could be slow and painful to maximise punishment corresponding with the severity of her crime. In a world where killers, rapists, swindlers and other criminals roam free, this woman lost her life over a crime that is mother's milk to many criminals in many countries. Amina bint Abdel Halim Nassar died a grisly death for practicing witchcraft and sorcery.

What exactly was the nature of her crime? When the authorities searched her home they found a book about witchcraft, 35 vials and glass bottles full of strange potions that were used to perform the tricks of her trade. Amina feigned to have the healing power and then sold a vial and three bottles to each patient for \$400. Nobody died because of her spurious medicine. No case of aggravation has been reported due to her deceptive treatment. No report of anybody being cured by her shamanistic method of medicine either. We do not even know if any of the disgruntled patients complained to the authorities after they found out she had duped them.

But the Saudi authorities found out anyway, and they found out she was taking advantage of gullible people. By god that happens to people in this country everyday! Doctors and hospitals regularly swindle their patients. Wrong diagnosis and wrong treatment often create complications that make patients suffer immensely more than their actual illness. Many patients also die because their doctors are grossly negligent.

Whether Amina was guilty or not is not the question. It isn't even the question of right or wrong. She was mis-selling her services, thus practicing

fraud on her patients at best. If that is wrong and wrong that must be, then what about millions of others who are doing the same thing? What about politicians who never keep their election promises? What about lawyers who give false hope to their clients? What about businessmen who

commit crime. She knew she was selling smoke to others to make money. She was lying, pretending and cheating helpless people who were desperate enough to fall for her gimmicks. The walls of the prison inside her weren't strong enough to restrain the scurrilous escapades of her dubious



CSA IMAGES, ARCHIVE

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adulterate food or sell inferior products to credulous consumers?

This is the time to invoke Fyodor Dostoevsky, who writes in *Crime and Punishment*: "If he has a conscience he will suffer for his mistake. That will be punishment as well as the prison." That Amina had a weak or almost no conscience was obvious from her

schemes.

Still, in any country other than her ultra-religious motherland, Amina would have lived. She probably would have been even licensed to practice her black art to professionally deceive people who would like to be deceived. Magicians do that all the time to their audiences, who come ready to see

POLITICS OF CLIMATE CHANGE

Green human development



SALEEMUL HUQ

which ended earlier this month in Durban, South Africa marks a major paradigm shift in how the climate change issue is likely to be tackled in the coming decades.

Nearly two decades of international level negotiations for a globally binding treaty, which got off to a reasonable start in the initial years after the signing and coming into force of the Kyoto Protocol in 1997, offered some hope, but these were effectively abandoned in Durban this year. There are two major reasons for this lack of progress. The first was the withdrawal of the United States from the Kyoto Protocol (which the US agreed to at Kyoto under the Clinton administration with then Vice-President Al Gore himself leading the US delegation) by the Bush administration and the subsequent inability of the Obama administration to reverse the tide of US hostility towards any global treaty.

The second overarching change has been the emergence of China overtaking the US as the biggest emitter of greenhouse gases (although still much lower than the US in per capita emissions) and the formation of a new negotiating bloc -- called BASIC --(consisting on China, India, Brazil and South Africa) separate from the other developing countries.

These two factors led to the current reluctance of other developed coun-

tries who had initially signed up to the Kyoto Protocol to no longer keep their promise to join its second commitment period due to start from 2013.

Thus the solution of the climate change mitigation problem at a global treaty level has moved further in time to 2015 or even 2020 as a result of the Durban agreement.

In the meantime, however, there has been a much greater emphasis on actions on the ground at the country and local levels with carbon markets developed under the Kyoto Protocol as well as significant nationally appropriate mitigation actions

national level (and even local level) actions.

In a way this is a positive development as countries are beginning to find ways to develop in a low-carbon, climate-resilient manner, not due to any obligations assumed under a (top-down) global treaty but for (bottom-up) domestic reasons of sound development.

Thus, there is now a new opportunity to re-frame the paradigm of dealing with climate change (both for mitigation as well as adaptation) away from the notion of "burden-sharing" (where some countries refused to take actions if

Although efforts to agree to a top-down global treaty may have not achieved as much as was expected, perhaps a bottom-up green development pathway that is both low-carbon as well as climate-resilient may be the more promising and sustainable approach.

(NAMAs) in countries like China, India and Brazil.

Even in the US, despite reluctance to take action at the Federal level, there have been significant developments at the state and city levels. For example California, which is the richest state in the US, has effectively adopted a Kyoto-type target at the state level.

The upshot of these developments means that the main arena for action on climate change has shifted away from the global negotiations for a legally binding global treaty to

others did not also do so) to "green development," where the actions are taken because they will be good for each country's own development.

This new notion is variously described as "green economy," "green growth," "green development," or even "green human development," which all basically mean the same (although there are some subtle differences between each term).

The new opportunity also relates to the arenas of global discourse, which no longer have to be tied to the UNFCCC only but can now be linked with similar

nothing but illusions. Bankers and insurance agents also do that, creating smokescreens that hide their charges and unscrupulous intentions.

So the book, the vials and the potions that were found in Amina's home come in varieties in different and even legitimate forms. The hocus-pocus, the monkey business, the treachery, lies and deception are common in today's world, and we don't have to go beyond our stock market to find proof. The poor woman got beheaded for charging \$400 from a patient, but Tk.200 billion vanished from our stock market and not a single head has rolled till today.

Amulets, talismans, potions, charms, spells, exorcism, witchcraft, oracles, palmistry and fortune telling are forbidden because these involve the worship of Satan and establishment of "partners" placed beside God. Roughly 600 years ago a saintly man named Thomas More was tried for treason and beheaded. The real story was that More had refused to uphold King Henry VIII's annulment of his marriage from Catherine and to attend the coronation of Anne Boleyn as the new Queen of England.

English philosopher Jeremy Bentham points out: "All punishment is mischief. All punishment in itself is evil." Crime and punishment have an uneasy balance because punishment of criminals can also criminalise punishment. There are many examples of innocent people rotting in prisons. Fall guys get death sentences, but foul men walk free.

Life is unfair and last week it was proved again in Saudi Arabia. The execution itself was an act of sorcery written in blood when truth must have vanished in the vanity of lies. I know, because there are many people who should have died before Amina Nassar if her execution was justified.

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global issues such as sustainable development and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

One opportunity for bringing these strands of discourse together will be the upcoming twentieth anniversary of the Earth Summit which was held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in June 1992. This new meeting, dubbed "Rio+20," will be held in Rio in June 2012 and will consider several aspects of environmental governance. It will also offer an opportunity for governments and other stakeholders to fashion a new paradigm for the next two decades as the current MDG targets end in 2015.

One discussion taking place in the run-up to Rio+20 is the development of a set of new "Sustainable Development Goals" (SDGs) up to 2030, which would include environmental (including climate change), social as well as economic elements.

Countries, including Bangladesh, are currently preparing their national inputs into the Rio+20 document and there is thus an opportunity for a national (as well as international) discourse on how such future SDGs can be developed at both national as well as global level.

Although efforts to agree to a top-down global treaty may have not achieved as much as was expected, perhaps a bottom-up green development pathway that is both low-carbon as well as climate-resilient may be the more promising and sustainable approach.

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