

PLEASURE IS ALL MINE

Virtues of self-reliant politics



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POLITICIANS and politics have attracted the mischief of the choicest of epithets with a somewhat routine regularity. It is not just liveried usurpers who gave a bad name to politicians to justify their unconstitutional takeover. Even civilians have done so for entirely different reasons.

Late H. L. Mencken, an American journalist and critic of American life and culture, a non-conformist in the times he lived (1880-1956) said: "A good politician is quite as unthinkable as an honest burglar." Read this with Canadian lawyer Frank McNally's comment: "If you want to succeed in politics, you must keep your conscience well under control."

If this characterisation of politicians and politics held good in American and Canadian democracies, it may sound universal and representative, perhaps giving a bit of consolation to our politicians.

Nevertheless, it must be added that once elected, our politicians are programmed to play a predetermined role unmarked by a stamp of independence, integrity or conscience, mild relaxation in Article 70 regardless.

Let us face it, our politics is not hardwired to be stable, let alone deliver governance. It is more cultural in roots, functioning and evolution than systemic as in most other established democracies. The culture is

our baggage of the past that we carry with a repertoire of mutual exclusion, repulsion and disunity between the political classes. Time has healed wounds, may be in some countries, but not in ours. They keep festering as time passes.

Whatever semblance of hardware there is, often gets uploaded with software of newer issues that it simply can't cope with. The result is digital chaos, if you like, that hogs news headlines as daily diet to print and electronic media readers and watchers respectively.

The other characterisation of politics would be that it is all very much black and white, not multi-coloured or multi-cultural mosaic of plurality of voices that it was supposed to be. It is all geared for election and electoral engineering and not fulfilling the obligations of their elected positions.

Politics is fiercely two-party centric (we are not unique there but for the ferocity of it), yet far it is from being bipartisan. The two-party straitjacket is so corralled and virtually impervious to the voices of the neutral media, civil society and think-tanks that they do not reach them, particularly those of critical nature.

Thus, the media, experts and academia get the feel

of kicking in the long grass.

The tragedy is, even an inanimate object like the computer has a "help" sign on the screen (user-friendly, eh!), but our hyper-animate politicians do not apparently have any use for help. Clearly, they do not think the media, civil society and think-tanks are user-friendly.

But hardly any contemporary concern escapes the attention of the media and the civil society -- the latter no longer armchair folks with their networking going far and

wide. So much for a possible feedback.

Indeed, we have a potential reserve of troubleshooting and problem-solving indigenous capacity waiting to be tapped in on by the major political players when they have worked themselves into a dead end to negotiate a way out.

Yet, our political leaders keep their inner thoughts to themselves, seldom, if ever, sharing these with the local press for home consumption. They reserve these to be rolled down their sleeves to foreign audience, or to some powerful elements during their trips overseas, if they can lobby their way to them. They seek to bring their high-profile listeners around to their viewpoints to leverage political opposition and vice-versa as the WikiLeaks had revealed so graphically.

We prefer outsourcing for guidance to taking the dignified self-reliant route for consultative inputs to bear on our political problems. So much for courting external help in solving our own problems that while they are accosted in an avuncular fashion, nonetheless they feel impelled to remind us that "it is an internal affair of Bangladesh" after all. Some times, but rarely we have to say this ourselves. On the whole, we are very deferential to what others have to say about us.

Imagine you mismanage and stage replays of same political games of rushing to the brink and then turning to others for good offices or to score a political point over the opposition by currying favour with a foreign dignitary. Isn't your self-esteem and dignity lowered before them?

While on the subject, the US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton came next-door to Myanmar on a historic visit recently to get a feel of the "Burmese Spring." She was supposed to visit Bangladesh which did not come about, owing to certain reservations she had expressed in her letter to our Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina over certain matters as reported in *Prothom Alo*. Given the US Ambassador Dan W. Mozena's emphasis on Bangladesh's geo-political importance, Hillary Clinton's decision not to visit Dhaka now sounds less than comforting to put it politely.

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Seismo-tectonic risk of Tipaimukh Dam

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INDIA is going ahead with a plan to construct a dam across the Barak River in Monipur state for flood control and construction of a 1,500 MW hydroelectric generation plant. This project has created controversy between Bangladesh and India over water sharing rights as per international law. It has led to discontent among and protest by the people of the lower riparian Bangladesh over the serious negative impacts on the socio-economy, hydrology, agriculture, fisheries, ecology, etc.

Nobody can deny that the unilateral decision of India to control and regulate water flow of the Barak river will have devastating effects of the life and economy of the people the north- east and eastern part, as witnessed by the people of the northern and southern regions of Bangladesh due to the Farraka Barrage. More than 67 villages of Monipur will be deprived of their source of livelihood, 1,461 tribal Hmar families will have to be evacuated from their paternal property, and about 60 kms of National Highway No-53 of Monipur will be submerged.

The people of Monipur fought legally to stop the project but failed. The Sinlung Indigenous People's Human Rights Organisation (SIPHRO) of India opined that the process of choosing the dam site ignored both the indigenous people and recommendations of the World Commission on Dams (WCD). About 20 influential socio-political organisations in Manipur have united under the banner of "Action Committee against Tipaimukh Project" and have been protesting against the project.

It seems that India has ignored all these protests and discontent. Strong determination declared by Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh in Monipur for implementation of Tipaimukh project leaves no ambiguity of their intention. India is not even considering the fact that the dam site is located in a topographically fragile, ecologically sensitive and seismo-tectonically highest risky zone.

The proposed Tipaimukh Dam site is at Monipur-Mizoram boarder in India. The area is surrounded by regions of high seismicity, which include the Himalayan Arc and Shillong Plateau in the north, Burmese Arc, Arakan Yoma anticlinorium in the east and complex Naga-Disang-Haflong thrust Zones in the northeast. The major Dauki Fault system along with numerous subsurface active faults and a

flexure zone -- called Hinge Zone -- lie in the vicinity of the dam site. Monipur-Mizoram states are part of India Myanmar Hill Range formed by the interaction of the Indian, Eurasian and Myanmar Plates. These weak regions are believed to provide the necessary zones for movements in the North-East India Region, which experienced many major earthquakes during last 150 years and has been affected by small earthquakes occasionally.

The dam site and adjoining areas lie in the most seismically active zone in the world. Historical records show that at least eight large earthquakes in the region have occurred during last one hundred and fifty years, with three of them having magnitude of more than 8.

The northern and eastern regions of India covering Meghalaya, Assam, Monipur, Mizoram and north-eastern Bangladesh are so related morphotectonically that the analysis of seismicity of the Bangladesh region without considering adjoining areas will be incomplete and unrealistic. All the great

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earthquakes located in India have affected the north-eastern region of India and caused enormous damage. The western Assam earthquake of 1897 is probably the most documented. The intensity distribution of its surface effects shows that the damage represented by Mercali scale (ME) VIII-IX lies in the vicinity of the Tipaimukh dam site. Return of such an earthquake in the region is not at all unexpected since the dam site is situated in the most fragile ge0-tectonic region.

Analysis of the epicentres of earthquakes obtained from the NOAA catalogue for the period 1868-2011 shows that they are distributed in the weak zones comprising surface or subsurface faults. Most of the events are of moderate rank (Mb = 4-6) and lie at a shallow depth, which indicates the recent movements in the sediments overlying the basement rocks. In the north-eastern region (Surma basin), major events are controlled by the Dauki Fault system and hence, it should be observed carefully. The earthquakes in the folded belt demonstrate shallow and low angled thrust

behaviour, which is conformable with the tectonic configuration of the region.

The average return period of earthquakes in the northeast Indian region has been studied, and it was predicted that the largest earthquakes expected to occur in 50 years would be about M = 7.8-8.8 and in every 100 years would be about M = 8.3-9.3 (type-I distribution). 1897 type of earthquake (M > 8) has a return period of about 100 years and it is seen from the record that it has not occurred in the region since then. It is also observed from the seismicity that the Dauki Fault region is relatively quite, while Naga-Disang-Haflong thrust zone in the northeast of the dam site is seismically more active. Activities in the thrust zone may develop stress concentration in the seismo-tectonically active north-east India region.

Seismicity records and tectonics of north-eastern India demonstrate that the region is in a highly seismic zone. The morphotectonic behaviour of north-east India shows that the area has been affected by the movements of the Dauki Fault system and relative upliftment of the Shillong Plateau. The Dauki Fault system is quiet compared to the Naga-Disng-Haflong thrust belt, giving rise to the probability of sudden rupture in the vicinity of the Dauki Fault system. On the basis of the predicted average return period of a large earthquake, a possibility of reoccurrence of 1897 type in the vicinity of Tipaimukh Dam should be considered seriously. Huge volume of water in the reservoir of the dam may also enhance seismic activities of the existing faults and fissures in the region and can trigger earthquakes.

Bangladesh has no idea whether India has studied the seismo-tectonic risk of the dam site with due importance. Avoiding or ignoring such important aspect of the dam site may cause unimaginable destruction in lower Surma-Kushiyara-Maghna basin in the event of damage to the dam due to large earthquakes. In case the dam is damaged, the tsunami-like rush of water will wash out the downstream districts of Sylhet, Habigonj, Moulabi Bazar, Sunamgonj, Brahmanbaria and Kishoregonj in Bangladesh. It is, therefore, suggested that in-depth study evaluating seismo-tectonic risk of the dam is necessary for the interest of the dam, Manipur state and lower riparian Bangladesh.

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Minimising wastage

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TODAY, people talk about sustainability of national resources and the nation worries about the fall of reserve of water and natural gas. Our resources are natural gas, water, fertile soil, etc., which we must not waste. A resource management system must aim to bring down wastage to a specific minimum percentage of total consumption from the present level by a definite period. Do we really have any such management approach to save national resources?

The wastage of natural gas from kitchen burners shows that there is no effective wastage-control policy in resource management systems. We have a reserve of about 20 trillions cubic feet natural gas. Average consumption is about 1,000 million cubic feet per day. That means we have an reserve of approximately 50 years. However, the increase in consumption with growth of population and expansion of industrialization, the reserve is not enough for even 20 years. An efficient management policy of minimising wastage will certainly help defend against the looming energy crisis.

Gas connections to the houses have to be fitted with meters so that people pay for what they use. Industries burning gas must maintain their equipment to reduce wastage. Some gas escapes from the end of the delivery nozzle when filling a car's tank from CNG pumps.

This can be saved by especially designed nozzle that will return gas to a reserve tank or to the suction pipe of CNG compressor. Hot fluid carrying pipes in industries are uncovered to allow dissipation of heat. These pipes should be covered up by thermal insulation to prevent loss of heat, which will in turn reduce gas consumption. Exhaust gases from engines or gas turbines may be used for driving a smaller turbine or for heating a water boiler, etc. before they finally escape into the atmosphere.

One kg of natural gas has about 49 mega joule of energy. The amount of energy one kg gas delivers depends on the way it burns. If it burns in a diesel engine it delivers more power. If it burns in a gas turbine it will produce less power. It also depends on design and maintenance of the burning equipment. The government may advise the industries to increase burning efficiency by using the proper equipment.

Availability of natural water resources is at risk as it was not taken care of with due attention in terms of saving ground and surface water, and preventing pollution of river water as well as wastage in domestic

usage. The Daily Star (October 25) reported: "Dhaka's groundwater drops 6m in 7 years. Study sees excessive withdrawal of water as the reason; saline water will make inroads if trend continues."

Not realising the consequences of wasting water, we often forget about saving it when taking shower or washing dishes. Water in agricultural irrigation is often wasted through overflowing. Millions of years of adaptation of different elements of nature had established co-existence of living species and nature. Containment of ground water, location of hills, rivers, seas and forests are dependent on each other. Relationship between existing eco-systems and living creatures, if interrupted without due consideration of interdependency, may cause fatal failure in resource management for future generations. Promoting awareness of consequences of wasting, conserving low lands, and citizens' effort to use less water may help avert a water crisis.

According to the rule of the International Maritime Organization, it is illegal to discharge any harmful substances, including mixture of oil and water which contain oil content of 15 PPM and above, in interna-

tional waters and in rivers and ports. (15 PPM means 15 liters of oil in one million liters of oily water mixture.) Such microscopic presence of oil is not visible in any oily water mixture. What we see in Bangladeshi rivers is that the water is excessively polluted by sewage, oil, and other harmful substances.

Fertile land is our main resource. Our elders tell us that in the past they only had to throw seeds on paddy fields and then reaped crops after a few months. No nursing of the land was required in-between. Such fertile lands are becoming uncultivable because of unplanned housing and industrialisation.

Like urban planning, we must also have rural planning. No one should be allowed to use farm land for making a house without approval of a government village planner.

In order to save resources sources of wastage have to be identified and the amount of wastage determined. Then the management has to decide on and implement corrective and preventive actions. The result of the actions has to be monitored by the management. Corrective measures have to be adjusted based on the result of previous corrective actions. This system is called quality management system, which is being practiced in modern management all over the world. Our resource management systems must be quality management systems to save our resources efficiently.

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