

CROSS TALK

Bangladesh's maritime claims vindicated

A job well done by FM and her team

BANGLADESH'S winning the legal battle with Myanmar in the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea (ITLOS) over its maritime right in the Bay of Bengal is a greatly heartening and positive piece of news. We congratulate the government, especially our Foreign Minister Dr. Dipu Moni for her able leadership of the team that pursued the case at the tribunal under the overall guidance of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina.

Especially thanks are also due to the deputy agent and the technical backbone of the team Rear Admiral (Retd) Khurshid Alam and the highly professional group of legal experts who efficiently placed Bangladesh's case throughout the prosecution of the litigation at the tribunal. That Bangladesh could successfully convince the international tribunal of its claim reflects the fact that the team did real homework and placed its arguments cogently supported by adequate facts and figures and other evidences in Bangladesh's favour.

We further appreciate that the resolution of the maritime dispute based on equity, rather than equidistance, has greatly benefited Bangladesh since the international tribunal has given due consideration to Bangladesh's case in terms of its needs, population size, economic status, needs, GDP growth and so on. Now Bangladesh will be able to establish its right over the maritime resources such as oil, gas as well as fish and the entire aquatic wealth that lie within its territorial waters that exceeds its original claim of 100,000 square miles.

The most relieving aspect of this dispute resolution between Bangladesh and Myanmar has been that that it could be done amicably keeping our good neighbourly relationship with Myanmar unharmed. And we must also commend the Myanmar government for its spirit of understanding so much so that it first agreed to Bangladesh's placing the case with ITLOS and then accepted the verdict in a spirit of good neighbourliness.

Now that the maritime delimitation with one of our neighbours has been completed we would hope that the issue of delimitation with our other neighbour India, the matter currently resting with the UN's Permanent Court of Arbitration based in The Hague, would be resolved in the same manner to the benefit of both the parties.

No forced disappearance is acceptable

Trace out the abductors immediately

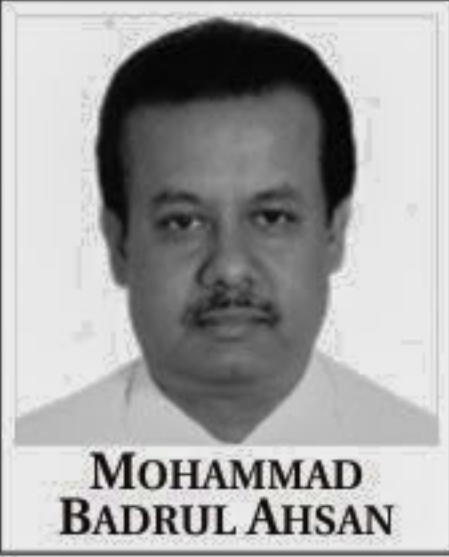
WHAT the Home Minister Shahara Khatun said in parliament on Wednesday about the victims of forced disappearance has shocked us, to say the least. In a reply to a lawmaker's query, she identified all disappeared victims as members of criminal gangs. Worse still, she dismissed outright the allegation that the abductors were plainclothesmen. On the other hand, she added that such incidents were triggered either by conflicting interests or by the motive of realizing ransom.

We are perturbed by the minister's statement because by identifying a victim as a criminal she is seeking to abdicate the government's responsibility to protect a citizen's basic rights. Every citizen whether he is a victim or a person with a clean track record, has a right to justice and it is the state's responsibility to protect that right. So if someone is found guilty of a crime, he should be tried according to the existing laws of the country.

As reported in the media, quite a good number of the victims were not criminals besides the fact that their family members and close relatives alleged that the abductors were members of law enforcing agencies. Evidently, the minister's claim flies in the face of available facts. We think that by making such statements she is embarrassing not only the government but also any person who believes in the basic principles of human rights.

In this column we have repeatedly emphasized that any incident of forced disappearance is a violation of basic human rights. We have also noted that it is for the government to find out the real identities of the abductors. In this connection, we recall the human rights commission chairman Mizanur Rahman who complained of the concerned agencies' negligence in replying to the commission's queries about forced disappearance. We expect the government will wrap up investigations in all

The showdowns put people down



MOHAMMAD BADRUL AHSAN

HISTORIA *Augusta* is a collection of biographies of the Roman Emperors, their junior colleagues and usurpers of the period 117 to 284. According to its account, the Syrian boy emperor Elagabalus once asked his slaves to collect

spider webs so that he could weigh them to do an assessment of the size and age of Rome. Last week, we saw a similar exercise repeated twice when two political parties gathered their workers in the nation's capital. Each tried to outnumber the other in a purported showdown to do an assessment of their political strength.

Once more, the people of this country paid the price for the delusions of their politicians. At least for a couple of days ahead of the BNP showdown, they lived in the fear of a gathering storm that threatened to lay a political wasteland in its wake. Buses stopped running. Launches stopped plying. Roads were empty, shops were closed and prices soared.

People traveled on foot between work and home, looking like exodus scenes from Biblical movies. Mass arrests appeared like scenes from Alex Haley's *Roots*, slaves walking in single files with ropes tied around their waists. The ruling party men sat in chairs arranged in semi-circular formation and doubled up as neighbourhood vigilantes as if they had fallen off a vintage photograph of a posse in the Wild American West.

The Awami League showdown was next, fueled by the lust for a bigger gathering. Once again roads were congested, people suffered in the traffic nightmare and the city life was largely disrupted. But this time people weren't harassed at checkpoints set up by police and party enthusiasts. Those who came to attend the grand rally could freely travel. Buses were running. Launches were plying. They didn't have to worry about rival

groups lying in wait to swoop on them.

All said and done, what was missing from all that political commotion was political emotion itself. Instead, these showdowns looked like two medieval armies mobilising troops for a fight to finish. In a twist of irony, both political parties vied for headcounts as if their rallies were improvised polls.

One can always ask if these showdowns were necessary. BNP could have announced its deadline for re-instatement of the caretaker system in a press conference. It would have cost the party lot less and saved it so much hassle. But nay, its

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leaders knew how power worked. Words mean nothing unless backed by strength.

One could say the same thing about Awami League. It had done so much to put up obstacles in land, air (disruption of three TV channels) and water to prevent its opposition from gathering a large crowd. The ruling party could have responded to BNP's ultimatum through a press conference. Instead, it chose to counter by another showdown, vowing to have a bigger turnout than March 12.

The law of large numbers is a theorem in probability theory, which states that the average of the results obtained from a large number of trials

should be close to the expected value, and it gets even closer as more trials are performed. In the last forty years we have had countless movements, rallies, demonstrations and public gatherings, yet our experiment with democracy only moved further away from its expected value. Last week's showdowns, if anything, deepened confrontation and diluted compromise. Like many times before, people proved more as the means of our politics than its end.

Only thing good that came out of last week's political conundrum is the oblique fact that our politicians still need their people. They still need people not so much for their souls as their bodies, more precisely their arms and legs to march for them and mouths to shout their slogans. This is a republic of truncated people; their limbs are more useful than the rest of their bodies.

This is where our politics resembles organ trade. The politicians use certain body parts, and they aren't interested in the whole people. It is alleged that political parties often hire people to swell the ranks of their rallies. Like organ trade, there is also a black market in national politics.

One political hack confided in me that there is an arrangement akin to carrying contract in goods delivery. Middlemen handle this people moving business and they supply people to politicians for rallies like decorators do tables and chairs for weddings. It is hard to judge the popularity of a political party in a populous country for the same reason one mustn't take credit for bringing coals to a colliery.

Perhaps a democracy faces setback in an overpopulated country in the manner oversupply depresses the price of a commodity. A government of the people, by the people and for the people doesn't work unless people pick their government, not the other way around.

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POLITICS OF CLIMATE CHANGE

Asia leads the world in adaptation to climate change



SALEEMUL HUQ

I have just returned from attending the second Asia-Pacific Climate Change Adaptation Forum in Bangkok on March 12-13. It was supposed to have been held in October 2011 but had to be cancelled at the last minute due to the floods that devastated Bangkok at that

time. It was jointly organised by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the Asia-Pacific Adaptation Network (APAN) with support from the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and Swedish government (amongst others) and brought together over 800 participants from all over Asia and Pacific including ministers, senior government officials, researchers, NGOs, private sector, UN agencies, media and others, with five plenary sessions and twenty parallel thematic sessions. There were also stalls set up by many organisations and a film competition.

Having attended both the first Asian Adaptation Forum in 2010 as well as the second this month, I am quite sure (based on my work on adaptation globally) that Asia leads the world on the practice, planning and knowledge generation of adaptation to climate change. I give a few examples below to demonstrate why this is so.

Mix of countries and ecosystems:

The Asia-Pacific region has by far the biggest population as well as the largest number and variety of countries of all the world's continents. This variety includes developed countries like Japan, Least Developed Countries (LDCs) like Bangladesh, small island developing states (SIDS) like the Maldives as well as the giants like China and India.

At the same time, it has all the vulnerable ecosystems like mountains in the Himalayas, low-lying coasts, small islands, mangroves and other forests, drylands, major river systems like the Ganges-Brahmaputra and Mekong and, perhaps most importantly, some of the fastest growing cities and mega-cities.

The knowledge being generated within the region on adaptation in such a wide variety of countries and ecosystems is truly enormous and is also very relevant for many other parts of the world.

Pro-active governments:

Some of the most pro-active governments on tackling adaptation to climate change are also in Asia. They include developed countries such as Japan and Australia as well as LDCs such as Bangladesh and Nepal and SIDS such as the Maldives and Kiribati (to name just a few).

The learning that is coming from such national level adaptation planning (and increasingly also implementation) can be shared with other countries in developing best practices in different areas.

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Urban adaptation:

With over half the world's population living in cities and with the fastest growing cities in the world being in Asia, there are already many examples of good adaptation practice in urban settings. One pioneering venture to pilot and share such experiences is the Asian Cities Climate Resilience Network (ACCRN) set up with support from the Rockefeller Foundation, which is already carrying out adaptation in ten cities in India, Indonesia, Thailand and Vietnam.

Community based adaptation:

One of the thematic panels at the Forum was on Community Based Adaptation (CBA), where Asia has some of the best experiences to share with

other continents. It is significant that the sixth international conference on CBA will be held in the region -- in Hanoi, Vietnam -- from April 16 to 22 this year, and the seventh international conference (CBA7) will be held in Bangladesh next year (April 2013).

Knowledge generation and management:

Many universities and research institutes in the region have started significant research as well as training, teaching and capacity building activities. To name just a few, the International Rice Research Institute (IRRI) based in the Philippines is developing saline-tolerant rice varieties. Several universities in Australia are doing work on drought while Japanese universities are working on sea level rise and coastal defences. It is also significant that the London-based International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED) has chosen to set up the new International Centre for Climate Change and Development (ICCCAD) in Bangladesh at the Independent University, Bangladesh (IUB) together with the Bangladesh Centre for Advanced Studies (BCAS).

Bangladesh at the Asian Adaptation Forum: Bangladesh was well represented at this year's Asia Adaptation Forum with a large contingent from government, NGOs, universities and media. They participated in many panel discussions and also had stalls showcasing their work.

BCAS also won an award for best video on adaptation for its short video on coastal resilience in Bangladesh.

In conclusion, it can be said that, as adaptation to climate change is becoming a higher priority in developing as well as developed countries globally, the countries in Asia (including developed countries like Japan and Australia) as well as LDCs (like Bangladesh and Nepal) and SIDS (like the Maldives and Kiribati) are amongst the world leaders.

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THIS DAY IN HISTORY

March 16

- 1939**
Marriage of Princess Fawzia of Egypt to Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi of Iran
- 1968**
Vietnam War: In the My Lai massacre, between 350 and 500 Vietnamese villagers are killed by American troops.
- 1977**
Assassination of Kamal Jumblatt the main leader of the anti-government forces in the Lebanese Civil War.
- 1978**
Former Italian Prime Minister Aldo Moro is kidnapped and is later killed by his captors.
- 2005**
Israel officially handed over Jericho to Palestinian control.