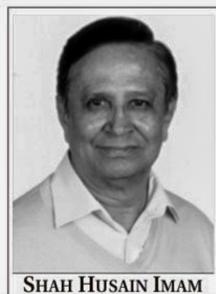


PLEASURE IS ALL MINE

Suranjit reinstatement fallout



SURANJIT'S reinstatement in government within hours of his resigning the post of railway minister cannot but raise a question in the public mind about the government's sense of judgment.

What made the PM turn the matter on its head so dramatically? Possibly, she acted on advice from her colleagues that the expose at the BGB headquarters was not consistent with "55 years of Suranjit's political track record." Perhaps, she didn't want to hurt the community Suranjit belongs to. She might have opted to keep a vote bank in good humour and in an extended sense India, too.

These are no doubt conjectures. Even so, one could hazard them given a certain communal portrayal of the issue sought to have been made by certain quarters.

Sheikh Hasina might have been driven by combative political instincts against the opposition to be reinstating Suranjit as hastily as she did. She possibly reacted to the barrage of damning words spewed out by Barrister Moudud Ahmed and Mirza Fakhrul Islam against her government. When Suranjit submitted his resignation to the government most people thought he had taken a step in the right direction to defuse the crisis. But the BNP couldn't apparently take it in good grace, their leaders chastising the Mahajote government as

corrupt and wanted it to apologise to the people and resign wholesale.

Whatever may be the underlying reasons for the PM's anti-climactic handling of the Suranjit controversy, she left few in doubt that she has trivialised a serious matter of public interest.

By his own admission, in his post-resignation press conference, the former railway minister said that the burden of responsibility was on him and that he accepted the challenge of proving himself through a fair investigation. He even said he did not wish to embarrass his party and the PM and hoped to return to politics after clearing his name.

But Suranjit's political vindication has come in a jiffy; this is a windfall for him.

For whatever beans have been spilled about the scandal in the railway, this happened under his watch; he cannot escape that bit of ultimate responsibility. Although the investigation is technically on and the minister has detached himself from the ministry, the rail probe may have been derailed.

Little does the government realise that it has drawn a blank in its professed crusade against corruption. Abul Hossain, the former communication minister, who even to this day, carries a label of corruption, centred around Padma Bridge financing by World Bank, was moved sideways to IT ministry. Even though cleared by the

ACC, the World Bank would have nothing of it. Last Tuesday, the WB demanded GoB's action against persons responsible for "corruption" in regard to Padma Bridge.

It is astounding as to the length the government is going on its self-righteous ego-trips risking investment in the country!

Just when a good precedent was about to be created in terms of democratic accountability, it has got frozen on its tracks. Little do our leaders realise that in India, Himachal minister Rajeev Bindal quit last month on being accused of corruption. Earlier, three Karnataka ministers -- CC

Patil, Laxman Savadi and Krishna Palemar -- resigned for allegedly watching pornography. The trio took the

plea they were watching a footage to "prepare for a discussion in the assembly on the ill effects of a rave party."

In January 2012, Indian railway minister Dinesh Trivedi resigned on as innocuous a ground as disagreement over railway budget stance with his Trinamool boss Mamata Banerjee. Look at the lively sporty democratic culture in the neighbourhood.

UK resignations in the current tenure of government read almost frivolous by our standards. Chris Huhne, energy secretary, had to quit for speeding offences rendered all the more "criminal" by his attempting to

pass on his offence to his wife saying she was driving the car, which she flatly denied.

Liam Fox, defence secretary, quit for taking his friend on 22 trips whilst on ministerial duty. Particular offence was taken of his friend claiming to be an advisor to the minister on his business card.

On balance, the highlight of the Suranjit controversy appears to be the escalation of recruitment business in the railways, for that matter, in almost all public sector enterprises.

This is a huge issue striking at the roots of professional and merit-based recruitments. Those who pay for jobs are not just impoverished having begged, borrowed or stolen, they turn out to be avengers, more corrupt than the initiator, to more than offset their losses. Corruption topped by incompetence that the whole system is shot through makes it unworkable, anti-people and, therefore, anti-state.

It is time the economists took a close look at all forms of unearned incomes which are but black money and assess totality of its impact on the national economy. Estimates of black money vary between 40% and 80% of our GDP.

This money is either stashed away in banks under different names or it contributes to flight of capital or is spent in real estate and car acquisitions, at home and abroad. Inflation increases in the sectors the money is used locally. If anything, ill-gotten money seldom goes into wealth creation because it is loathe to productive investment.

Whilst it is Klondike or gold rush for some it is pestilence for the rest.

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Drought and armed conflict

MD. RASHED CHOWDHURY

It has been identified in many earlier works that there are three ways in which climate change could cause social instability and conflict: (i) increasing resource scarcity due to drought, (ii) intensification of natural disasters, and (iii) sea-level rise. I shall discuss the first issue -- drought -- today.

Drought is widely believed to relate to conflict because it may lead to local scarcity and increased resource competition, because freshwater is the resource most vital to human existence. The Sudanese government, NGO officials and some scholars have used the drought in the mid-1980s as, at least, a partial explanation for the conflict and killings in Darfur (Moon, Ban-ki 2007. "A Climate Culprit In Darfur," *Washington Post*, June 16: A15).

Theoretical arguments relating extreme water deficiency to conflict emphasise that people in drought-stricken areas are directly dependent on freshwater for their livelihood. Where trade is low and reliance on subsistence agriculture is predominant, a loss of freshwater will have much greater impact than in an advanced industrial economy.

In particular, regions such as sub-Saharan Africa and Southern Asia (e.g., Bangladesh) (agriculture-based economies, heavily reliant on water from glaciers or seasonal rainfall) will suffer much more from droughts than regions and economies less dependent on renewable resources.

From the general argument linking renewable resource scarcity to conflict, we identify two economic linkages between drought and armed conflict. The first is the loss of income-earning activities as well as food insecurity in general, which increase individuals' inclination to criminal behaviour. Accordingly, scarcity-induced loss of livelihood in societies founded on subsistence agriculture increases the pool of potential rebel recruits, resulting in a higher conflict risk. Climate-related phenomena, such as more frequent droughts, may decrease the expected returns to farming compared to joining criminal and insurgent groups.

The second linkage is that scarcity of renewable resources reduces state income and can weaken the state's capacity to deliver public goods. In turn, this may reduce the state's political legitimacy and open up opportunities for political challengers. Thus, from an economic point of view, drought can affect both the individual inclination to join a rebellion or violent activity and the state capacity to forestall or quell the rebellion, thus increasing the risk of armed

conflict.

Among the few studies systematically testing the economic consequences of drought-related phenomena for armed conflict, Miguel et al. (2004) ["Economic Shocks and Civil Conflict: An Instrumental Variables Approach," *Journal of Political Economy* 112 (4): 725753] found that negative deviation in annual precipitation in sub-Saharan Africa substantially reduces national economic growth and thereby indirectly increases the risk of civil war. Other research findings also found that a small percentage change in precipitation lagged one year increases the risk of armed conflict in sub-Saharan Africa, whereas countries with more freshwater per capita also run a higher risk of armed conflict.

A frequently-cited article by Hauge & Ellingsen (1998) ["Beyond Environmental Scarcity: Causal Pathways to Conflict," *Journal of Peace Research* 35(3): 299-317] found freshwater scarcity to increase the risk of armed conflict; however, some authors also demonstrated that these results are not replicable. Despite some criticism, the emerging research on the effects of water

scarcity on armed conflict has produced an important insight that "a negative change in water accessibility appears to be harder to adapt to and potentially more important for conflict."

Currently, drought and conflict related researches are virtually not available in Bangladesh. There is a need to begin this line of research. This can be done in the following ways:

First, we use state-of-the-art climatic models to derive scenarios for changes in rainfall. This also includes taking into account the effect that temperature has on evaporation. The same degree of variability in rainfall is likely to be more harmful in an area with high evaporation.

Second, we plan to use improved conflict data that include not only state-based conflict (conflicts between two organised parties, at least one of which is a government), but also non-state conflict (conflict between groups, not involving the government), and one-sided conflict (massacres and similar kinds of violence against an unorganised party). In this way we can gauge the local effects of drought and test how their local socio-economic consequences such as unemployment and food insecurity relate to conflict in Bangladesh. This is an important issue and, therefore, demands careful examination from the socio-economic perspective of Bangladesh.

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The rights of older people

M. SHOEB CHOWDHURY

ONE of humanity's greatest triumphs over nature has been increasing the longevity of the world's population. This brings in new challenges and places increasing economic and social demands on states and societies globally. People in their 60's are the world's fastest growing population group due to declining fertility and rising longevity.

Older men and women have the same rights as everyone else. We are all born equal, and this does not change as we grow older. Despite this fact, there are still not enough legal instruments to ensure that the rights of the old are adequately protected. Older men and women around the world face age discrimination and are denied their rights on a regular basis.

Demographic change is resulting with the rise in unprecedented numbers of old people worldwide. Greater numbers of people will be affected directly by age discrimination and ageism, thereby increasing pressure on governments and civil society as a whole to respond.

Strengthening the rights of old people is the only solution in response to this new problem.

While UN conventions are accepted by governments, support for the rights of the old cannot be built without advocacy and the backing of society as a whole. A rapidly ageing population has a wide range of ramifications and will alter the way in which developed and developing societies function. It is essential that policy-makers and leaders from different countries play a key role in planning appropriately for the changes ahead.

This is why we need you to be involved.

The time has come for a special approach or an initiative on the rights of older people. These new human rights instruments would help change attitudes towards older adults and increase their visibility at both national and international level. It will also clarify government responsibilities towards older women and men, improve accountability and provide a legal framework for policy and decision making.

According to the UN Population Division, during the next 45 years, the number of people aged 60 years or older is expected to almost triple, increasing from 668 million in 2005 to nearly 2.03 billion by 2050. This proportional increase by almost 80% during the next four decades will be a demographic fact, sooner than most of us realise. At the same time, the number of "older old" persons (here defined as 80 years and over) in the developed world will reach unprecedented levels.

Increase in the number of older people will be most rapid in developing countries. From WHO sources in developing countries, the proportion of the older population is expected to rise from about 9% in 2005 to about 20% by 2050.

Older people need financial freedom or adequate income support as they age, opportunities to engage in decent employment should they wish to remain active, and access to appropriate health and social services, including long-term care. These have to be ensured. The higher number of women living into very old age must also be treated as a

major challenge for policy-makers. The lack of policies to address these issues is condemning millions of older people to a life of poverty. The abilities of the old need to be utilised optimally for the benefit of all.

Discrimination against any group in society is unacceptable. Treating older people with respect and on an equal basis with younger people creates the conditions that enable all people in society to participate in and contribute to their collective development. This message needs to be delivered to today's younger adults who will be tomorrow's older people.

The United Nations Declaration on Human Rights states that "all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights." This equality does not change with age. Discrimination of any kind, anywhere is ethically unacceptable, and age discrimination has to be resisted the way gender discrimination is being resisted at present.

For the reasons stated above, human rights conventions need to be reformulated. General protection is not sufficient. International human rights conventions need to be

more specific regarding age-related issues.

Regional and national laws do not protect the rights of the old comprehensively or systematically. The normative gaps in international, regional and national legal frameworks have to be upgraded to universally acceptable standard.

Malta was first country to raise the question of ageing as a matter of inter-

national concern at the United Nations in 1968. Eventually, in 1979, the General Assembly agreed to call a World Assembly on Aging in 1982. In its Resolution 37/51 it recommended inter-alia the promotion of training and research, as well as the exchange of information and knowledge in order to provide an international basis for social policies and action. It unanimously, and without reservation, adopted the Vienna International Plan of Action on ageing, which remains as the cornerstone of worldwide policy on ageing.

In Bangladesh, we are totally unprepared to deal effectively with the problem of a rapid increase in the number of older people. Our intuitional infrastructure and the availability of health services to cope with the problems of the old (e.g. treatment of Alzheimer's disease) are virtually nonexistent.

Ageing is a natural phenomenon. This natural process should take place with the older people in every society living purposefully, peacefully, usefully and gracefully. Former US president, Bill Clinton, has taken an initiative in this regard via the Clinton Foundation. Similar measures have been introduced in the EU countries, Japan and China. Such measures need to be incorporated in the Bangladesh government's Vision 2021.

This is the right time to establish a practical bridge between and among the world's developed and developing countries with the participation of all stakeholders including NGO's, government agencies and international organisations. To approximate this objective, states and civil societies must work as partners. Bangladesh has to work with the rest of the world to ensure protection of the rights of all its citizens including the old and the vulnerable.

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