

Uproar over what Prof Sayeed did not say

MPs' abrasive comments uncalled for

We were confounded to see some lawmakers of the ruling alliance on Sunday launch a fierce diatribe against Professor Abdullah Abu Sayeed in a parliamentary sitting. Deputy speaker Shawkat Ali has categorically stated that just on the basis of a report in a single newspaper and without verifying it, a respectable person like Prof Abu Sayeed should not have been subjected to adverse comments by MPs. We thank him for putting the matter in perspective.

When asked, Prof Sayeed told a leading Bangla daily that he had not even mentioned the word 'parliament' in his speech. While clarifying what 'durneeti' (corruption) really means, he had stressed that when thieves or dacoits steal or rob, we don't say they engaged in a corrupt practice. But if a minister on oath pledges something and fails to fulfill his/her pledge, then it is a matter of principle, or lack of it. This then becomes an abuse of principle.

We really expected that before coming up with any decisive conclusion about a person as respectable as Prof Sayeed, they should have verified the report taking into consideration the fact that the news was not covered in most of the leading dailies of the country. They could have as well contacted the TIB seeking an authentic version of his statement. If necessary, they could also have spoken to Prof Sayeed himself.

Without having done any of these, they jumped to a conclusion based on what was nothing more than hearsay and assumed an aggressive, intimidating stance which was patently an attempt to curb people's freedom of expression. Therefore, we think it was they who undermined democracy by trying to stifle one's freedom of expression. By the same token, we think it was they who denigrated the sanctity of the parliament by raising a hue and cry about what was nothing more than a misrepresentation of a statement. In fact, apart from this instance, we have often watched them desecrate the parliament with their reckless invectives thrown at each other instead of engaging in constructive discussions on policymaking.

Some of them also blasted the TIB, labeling it as an anti-democratic institution and demanded an inquiry into its financial resources. We think it is very unfortunate that lawmakers have such a low opinion of an institution that has been crusading against corruption since long and upholding democratic practices in the country.

Economic challenges highlighted

WB charts out four major impediments

At a time when the government is pushing ahead aggressively to attract foreign direct investment in an effort to pump fresh blood into a stagnating economy, the World Bank has highlighted key impediments to growth. The four areas stressed up on by the financial institution are: the Euro crisis, turmoil in Gulf States, volatility of oil prices in international markets and internal energy crisis.

By far the biggest challenge is the severe energy crunch which continues to derail the existing production and acts as a major deterrent to future foreign investment. This coupled with, to a lesser extent the shortage of land availability and the culture of red tape-ism aid only in deterring prospective foreign investment in Bangladesh. With the bulk of new power added by the present government coming from oil-dependent plants, there is little that can be done to mitigate this problem since the global oil markets have been in flux due to various geopolitical reasons.

With nearly US\$12billion generated annually from Bangladeshi expatriate workers in the Gulf countries, the continued political instability in the region is a major threat to Bangladesh' ability to preserve this precious flow of inward remittance that plays a crucial role in paying for essential imports and fund the major infrastructure projects needed to keep the wheels of the economy turning. In an effort to tackle the double-digit inflation in the local economy, the central bank has imposed credit control conditions which have inadvertently helped reduce private investment. On the external front, exports that bring in some \$26billion a year for the Bangladeshi economy have been hard hit with European economies battling a nagging recession.

While external causes cannot be influenced, internal problems can certainly be mitigated provided the political will exists. Expediting the setting up of special economic zones with requisite facilities is very much within control. Simplifying long bureaucratic decision-making processes by streamlining functions of the Board of Investment along with other related ministries is very much within the government's powers. These steps need to be taken today as opposed to sometime in the future if the State is serious about attracting foreign investment.

THIS DAY IN HISTORY

- June 5
- 1963

Movement of 15 Khordad: Protest against arrest of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini by Shah of Iran, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi. In several cities, masses of angry demonstrators are confronted by tanks and paratroopers.
- 1967

Six-Day War begins: The Israeli air force launches simultaneous pre-emptive attacks on the air forces of Egypt and Syria.
- 1968

U.S. presidential candidate Robert F. Kennedy is shot at the Ambassador Hotel in Los Angeles, California by Palestinian Sirhan Sirhan. Kennedy dies the next day.
- 1989

The Unknown Rebel halts the progress of a column of advancing tanks for over half an hour after the Tiananmen Square protests of 1989
- 2006

Serbia declares independence from the State Union of Serbia and Montenegro.

14 Environmental protection: At what cost?



SYED MANSUR HASHIM

The honourable minister of environment and forests informed the public during the current session of parliament on May 29 that traditional brick kiln owners in the country are "advised" to move on environmentally friendly "zigzag" or "Hoffman kilns" by September of this year, or face closure. Needless to say, we laud the minister's commitment to reducing, by half, the annual carbon emissions of the country's existing brick kilns in a mere three months. Perhaps the exuberance of the government has something to do with Asian Development Bank's \$50 million loan earmarked for Bangladesh to be lent through local banks to help brick kiln owners make the switch to less-damaging technology.

Were a mere \$50 million fund enough to mitigate the problems of nearly 5,000 brick kilns operating in the country, most of our pollution-related problems would undoubtedly be taken care of in the shortest span of time. Alas, things are seldom that simple. The bulk of the kilns in operation today operate on outdated technology, i.e. "Bull's Trench Kiln" (BTK) that has been around for nearly two centuries. It is notoriously inefficient in its energy usage. This view is supported by UN's "Financing Brick Kiln Efficiency Improvement Project" that is providing the \$50 million assistance, which states: "There are six basic types of brick kilns in Bangladesh: (i) bull's trench kiln (BTK), (ii) fixed chimney kiln (FCK), (iii) improved zigzag kiln, (iv) vertical shaft brick kiln (VSBK), (v) Hoffman kiln, and (vi) tunnel kiln. From (i) to (vi), BTK is the least energy efficient and most polluting, and tunnel kiln is

among the most energy efficient and least polluting...FCK can be upgraded to improved zigzag kiln because of the similar technical design. Currently, 92% of the 4,880 brickfields in Bangladesh are using the highly polluting FCK design. Improved zigzag kilns, VSBKs, HHKs, and tunnel kilns are rare because of the lack of awareness of these technologies and inadequate market funding support."

As stated above, with more than 9 out of 10 kilns based on a combination of FCK and BTK technologies, it will be a monumental task to meet the deadline set by the ministry. According to one UN study conducted in 2007, "studies in the 1990's show that out of 14.8 million households,

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3.7 million or 25% used bricks as wall materials. Demand for bricks, which has been growing at about 10% over the last two decades, stems mainly from the growth of the construction industry which has been growing above GDP rates. GDP growth rates have averaged about 4% whereas the construction industry growth has been about 5.5% during this period."

According to Bangladesh Brick Manufacturing Owners Association (BMOA), 60% of all bricks produced in the country are utilised by various government departments that include amongst others, Public Works Department, Local Government Engineering Department and the Roads and Highways Department.

According to a recent World Bank report published this year -- "Introducing Energy-efficient Clean Technologies in the Brick Sector of Bangladesh" -- "Bangladesh's brick sector is characterised by outdated technologies with low energy efficiency and high emissions; low mechanisation rate; dominance of small-scale brick kilns with limited financial capacity; and dominance of single raw material (clay) and product (solid clay brick). Adopting gas-based cleaner technologies is hampered by serious energy shortage and land scarcity."

What has become abundantly clear is that while the current scenario is not sustainable and Bangladesh must

mate" requirement to conform with environmental needs; there is bound to be negative reaction from the industry on this latest "requirement," as espoused by the ministry of environment. More so, since the shift from BTK to Zigzag or HHK will double the initial investment of Tk.3 million to around Tk.6 million, and that too within the span of three months.

With little consistency in policymaking, where does one draw the line (from investors' perspective) that laws will not change again, say in five years' time? The other question that policymakers may choose to ponder upon is: If brick kiln owners decide to give up this business due to non-viability due to costs involved in replacing 50% of existing kilns, within the three months' stipulated timeframe, the first casualty will be the government projects and a \$1.2 billion per annum industry (contributing roughly 1% of the GDP) growing @ 2-3% a year, employing around 1 million people will be put in jeopardy.

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World Environment Day

Are you green?

MOHAMMAD SHAHIDUL ISLAM

Green economy will create many opportunities for entrepreneurs, scientists, engineers and decision makers willing to embrace changes. What the country needs to ensure is that whatever is done in this process should create win-win outcomes for all members of society and provide solutions to the challenges from climate change, population growth and other socio economic factors.

World Environment Day (WED) is being observed today with the theme "Green Economy: Does it include you?" WED is celebrated every year to raise global awareness of the need to take positive environmental action. It is run by the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP). UNEP's statement regarding WED-2012 is "Green economy is one that results in improved human well-being and social equity, while significantly reducing environmental risks and ecological scarcities. In its simplest expression, a green economy can be thought of as one which is low carbon, resource efficient and socially inclusive."

Today, it is necessary to focus not only on the environment of workplaces but also look at the macro- picture of how we can sustain businesses and employment in the light of what is happening in the real environment. It has come to a stage that changes are happening in the environment which directly impinge not only on the sustainability and stability of employment but also on the very existence of human life.

Therefore, promoting green jobs for a sustainable future is not the respon-

sibility of the government only but also of all who are genuinely interested in the well-being of the society. It is a fundamental social obligation of everyone. It is only through a multi-stakeholder dialogue that the country can truly move towards the path of green growth.

Green jobs, as defined by the ILO, are jobs that reduce environmental impact of enterprises and economic centres to sustainable levels. However, from employers' perspective, it is important to understand and appreciate the strategies that countries should take in relation to moving towards a green economy will have to

No doubt, earth is on fire and climate change is inevitable. But, it appears as if the business establishments don't take this seriously and for them its "business as usual." Industry has taken a lot from the world's natural pool of resources and in return has let out waste and pollutants into the environment. By doing this they have destroyed the biodiversity and balance of the ecological system.

The world is in the midst of a colossal shift. The decisions that are going to be made by emerging economic giants China and India will have a huge impact on the quality of life throughout the world. In the effort

istrative systems and political systems as well. National, cultural and political differences on these changes in structure should be overcome. These might be the guiding fundamentals when we explore the green economy. The priority economic sectors may be production of clean energy and focus on local and rural energy access; bio-diversely based business including organic agriculture; commercial forestry; fishing and marine based industries; natural resources based industries; and nature based tourism and social services.

Green economics is not just about the environment. Certainly we must move to harmonise with natural systems, to make our economies flow benignly like sailboats in the wind of ecosystem processes. But doing this requires great creativity, tremendous knowledge, and the widespread participation of everyone.

Human beings can no longer serve as cogs in the machine of accumulation, be it capitalistic or socialistic. Ecological development requires an unleashing of human development and an extension of democracy. Social and ecological transformation goes hand in hand.

Green economics and green politics both emphasise the creation of positive alternatives in all areas of life and every sector of the economy. Green economics does not prioritise support for either the "public" or the "private" sector. It argues that both sectors must be transformed so that markets express social and ecological values, and Bangladesh becomes merged with grass roots networks of community innovation.

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