

ACC a toothless tiger!

Why did you then preside over it?

THE outgoing chairman of ACC was indeed being frank but self-deprecatory when he termed the organisation a "toothless tiger." We recall his comments, made in the same vein soon after he assumed the office of Chairman when the ACC law was modified.

We had hoped that as the Chairman of ACC he would have protested the amendments, that in public perception had made the ACC a handmaiden of the government, and done his utmost to strengthen the commission to fight one of our worst malaise. Instead, he chose to preside over an institution whose performance in fighting corruption, in our estimate, was zero. It is a pity that he is leaving us with an ineffective anti-graft body.

We are flabbergasted by his stand on the Padma Bridge issue vis a vis the World Bank. What the WB wanted was an investigation into allegations of corruption conspiracy and not prosecution. It surprising that the ACC gave a clean chit to some without conducting proper investigation

It is disappointing that even on the eve of his departure the ACC Chairman could not find the courage to admit his own failures.

To be honest, our criticism is not against any person, but against the chair that the person holds. As an honourable man, which we believe he is, the Chairman ACC should have left office earlier rather than head an institution devoid of power to deliver.

Climatic change poses severe threats

Focus on long term mitigation

THE scientific report unveiled by World Bank this week paints a grim picture for Bangladesh in terms of climate-induced changes that pose a serious threat to poverty alleviation. Were we to take the findings at face value, a 2-degree increase in global temperature over the coming decades would result in severe heat waves that would cut food production and pose serious threat to infrastructure and adversely affect livelihoods of millions across the land.

Extreme floods, tropical cyclones, rising sea levels would mean that the impact of disasters would increase manifold for a country like ours. In a resource-constrained and over-populated country any reduction in agriculture production, fall in water resources, depletion of ecosystems would spell disaster, unless mitigation efforts are taken into consideration now. Poor harvests will propel a large number of rural and traditionally agriculture-based communities to migrate to the cities – that are already under stretched to the limit in terms of providing bare minimum services.

Since the forces of nature cannot be controlled, it falls upon policymakers to make preparations to meet challenges head on. In many respects, a lot of major work has already been undertaken, particularly in terms of early warning systems for flood and embankments. However, these will not be enough unless the global community wakes up to the necessity of putting a cap on greenhouse gas emissions. Countries like Bangladesh which will inevitably face the full brunt of these climatic changes need to be aided to prepare for the worst.



Guerrilla war over Grameen

SYED BADRUL AHSAN

THE government is truly in hyperactive mode. Of course, it's always a wonderful sight having an activist government in action, for that is what governments are expected to be. But, then, activism is always symbolic of positive action, of building bridges and institutions. In the present instance, governmental activism seems to be taking a reverse course. A commission appointed by the government has predictably recommended breaking up Grameen Bank into as many as nineteen different zones. If you ask the authorities why they are doing such a terrible thing, the likely response would be that decentralisation and therefore a delegation of responsibilities on a wider scale is always a most healthy thing.

That would be well put, except that the record of the Awami League government vis-à-vis Grameen Bank has nothing to do with decentralization. The aim here is to take over the organisation and reduce it to emasculation. Or it is to break it up into pieces and so render it impotent. To be sure, Grameen Bank is no embodiment of perfection. But it has given hope to many. Why drill holes through hope? For hope is what has historically carried us through all our little difficulties and huge impediments. If now we must be told that Grameen Bank is being restructured, our response will be simple: why not restructure politics first? Why not decentralise the state through empowering local bodies at all tiers?

The government's obsession with Grameen Bank has made big dents in its own reputation and embarrassed citizens to no end. Can someone call a halt to this guerrilla war? The sight of an entire government battling an individual, in this case a Nobel laureate, is not very edifying.

A gale of four cities

CROSS TALK

MOHAMMAD BADRUL AHSAN

The government can pat itself on the back if that makes it happy. It may brag about holding free and fair elections but the people aren't convinced. They have fired the warning shots from all four cities. How the government reacts is crucial because whether we are going to have elections or confrontation next time depends on it.

THE city corporation elections held on June 15 in Bangladesh has something in common with the War of 1812. Fought between the United States and the British Empire, historians still can't make up their mind as to which side had won it. Although the people have already elected their new mayors, our politicians, the masters of muddle that they are, continue to argue over who must have actually won those elections. The opposition BNP may be on cloud nine after its candidates swept in all four cities, but even the prime minister insists that it has been a victory for her government.

Like many other things in our life, this discourse is also divided. The ruling party leaders, workers and sympathisers argue that the primary objective of the elections was not to win but to show that this government is capable of holding neutral and fair elections. They expect this game plan to convince the opposition to abandon its movement for a caretaker government like cranky babies are pacified with candies.

The opposition naturally opposes. It steadfastly maintains that the victory of its candidates has been nothing but an emphatic rejection of this government by people. Some of its leaders have claimed that the government has lost its moral right to rule after losing those elections. Others have asked the government to resign as soon as possible.

What about the voters who cast their votes? Many of them are the same people who last time had voted as enthusiastically for the same candidates whom they voted down this time. This is where things get murky. The outgoing mayors did impressive work in their respective cities. They have not been involved in any shocking scandals except for one or two of them who failed to balance the books on their assets, and one whose alleged second wife popped out like a rabbit from magician's hat.

To argue that the government may have given away these elections as a concession to the opposition is to deny the voters the credit they deserve. It was they who woke up in the morning, went to the polling centers, waited in long queues under the blazing sun and put the stamps on the ballot papers for their candidates of choice. Where then is the room for concession from the government in this entire process?

MAHMOOD HASAN

THE 39th G8 summit was hosted by British Prime Minister David Cameron at the Lough Erne Resort, a golf course, in Northern Ireland. Because of its remoteness there were not many protestors, as is normally not the case. Nevertheless, security around the resort was unprecedented, because of threat from Irish dissident IRA group.

Britain hosted the 2-day summit (June 17-18) for the sixth time since its inception in 1975. One of the reasons for holding the meeting in Lough Erne is to show that the long Protestant-Catholic conflict in Northern Ireland is over and there is harmony between the communities.

This annual informal gathering of eight leaders of the world's rich and powerful nations originally dealt with global trade and economic issues. Now it addresses global security, energy, development, environment and climate issues. These eight -- UK, US, France, Italy, Germany, Canada, Japan, Russia -- democratic capitalist nations account for 15% of the world population, 53% of global gross domestic product and 70% of global official development assistance.

As Chair of G8, David Cameron decided the agenda for this summit -- trade, tax and transparency -- dubbed "the three Ts."

The 22-page Final Communiqué released on June 18 dwells at length on the "three Ts." The 10-point "Lough Erne Declaration" commits the leaders to a set of actions on tax, trade and transparency.

Tax evasion has become a serious issue for countries of the world. Much of Europe's economic woes stems from rampant tax evasion, more by corporate houses than by individuals. As a result, governments across Europe have been borrowing money to bridge the gap between earnings and public spending and balance their budget, thereby making the Euro terribly weak.

The leaders agreed to crack down on multinationals that cause billions of dollars in lost revenues. Countries should change rules to stop companies running away with their profits to low tax jurisdictions. Companies should also know who really owns them. Tax authorities across the world should automatically share information to fight this scourge of tax evasion. Tax evasion problems are shared by developing countries too. Strong and effective regimes on money laundering and terrorist financing are also needed.

Trade is the engine of economic growth and job creation. The Western economies are still struggling to recover from the recession that hit them in 2008. Global economic prospect remain weak. The Communiqué supports free trade on a global scale and cuts all barriers to trade and investment, through WTO.

On transparency -- empowering people to hold governments and companies to account -- the leaders agreed to "Open Data Charter" to make budget data and other government information public.

The "three Ts" are indeed imaginative -- but how will developing nations get the benefits? Particularly, when they have low tax base and inefficient administration.

Apart from addressing economic issues the Summit also dealt with foreign policy issues. The Syrian war came to dominate the informal talks between President Vladimir Putin and the rest of the leaders. Serious disagreements surfaced between President Putin and President Obama. Putin, a strong supporter of President Bashar Al-

Yes, the government didn't do what it could have done. It could have rigged the elections if it wanted. It could have disrupted polls, snatched ballot boxes, interfered with the counting, and done countless other things in its bid to deprive the winners of their victories.

But has the government not done any of these things out of its choice? So close to the parliamentary elections and haunted by so many failures and mistakes already, the ruling party must have thought it better not to take that unnecessary risk. For sure, any government attempt to tinker with those elections would have hurt its credibility, and made the demand for a caretaker government more forceful and logical than before.

Sources inside the ruling party contend that they expected the incumbents to win because they had done so much to develop their cities while in office. Their party somehow failed to grasp the quintessential nature of Bangladeshi politics. What goes with the flow also slows with it. By the time that looked obvious, it was too late for the government to do anything.

One thing, however, can be argued. What do these elections prove? Did the candidates win because people love BNP more or because they hate Awami League more? The answer is that every five years people of this country are subjected to this cruel torture of having to choose between a rock and a hard place.

We don't know if the government has a card up its sleeve. We don't know if the government planned for this defeat or its plan got defeated in the end. But the huge voter turnout and wide margin between the winning and losing candidates in each of the four cities gives us only one conclusion. The voters, women in particular, had come to vote in large numbers with a vengeance on that day.

People determine winners in elections, whereas winners determine the fates of people in wars. But our politics blend both elements together. Politicians can't stand their opponents, and political parties want to eliminate each other. The irony of our democracy is that elections create a state of war every five years.

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A divided G8 Summit

Assad, was strongly opposed to US-EU decision to arm the rebels in Syria.

The two-year war in Syria has so far killed 93,000, with 4.2 million displaced internally and 1.6 million refugees in Turkey and Jordan.

Putin wanted a peace conference in Geneva attended by all the parties in the conflict to have a transitional government. "Of course our opinions don't coincide. But all of us want to stop the violence and we have to agree to push the parties to the negotiating table," Putin told reporters. Obama emphasized: "We're not taking sides in a religious war between Shia and Sunni" but aiming instead for a "stable, non-sectarian, representative government. We have to not rush into one more war in the Middle East." The two-hour meeting between Obama and Putin reflected the cold and tense demeanour of the two men.

David Cameron tried to build on the "common ground" rather than conclude the Summit divided over Syria. The Final Communiqué says all "committed to achieving a political solution to the crisis based on a vision for a united, inclusive and democratic Syria" and strongly endorses the decision to hold the Geneva Conference on Syria. Though Putin was isolated at first, he finally got his way.

The Communiqué also referred to Libya, two-state



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solution for Palestine, Afghanistan, Iran's nuclear programme and North Korea.

One wonders whether the G8 leaders are really powerful enough to control the global economy -- now that Brazil, India, and China are strong rising economic powers. G8 no longer tops the list of economies in terms of economic size. China, the world's second largest economy after US, was absent from the meeting -- as it is not a "democracy" as understood in the West.

The much hyped US-EU free trade deal, which is under negotiation now, is said to be crucial for reviving the world economy. But will it really make trade freer between nations and create the jobs so badly needed? Besides, all the Western economies are grossly indebted. The WTO has repeatedly failed to remove the myriad barriers that the developed nations imposed on the developing world.

As far as Syria is concerned, the Summit did a patch work to gloss over the clear rift between the positions of Russia and the West. Even the Geneva negotiations are unlikely to produce a quick settlement of the conflict.

Past G8 summits have made tall promises but could not deliver. Critics have dubbed it "talking shop." Let us hope this time they will deliver.

The writer is a former ambassador and secretary.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Week's Best

Terrorism that makes no news

Terrorists are not always little armed individuals or groups who commit atrocities. The biggest and worst terrorists are nations who commit atrocities with their armies, who wage what they call "war" but which differs from terrorism only in scale, for war is often terrorism on a massive scale, conducted with planes and tanks and bombs and tens of thousands of soldiers.

Yet war is somehow considered more palatable by the world, for it is conducted by national terrorists, while terrorism is condemned because it is conducted by individual terrorists. My heart goes out to each side, and I long to see the senseless killing, maiming and destruction stop.

Israel is the occupying power, for it has driven the Palestinians from their land, it surrounds or occupies their cities, makes use of them as cheap labor, like the slaves of old, and humiliates or slaughters their men, women, and children. Israeli terrorism happens every day in out-of-the-way corners that make no news or no waves.

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"Nationalism in the sub-continent"

I wholeheartedly agree with the views expressed by Prof. Mufakharul Islam (DS 16-6-2013). While I was studying in the UK, one of my Indian Hindu colleagues described the Muslim rule as "the darkest period of Indian history". More brazenly dangerous was his sweeping personal opinion that all Indian Muslims are Pakistanis at heart! I am more than certain that this view is not shared by the vast majority of Indians, both Hindus and Muslims, just as most of us have no reason to doubt the loyalty and patriotism of our non-Muslim brothers.

S. Ahmed
Gulshan, Dhaka

Industrialisation vs. water pollution

Water is a vital element for all living things. We are using only 0.03 percent of the vast water body, whereas 99.97 percent remain unused because of being salty. But this 0.03 percent is not being used properly. We are indiscriminately polluting water by industrial waste, chemical fertiliser and pesticides, medical and human wastes, etc. It seems we do not care about water pollution; our only concerns are production and revenue. It is high time we rethought our priorities about industrialisation vis-à-vis water pollution and conservation of environment. The government should implement the industrial law properly to keep the water bodies safe.

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Is motorised rickshaw safe?

Dhaka is known as the "Rickshaw Capital of the World." Dhaka's streets are dominated by human-driven rickshaws. But now quite a number of motorised rickshaws are also seen in the main streets of the capital. These battery-powered rickshaws run through the streets with greater speed. If hit by any other vehicle or any obstruction, there is every possibility that these types of rickshaws may break apart because of their frail structure. It is not known whether these motorised rickshaws have been given license to operate in the streets of Dhaka.

The authorities concerned may adopt some policy for manufacturing and operating such motorised rickshaws.
Professor M Zahidul Haque
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Comments on news report, "Worst awaits the best?", published on June 19, 2013

Snr Citizen

Clear manifestation of authoritarianism. I hope our government leaves it (GB) the way it has been working and being crowned with laurels.

Md Abu Yusuf

Unfortunately, government is leading towards a disastrous situation. Enough damage has been done by the so-called advisors of the government on this issue. Still a few days are in hand to rectify the blunders of the government.

Abul Kashem

The government authorities concerned have much more tasks to perform than making such useless enmities.

Nazmul Haq

The Grameen Bank has much juice in it. They want to squeeze it and enjoy the juice. They want to make it their personal bank, so they can loot the assets of poor hardworking women of Bangladesh.

Merina Parvin

Well, nothing seems to affect the global image of our Nobel laureate, does it?