

PM's scare tactics

Meaningful politics is the need

PRIME Minister Sheikh Hasina has warned Opposition Leader Khaleda Zia that the latter's advocacy of a caretaker government could well boomerang on both of them in the sense that such a government could end up staying in power forever and sending them to prison. Frankly, one does not quite understand what the prime minister means by the scare tactics and the term 'forever'. Why is she so certain she will be taken to jail? What has she done that she has such fears?

But what concerns us is the scare tactics Sheikh Hasina appears to be employing against those calling for a restoration of the caretaker system. Our point is simple: it is time for the government and the opposition to engage on the issue. The reason is obvious: what the country needs today is a preservation and strengthening of democracy. To that end, whatever degree of compromise or negotiation is necessary, let it happen.

The prime minister has consistently been drawing attention to the nation's experience of the last caretaker government. That sounds rather intriguing, for the fact remains that she welcomed it "as the harvest of her own movement." Had it not been for that government, the free and fair elections which led the Awami League to victory in 2008 would not be possible simply because of the fake voters with which the voters' list was replete. Besides, to argue now that a return to a caretaker system could take the country back to a long period of undemocratic rule is to ignore the objective realities in 2006-2008 and now. Then it was a matter of cleaning up a mess created by lajuddined caretaker government. Today, the problem is simply one of organizing clean, credible elections in the interest of democratic continuity.

The prime minister's position is thus fallacious. One has hardly any reason to agree with it.

Where is Jahangir?

Calls for a public statement

NO one seems to know where AL-rebel candidate running for Gazipur City Corporation poll has ended up. Were eyewitness accounts found to be true that Jahangir had indeed been picked up by pro-AL activists, then where does that leave us and our commitment to democracy? Jahangir's disappearance on the back of AL choosing Ajmat as its Gazipur mayoral candidate in preference to Jahangir who enjoys considerable popularity appeared to have propelled his disappearance. Such unfair tactic obviously does not sit in with democratic norms.

The police's role appears to have been wrapped in a mystery. They should be obliged to find his whereabouts with a sense of urgency.

We strongly condemn any effort to forcibly prevent or remove a candidate from the race. This culture of intimidation is in direct contravention with integrity of standard electoral practice and a violation of a citizen's fundamental rights. If public contests should endanger the safety of anyone aspiring to be a candidate, even in an independent capacity, then how are we going to uphold people's right to franchise?

We feel there should be a public statement, both from the party and government levels, as to what is being done to get Jahangir back and help end the anxiety of the family as well as the people of the constituency.

BUDGET 2013-14

Education weakened

ALAMGIR KHAN

THE finance minister thinks that his ambitious Tk.222,491 crore budget is achievable. But his proposal for expenditure on education is not only without any ambition, it is hopeless.

The finance minister has proposed Tk.260,93 crore for education and technology, which is 11.7% of the total budget, but it was 12.3% for FY09. Dr. Mirza Azizul Islam, former Advisor to the then caretaker government wrote in *The Daily Star* (June 15): "The reduction of allocation to health and education militates against development of human resources."

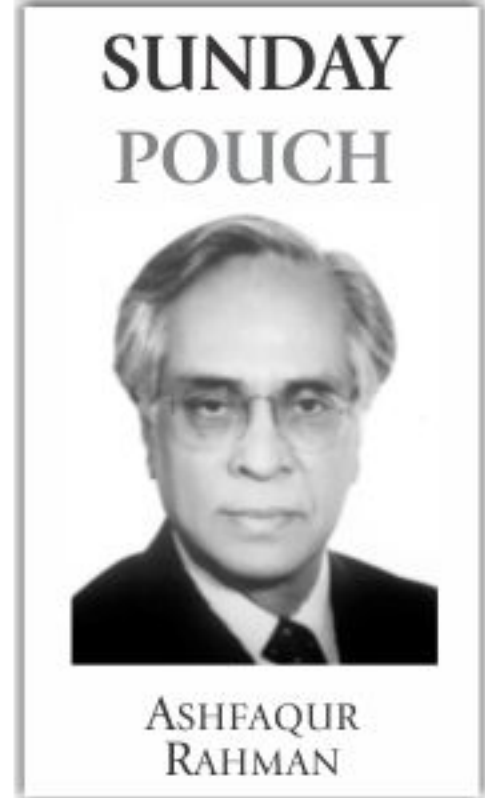
The minister admits there are still villages without any school and many children out of school.

He said: "We have selected 1,383 villages without primary schools, to establish primary schools there." He said the achievements in the development and expansion of education have been acclaimed by the global community. They are: improved primary education curricula, updated history of Liberation War, incorporation of life-sketch of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in the curriculum, reorganisation of school managing boards, new rules for transfer and posting of government primary school teachers and formulation of a policy for non-formal education.

The education minister has expressed his frustration for years that public expenditure on education is very low. In 2011, at the Annual Ministerial Review Meeting of the UN Economic and Social Council, Mr. Nahid spoke of the government's commitment "towards gradually enhancing our budget allocation for education to 6% of GDP or at least 20% of national budget." Now, with allocation of only 2.1% of GDP for FY14, is there is any sign of this commitment?

Mr. Mohammad Badrul Ahsan expressed his dismay in this newspaper that this "budget won't fly." But, in this budget, education has not been given the chance of standing up, let alone fly.

The writer is Research and Publication Officer, Centre for Development Innovation and Practices (CDIP).



SUNDAY POUCH

RECENTLY, Foreign Minister Dipu Moni informed our Parliament that the Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA) based in the Hague, Netherlands, is expected to deliver its judgment on the maritime boundary dispute with India by the middle of next year. Oral hearing of the case by the five members of the PCA would start this December. Bangladesh in the meantime had submitted a 'memorial' in May 2011 which was countered by India with its own 'memorial' in January 2013. Then Bangladesh submitted the required papers to lay its claim to territorial waters, Exclusive Economic Zone up to 200 nautical miles and Continental Shelf up to 350 nautical miles from the baseline. PCA has fixed July 31 this year to hear India's rejoinder on this issue. The expected oral hearings will then take place in December.

It may be recalled that India and Bangladesh had approached the Arbitration Court in 2009 to resolve the dispute over the maritime boundary between the two countries. It is therefore pertinent to examine the nature of the dispute, what the claims are of India and Bangladesh and what are the international principles usually applied to resolve such disputes.

The maritime boundary between India and Bangladesh is not delineated. Both the countries co-occupy 180 km of a maritime borderline. Hence, there have always been claims and counter-claims and overlapping claims. The issue came to a head after India discovered huge hydrocarbon deposits in the Bay of Bengal. India, it was reported, was keen to 'box' out Bangladesh from the Bay so as to be able to exploit these resources. But this could only be done if the maritime border was drawn by India at an acute angle from the coastal base line.

India's came in late 1971, when a small island unexpectedly appeared 3.5 km from the mouth of Hariabhanga river, which served as the border river between the two countries in the south west part of Bangladesh. As per the Thalweg doctrine, when a river separates two nations, the middle of the deepest channel serves as the borderline. Because of this principle, the flow of the river Hariabhanga became a source of the maritime dispute.

Even in those early days of Bangladesh, a joint survey with India was suggested to determine the position of navigable main deep water channel of Hariabhanga. The critical point was that if the deep water ran west of the island, Bangladesh would have its rightful claim. However, if the flow was deepest on the eastern side of the river, then Bangladesh would be 'boxed' out of the Bay as India intended. India said no to the joint survey as it said that the island was already Indian territory. In fact, India went to the British Admiralty to officially put the island, to be called New Moore island, as its own on the admiralty chart. Bangladesh contested this and named the island South Talpatti.

In 1975, Indian Border Security Force (BSF) installed concrete pillars and a billboard with the Indian flag, thereby claiming it as 'its territory.' Bangladesh had to send its naval

AMARTYA SEN

MODERN India is, in many ways, a success. Its claim to be the world's largest democracy is not hollow. Its media is vibrant and free; Indians buy more newspapers every day than any other nation. Since independence in 1947, life expectancy at birth has more than doubled, to 66 years from 32, and per-capita income (adjusted for inflation) has grown fivefold. In recent decades, reforms pushed up the country's once sluggish growth rate to around 8 percent per year, before it fell back a couple of percentage points over the last two years. For years, India's economic growth rate ranked second among the world's large economies, after China, which it has consistently trailed by at least 1 percentage point.

The hope that India might overtake China one day in economic growth now seems a distant one. But that comparison is not what should worry Indians most. The far greater gap between India and China is in the provision of essential public services -- a failing that depresses living standards and is a persistent drag on growth.

Inequality is high in both countries, but China has done far more than India to raise life expectancy, expand general education and secure health care for its people. India has elite schools of varying degrees of excellence for the privileged, but among all Indians 7 or older, nearly one in every five males and one in every three females are illiterate. And most schools are of low quality; less than half the children can divide 20 by 5, even after four years of schooling.

India may be the world's largest producer of generic medicine, but its health care system is an unregulated mess. The poor have to rely on low-quality -- and sometimes exploitative -- private medical care, because there isn't enough decent public care. While China devotes 2.7 percent of its gross domestic product to government spending on health care, India allots 1.2 percent.

India's underperformance can be traced to a failure to learn from the examples of so-called Asian economic development, in which rapid expansion of human capability is both a goal in itself and an integral element in achieving rapid growth. Japan pioneered that approach, starting after the Meiji Restoration in 1868, when it resolved to achieve a fully literate society within a few decades. As Kido Takayoshi, a leader of that reform, explained: "Our people are no different from the Americans or Europeans of today; it is all a matter of education or lack of education." Through investments in education and health care, Japan simultaneously enhanced living standards and labor productivity - the government collaborating with the market.

Despite the catastrophe of Japan's war years, the lessons of its development experience remained and were followed, in the postwar period, by South Korea, Taiwan, Singapore and other economies in East Asia. China, which during the

Maritime boundary dispute with India

units to challenge this claim on the island. Then, in 2010, it was reported that just as suddenly as the island appeared, it also disappeared from the Bay. It had submerged into the sea. A crisis was averted but the problem of demarcating the maritime border between the two countries still remained.

Several issues need, therefore, to be determined when delimiting the maritime border between India and Bangladesh. First is the definition of territorial waters. Usually, this refers to a belt of coastal waters extending up to 12 nautical miles from the 'baseline' of a coastal state. The 'baseline' is a line connecting low water marks closest to its shore. The UN Convention of the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) gives all coastal states full sovereignty within these territorial waters. India insists that Bangladesh comply with the same low water baseline concept. But Bangladesh is a delta and has a very uneven and unstable coastline, as numerous rivers empty into the Bay of Bengal. In 1974, Bangladesh refused to follow the concept and instead endorsed the system of a straight base line. Under Article 7 of UNCLOS, a straight base line is accepted where a region is characterised by islands or is deeply indented or is unstable.

The second determination is related to the direction the maritime borderline should be drawn to establish the maritime zones in the Bay of Bengal. India wants to delineate its 200 mile Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) by applying the 'equidistance principle' from its coastline. But this can be applied where the border of adjacent nations is located in a contiguous coastline. If this principle is used Bangladesh will then become a 'zone locked' country in the Bay of Bengal.

Bangladesh applies the 'equitable principle' based on a straight baseline. It emphasises equity to produce an equitable solution to overlapping boundary claims. A boundary based on equity will take into account all equitable variables, combine them and then balance the relative weight of each factor. The 'equitable' principle had been successfully applied by the ICJ when deciding the 1969 North Sea Continental Shelf where a situation similar to Bangladesh prevails. In 1983, the case of Guinea and Guinea-Bissau was also decided using this principle.

The matter of Continental Shelf up to 350 nautical miles is the next determination that has to be done by the PCA. On this matter, papers based on scientific survey will speak for themselves. But, in principle, equity must play its due role here too.

There is no doubt that both the countries have much at stake on fair maritime border delimitation. But it must be remembered that Bangladesh has, in percentage terms, a much bigger stake than India. The Bay of Bengal is our only sea and we are heavily dependent on its resources. India enjoys a much larger coastline in the Bay than Bangladesh. In addition, it has the Indian Ocean and the Arabian Sea.

If the maritime border delimitation is done to the satisfaction of stake holders there will be little reason why the two countries cannot cooperate and work together in the Bay for their mutual benefit. There are other issues that must also be addressed jointly by the two countries, like climate change, sedimentation, subsidence, as well as maritime security. Peaceful settlement of the maritime border issues will indeed open up huge opportunities to both the countries to work together and prosper.

The writer is a former Ambassador and a commentator on current affairs.
E-mail: ashfaq303@gmail.com

| The New York Times EXCLUSIVE

Why India trails China

Mao era made advances in land reform and basic education and health care, embarked on market reforms in the early 1980s; its huge success changed the shape of the world economy. India has paid inadequate attention to these lessons.

Is there a conundrum here that democratic India has done worse than China in educating its citizens and improving their health? Perhaps, but the puzzle need not be a brainteaser. Democratic participation, free expression and rule of law are largely realities in India, and still largely aspirations in China. India has not had a famine since independence, while China had the largest famine in recorded history, from 1958 to 1961, when Mao's disastrous Great Leap Forward killed some 30 million people. Nevertheless, using democratic means to remedy endemic problems -- chronic undernourishment, a disorganized medical system or dysfunctional school systems -- demands sustained deliberation, political engagement, media coverage, popular pressure. In short, more democratic process, not less.

In China, decision making takes place at the top. The country's leaders are skeptical, if not hostile, with regard to the value of multiparty democracy, but they have been strongly committed to eliminating hunger, illiteracy and medical neglect, and that is enormously to their credit.

There are inevitable fragilities in a nondemocratic system because mistakes are hard to correct. Dissent is dangerous. There is little recourse for victims of injustice. Edicts like the one-child policy can be very harsh. Still, China's present leaders have used the basic approach of accelerating development by expanding human capability with great decisiveness and skill.

The case for combating debilitating inequality in India is not only a matter of social justice. Unlike India, China did not miss the huge lesson of Asian economic development, about the economic returns that come from bettering human lives, especially at the bottom of the socioeconomic pyramid. India's growth and its earnings from exports have tended to depend narrowly on a few sectors, like information technology, pharmaceuticals and specialized auto parts, many of which rely on the role of highly trained personnel from the well-educated classes. For India to match China in its range of manufacturing capacity -- its ability to produce gadgets of almost every kind, with increasing use of technology and better quality control -- it needs a better-educated and healthier labor force at all levels of society. What it needs most is more knowledge and public discussion about the nature and the huge extent of inequality and its damaging consequences, including for economic growth.

The writer, a Nobel laureate, is a professor of economics and philosophy at Harvard. He is the author, with Jean Dr  ze, of *An Uncertain Glory: India and Its Contradictions*.

  New York Times. Distributed by the New York Times Syndicate.

LETTERS

TO THE EDITOR

letters@thedailystar.net

Ensure equal job opportunity

The government can provide accommodation, food and clothing, treatment and social safety to freedom fighters (FFs)' families as they made supreme sacrifices in our Liberation War. But why provide quotas for their sons and daughters and family members after 42 years of independence? Ridiculously, now it has been extended to their grandsons and granddaughters. Article no. 29 of our constitution says 'equality of opportunity in public employment.' Now where is the equality? **Misbah Uddin Sumon**
Department of Tourism and Hospitality Management University of Dhaka

Reinstate CTG system

In the four city corporation elections, BNP candidates won the race. The failure of Awami League-led government in many sectors in the last four years is the reason behind it.

But these elections can not be compared with the general election. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and other ministers are saying that the opposition has nothing to fear, that the general elections will also be conducted in a free and fair manner and there is no need for a caretaker government. They may say what they wish, but the people will not participate in the general election if the caretaker government system is not reinstated.

So, the government must not waste time anymore and take necessary steps to implement it.

Nur Jahán
Chittagong

A father's interview

The other evening I was listening to Radio Foorti. RJ Nawaf was very aptly hosting 'Dhaka Calling' with tracks of some lovely songs. In between the programme, an interview with the host's father was presented as part of the 'Father's Day' celebration. Nawaf's father Mr. Naser narrated his thrilling experiences of being the first Bangladeshi cyclist to go on a world tour with an ordinary bicycle at a very tender age. He travelled up to Iran via India and Pakistan in 1978 with his cousin Tamu.

In his concluding remarks Mr. Naser left one important piece of advice: "A cyclist or any other person should not smoke cigarette because smoking destroys the energy of life."

RJ Nawaf's conducting of the interview was very lively. Radio Foorti deserves appreciation for airing such an interesting and entertaining programme.

Professor M. Zahidul Haque
Dean, Faculty of Agriculture SAU, Dhaka

Politicians setting bad examples

Children are supposed to learn from the elders. But what examples are they leaving for us? We often come across reports on corruption, negligence on the part of authorities, especially of our politicians. It is sad to know that many of the so-called civilised people are on the wrong path of falsehood. What should we learn from them? Political leaders, please, stop lying for the sake of your children.

Ahmed As Sami
Anandeniketan School, Sylhet

Comments on news report "Fakhrul terms PM comments seditious," published on June 20, 2013

Wind

The tenure of Fakhruddin Ahmed was much more smart and helpful for the poor people. So a good, powerful and authoritative tenure is not absolutely bad to remove corruption, money laundering, looting public property, etc.

Mohidul Saad

The fact is that, after the disaster in the four city corporation elections, Awami League is going to be very reluctant to hold a national election under non-political government.

"ACC chief refutes WB report" (June 20, 2013)

Zman7

The WB's position is that the ex-communications minister Abul Hossain "must have been involved in the corruption conspiracy" and hence "to be implicated in the corruption case" on grounds that he was the boss of the ministry. However, terming the WB's claim irrational, the ACC Chairman said "the chief of an organisation or a ministry could not be held responsible for everything that happened there," but the then chief (Abul Hossain) "will be indicted if any proof of corruption is found against him." And my vote goes to the ACC chairman, for making sound and valid argument.

Shahin Huq

In order to avoid further embarrassment and humiliation, isn't it better to accept the truth? Please let us be united against corruption and put our country's interests above individuals'. Please think about the poor people of Bangladesh who do not have enough to eat, and please do not embezzle public money for your luxury.