

The Sunderbans under threat

Address the concerns with urgency

WE share the concerns of the environmentalists regarding the danger faced by the Sunderbans. Our concerns stem from the two projects the government is planning to set up in the very close vicinity of the forest.

One need hardly emphasise the importance of the world's largest mangrove forest to our ecology. It is the repository of a large variety of flora and fauna. It provides sanctuary to nearly 60 varieties of bird life. It is also a natural barrier to tidal surge. The Sunderbans has already come under threat due to unplanned tourism.

We strongly urge the government to go further into the profit-gain analysis before going ahead with the Rampal power plan. There is need to not only delve further in to the economics of the scheme, the deleterious impact on the environment of this coal-fired project should also be reevaluated. Admittedly, an environmental management plan has been worked out to address different areas of concern, but both the efficacy of the plan and the continued resource availability is not fully guaranteed.

To add to its woes, the projected ship-breaking yard in Barguna Upazilla happens to be only six kilometers from the Sunderbans. And the government has decided to build the yard on an area covering more than 52 acres of land even after the local forest department as well as the department of environment has advised against it. Given Sitakund experience we cannot but be alarmed at the idea of a ship breaking yard so close to the Sunderbans.

Peace in the Middle East

Substance, not symbolism, is called for

THE peace process, or something like it, is once more moving in the Middle East. There are two ways of looking at it. The first and more improbable one is that Benjamin Netanyahu and Mahmoud Abbas have suddenly discovered the joy that comes of good neighbourly relations. The second and more likely one is that the US administration of President Barack Obama now feels a new momentum toward a deal between the Palestinians and the Israelis is not only necessary but also possible.

That last bit, given the recent history of American diplomacy, sounds rather predictable. Every US president since Richard Nixon has usually opted to go for a push for peace in the Middle East given that a second term in the White House has generally been regarded as a lame duck affair. As for President Obama, the enthusiasm with which he dealt with Middle Eastern leaders at the beginning of his presidency in early 2009 has over the years been dampened by the realities on the ground. Or call them hurdles, given Israel's intransigence over the continued building of Jewish settlements on occupied Arab land.

Now that Secretary of State John Kerry has talked to Israeli and Palestinian leaders on his trip to the region, interest in fresh chances for peace takes centre stage once more, especially when both sides are likely to meet in Washington. Israel has agreed to free some long-serving Palestinian prisoners in its jails as a gesture of goodwill. That is a good beginning. But mere symbolism cannot be a substitute for substance. Both

India can learn from Bangladesh's success

PAUL HOWARD and MOAZZEM HOSSAIN

PROFESSOR Amartya Sen and Jean Dreze have recently published a volume called, *An Uncertain Glory: India and its Contradictions*, in which Professor Sen strongly criticised India's non-achievement in sanitation access even after this nation's recent economic prosperity. When comparing with India's neighbours, he was disappointed that India placed well behind Bangladesh.

Compared to its immediate neighbours, on an aggregate nationally, India performs relatively poorly in terms of improved and shared sanitation access. For example, India, with 53% access (improved plus shared facilities) to sanitation performs poorly relative to Pakistan (54%) and Bangladesh (81%) in 2010. Comparing this national performance in rural and urban terms, the difference at urban level in India (77%) is lower against Bangladesh (83%) and Pakistan at 78%.

At the rural level, the difference has been phenomenal. For example, in Pakistan, 40% of the rural population have access to an improved plus shared sanitation facility, which is significantly higher than the 27% of rural people in India. In stark contrast to both India and Pakistan, in Bangladesh 80% of rural people has access to sanitation. This raises the question of why Bangladesh has been outperforming Pakistan and India. The main reason is availability of microfinance to the poor in rural areas. Bangladesh is the home of large microfinance institutions (MFIs) of the world such as Brac, Grameen Bank, Asa, and so on (this also got mentioned in Sen's observations on July 16).

Within India, the Ministry of Drinking Water and Sanitation (MDWS) has been working on the improvement in sanitation coverage tirelessly through its Total Sanitation Campaign (TSC) programme. According to the MDWS, there is a great variation in access to sanitation, particularly in rural areas. For example, as of the 2011 census, the poorest performing state, Jharkhand, only had 8.3% coverage, a modest increase from 2001 (6.57%). In stark contrast to this was the best performing state, Kerala, which recorded 94.4% coverage in 2011, a solid increase from 81.33% coverage in 2001. With such a huge variation in levels of sanitation infrastructure between states, vast rural India has a major challenge in hand to build sanitation facilities in the years to come. Certainly, India can learn from Bangladesh's success.

The writers teach at Griffith Business School, Griffith University, Australia.

Compensation for Rana Plaza victims: A forgotten issue?

ANU MUHAMMAD

IT is really unbelievable! Nearly 3 months have passed since the deadly factory collapse on April 24, but no compensation for the families of the killed and injured has been declared, not to say payment of that to the families now living in utter distress. The prime minister has handed over some money, collected through donation, to a few hundred families. That can be called preliminary help, not compensation, but that also stopped since June 19.

Is the compensation issue forgotten or is there an attempt to bypass it? Even after the death of more than 1,100 workers in Rana Plaza, no significant initiative from the BGMEA or the government was seen that could mark a change of attitude, though we have learned of international conferences and consultations that ended up with some promises and plans.

On July 8, the International Labour Organization (ILO) along with European Union (EU) and the Government of Bangladesh had declared a major "compact" to improve labour rights, working conditions and factory safety in the readymade garment industry in Bangladesh. They concluded with commitments from all the parties concerned to a number of time-bound actions, including reforming the Bangladesh Labour Law to strengthening workers' rights; improving building and fire safety by June 2014, and recruiting 200 additional inspectors by the end of 2013.

These are undoubtedly important and primary steps. Question is, what prevented the government and BGMEA from taking these initiatives on their own? Why did they have to wait for the "carrot or stick" threat from the EU commissioner to declare some very preliminary steps? If initiatives do not come from within, will that work in the end? The government declared the budget 6 weeks after Rana Plaza disaster. But that disaster could not move it to allocate funds to improve monitoring system for the garments industry and to strengthen institutions for efficient rescue operation.

On July 10, seventeen North American retailers, including Wal-Mart and Gap, formed the 'Alliance for Bangladesh Worker Safety Initiative' and undertook a five-year plan that set timelines and accountability for inspections, training and worker empowerment. It was said that the members of the alliance would provide the funding necessary over the five-year period—currently at \$42 million and growing—to support the specific programmes of the initiative. Some companies offered an additional combined total of over \$100 million in loans and access to capital to assist factory owners they work with in Bangladesh for factory safety improvements.

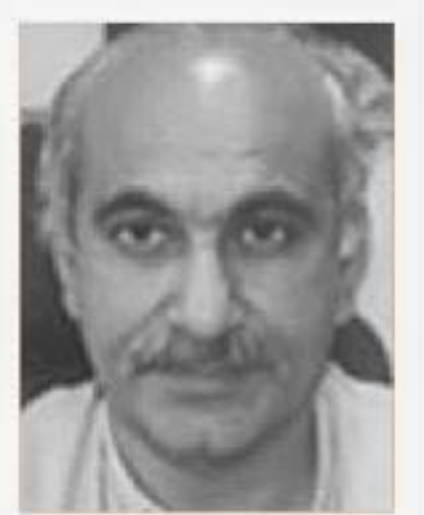
These sound good, yet they are not enough. However, all depends on how the owners, brand retailers and of course the government behave on the ground.

The Obama administration announced plans on June 27 to suspend 'trade privileges' for Bangladesh over "concerns about safety problems and labour rights violations" in the country's garment industry. It seems that the US administration has been very worried about safety of the workers and labour rights; therefore it is punishing guilty owners by withdrawing some facilities so that they change their behaviour. But the question is what trade privileges were given, prior to that declaration, to Bangladesh garments in the first place? Who will actually be affected by this punishment?

A partial answer can be found in the *New York Times* report, which said: "The suspension (of GSP) would be largely symbolic because it will affect less than 1% of America's \$4.9 billion in annual imports from Bangladesh."

Money shouts, conscience merely murmurs

BYLINE



M.J. AKBAR

everyone saw, except for the umpire who, being eyeless, shall be left nameless. Broad knew he was out. Honour demanded voluntary departure from the crease; he chose to wait for the jury to make a mistake even when he knew he was guilty.

For you, lolling on a sofa, or, if a cricket junkie, watching the match on television, any debate with conscience may seem merely theoretical. But is it any the less important? For the debate is about values. Is honesty dispensable? Are survival and success the only priorities in life?

Cricket, like existence, is not always black and white. There are situations in which a batsman has every right to hold his ground against a chorus of theatrical appeals, because he is genuinely uncertain, most often in a leg-before-wicket decision, or when a catch has not gone cleanly to hand. Innovations like the technology-driven third umpire have been created to find light through grey space. But Stuart Broad's case is worth mention precisely because there was huge daylight between black and white. He was out. Everyone on the field, and millions outside, knew the truth.

Honour was once essential to the spirit of cricket. Bad behaviour, caused by temperament or the pressures of sport, was a discrepancy. No one has ever wanted to fail through the long history of human endeavour, and yet cricket looked down upon success without honour. In the larger field of life, honour bred the honours system, which was society's way of recognising merit. You could, of course, occasionally buy your way to a gong, for money always talks. But money used to speak in a whisper. Today it shouts. The little murmur of conscience is lost in such noise.

Cricket was always proud to place itself on a pedestal, even when inconsistencies existed lower down. Till the 1950s, there was obnoxious class distinction, in which the

Why is that? Simply because Bangladesh garments had never been under GSP facility of the US. According to the US trade representative policy, not only BD garments, but garments in general have mostly been excluded from the GSP facility to protect their own factories. The 1% value of the export items from Bangladesh to the US that got this facility includes ceramic goods, plastic, toys, etc. Ironically, the US administration did not have any complaint against those factories, but they are being punished by this US step. Things stand like this: the US has 'suspended' GSP facility to BD garments that it does not and never did provide. And it was done 'over concerns about safety problems and labour rights violations.' Is it a joke or psychological pressure for something else, as well for hiding the reality from its own citizens to confuse them?

What will be the impact of this so-called GSP suspension? Nothing in terms of export flow of garments, that will continue with high rate of duties as before. However, one may fear one possibility though. A chain of actions may take place; brand retailers and buying houses may push for further price cutting, owners may continue cost cutting to maintain their level of profit, which will all affect the workers adversely. If that happens, net result of the US 'pro-labour' punishment measure will end up with more hardship for labourers.

GSP facility is not something from which only LDCs get benefit, it gives benefits to the brands and the consumers in the West too. Bangladesh deserves it because of WTO rules and global understandings regarding LDCs. However, Bangladesh has not only been deprived of GSP facility in the US, it is discriminated against by the US duty structure. When many other countries have a 1% tariff rate—some even less—as they enter the US market, Bangladesh garments sector faces 15% and more. This is a highly protectionist and discriminating policy of the US against Bangladesh.

Without asking the US to behave in line with the 'free market' principle that it claims to be the champion of, Bangladesh cabinet approved the Ticfa draft on June 17 as an attempt to please the US. In the public domain it was presented as a deal that would fight corruption, promote basic labour rights, and help expand trade and investment. The history of close ties of the US with corrupt and repressive rulers around the world suggests that the issues of corruption, environment and labour rights were put in the Ticfa document as ornaments. Moreover, expansion of trade and investment does not require Ticfa, we know that major trading partners of the US do not have Ticfa.

The main interests of the US, therefore, lie elsewhere, maybe 'to drive Bangladesh towards enforcing intellectual property rights' is one of them; 'to open its service sector to US investors' could be another. And to bring Bangladesh into bilateral obligation avoiding multilateral forum like WTO seems to be the most important objective. That would certainly give the US an effective instrument to twist arms and take strategic steps whenever necessary.

We have heard unclear statements from government spokespersons or BGMEA members that if Bangladesh signs Ticfa it will get GSP again! That will never happen. In fact, it is meaningless for Bangladesh to ask for GSP facility, since it would not bring anything better. Instead, Bangladesh should demand removal of the protectionist wall against its garments, and of the discriminating tariff structure imposed by the US.

Finally, in the last few days many promises were made, and international conferences were held that concluded with many programmes. But talk about compensation and necessary steps for the dead and injured is still missing!

The writer is Professor of Economics, Department of Economics, University of Dhaka.

amateur entered the field through the club gate, and professionals used a turnstile. A gentleman considered payment beneath his dignity, largely because he had enough money. The professional, from the working class, could not afford to take a week off from his job. But during the game honesty was not divisible by class.

We claim to live in a more egalitarian age, but we have turned "professional" into a synonym for amorality. Broad was exonerated because of his "professional" approach, as if honour is now a derisive hobby of the parson or a preacher.

Former England captain Tony Greig was an exemplar of this tough-guy saloon-bar approach to cricket. His counterpart, during a series in India, was the very opposite: a courteous, gentlemanly G.R. Viswanath. In one Test, Greig was given out when the English innings was tottering. There was obviously no review system. But Viswanath, to everyone's surprise, overturned the bemused umpire and asked Greig to play on. Was that the holy moment in

which Greig saw the light and converted to purity of thought and behaviour? No. He remained loyal to his tough school, where success is all that matters. Perhaps he privately laughed at Viswanath for being a sucker. Some cricketers still at the crease have resisted dining at this trough. Australian Adam Gilchrist famously walked against Sri Lanka in 2003, and South African Hashim Amla does not linger if he knows he is out. But both have an old-fashioned look about them.

So would you walk? The question is larger than cricket. Ministers, ordinary, extraordinary, chief or prime, do not walk when exposed as corrupt, or when atrocious administration kills children after a mid-day meal. Do those on lower rungs of power, whether secretary presiding over a department, or clerk guarding a file, walk away from a bribe? Do business executives walk away from offering one? What prevails in the constant battle between commerce and conscience? If we all walked away from temptation, wouldn't the world be a nice little Utopia?

The first commandment of contemporary religion is unambiguous: Thou shalt win. Everyone, as the saying goes, loves a winner. There is a second commandment: Thou shalt not be so stupid as to get caught. There is no third commandment. If Stuart Broad were only a cog in a game it might not matter, but he is also a role model for millions of young people. If survival by any means can guarantee heroism, then surely plain old morality sucks.

Enjoy the delicious fruits of survival. Don't walk.

The writer is Editor of *The Sunday Guardian*, published from Delhi, India on Sunday, published from London and Editorial Director, *India Today* and *Headlines Today*.

LETTERS

TO THE EDITOR

letters@thedailystar.net

Nanomedicine to treat cancer

A recent article of this daily told us about nanomedicine and its use in cancer treatment. But the article was too small to give us a clear idea. However, the developed countries are focusing on nanomedicine to find a cure for cancer. We have also heard about multifunctional nanomedicine. Scientists say this could be used for multiple purposes including cancer cell targeting, early cancer diagnosis and its treatment.

The conventional anti-cancer agents and chemotherapy have many negative aspects such as higher toxicity, higher expense, and non-specificity. Hope nanomedicine will provide better treatment to cancer patients all over the world.

Mobarak Ali
Gopibagh, Dhaka

Our daily need of water

It is widely recommended that a person should drink at least 8 glasses of water per day. The above equation suggests that each of the 8 glasses should contain 8 ounces of water, that is, 64 ounces per day. This water-intake suggestion was based on the recommendation by the Food and Nutrition Board of the National Research Council (USA) -- one milliliter of water for each food calorie ingested. But some scientists who tried to find out scientific basis for this recommendation couldn't find any evidence. Actually water intake for a person depends on his/her food and beverage consumption because these also provide sufficient amount of water to human body. The fact is, for keeping us healthy, sufficient amount of water intake is necessary.

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

Publish LLB final exam results

The LLB final examination of 2011 was held under the National University in 2012. We were eagerly waiting to appear in the Bangladesh Bar Council Advocateship Examination 2013. But the National University has not yet published our results. Usually, it takes 10 to 11 months to publish the result, which is very unfortunate. 12 to 14 lakh examinees of SSC and HSC get their results just within 2 months. Then why does the National University take such a long time to publish our results? We urge the authorities concerned to take immediate steps to publish the results of LLB final examination of 2011.

Ferdousi Jahan
Khilgaon, Dhaka

Comments on news report, "People fed up with errant politicians," published on July 20, 2013

S. M. Iftekhar Ahmed

Congratulations to the minister, for making such an honest and straightforward comment.

Shahin Huq

We have heard enough of your moral lectures. Please try to play some constructive role or keep quiet.

"PM's press secy. protests statement," (July 20, 2013)

SM

So did she or did she not make those comments in that "informal" meeting? That is not clear from the rejoinder. Secondly, if the papers were wrong, then why didn't the PM issue a rejoinder to disclaim it as the comment did carry quite grave allegations and surely have a negative impact on government's international relations?

Samih34

The protest from the prime minister through her press secretary is obviously based on their blind assumption that people are all fools except a few of them in power.

Zman7

So all the DS commentators did in fact react on the "unsubstantiated" and "completely baseless" information and apprehension! It is like "we ran behind the flying eagle" before checking anything. Unfortunately, the Yunus Centre spent so much energy by running so long. Thank God, nothing is lost and everything looks okay. The PM's PS made it clear that "the government has no intention to belittle the Nobel laureate" and Bangladesh's deep and friendly relations with Norway and the US will remain intact in the future.

Ash C.

The PM's comments as reported in TDS on July 12 were as usual compared to other comments she had made publicly in the past on Prof. Yunus. And we treated this particular one as 'the first day Ramadan greetings' to Prof. Yunus from Sheikh Hasina! However, now that the PM's press secretary has protested Yunus Centre's rejoinder as baseless, are we to assume that the AL minister / lawmaker, who confided to TDS about Sheikh Hasina's comments on Prof. Yunus at the high level meeting, is a liar?