

# The Daily Star

FOUNDER EDITOR  
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## Vanishing wetlands

Government's inaction unfortunate

IT is extremely disheartening to see the catchment areas in an around Dhaka city reducing at an increasing rate every year. More than 70 percent of the catchment areas in the eastern fringes of the city have already been filled up, illegally. And what is galling is the fact that there has been an increased propensity to grab more low lands ever since the government gazette on the Detailed Area Planning was issued in 2010. Not only wetlands but even parts of rivers that provide sustenance to the Capital have been illegally gobbled up.

The matter raises some serious concerns about not only a lack of commitment on the part of the successive governments but also collusion of the administration with the illegal land grabbers. The bleak picture was revealed at a seminar on "Saving Rivers and Water Bodies in an around Dhaka City" held in the Capital on Saturday.

That there has been a brazen lack of supervision is very clear. We call upon the relevant agencies of the government including the District Administration to explain how, in spite of the Gazette and judicial orders to protect wetlands, more than 700 acres of low lands, i.e. double the amount before the gazette was issued on October 22, 2010, have been filled up by land encroachers.

It is matter of life and death for Dhaka city that would become well nigh unlivable if the remaining water bodies are not spared the grabbers' clutch. The administration should move fast to arrest the situation

## UNSC resolution on Syria

Political transition is now the need

THE resolution adopted by the UN Security Council on Syria is a breather for a whole world. It puts on hold, at least for now and hopefully for good, any escalation in the conflict within Syria and any increase in tension around the globe. More importantly, the resolution is a sign of how diplomacy, given due emphasis in significant capitals of the world, can yet do all that is needed to roll back a crisis. With the United States in belligerent mood, with the British parliament having vetoed London's entry into a joint military programme with Washington over Syria, with the Russians not ready to countenance any strike on Syria, it was fair to suppose that all hell would break loose once again in the Middle East.

Well, hell has not broken loose. What remains to be done is for all parties to the conflict, especially the Assad regime, to convince the world that it will not do anything that will lead to the killing of more civilians in the country. At the same time, with suspicions about sarin nerve gas being used by anti-Assad rebels cropping up as well, the Syrian resistance must convince the world that its intentions remain focused on the creation of a decent, democratic Syria. That of course takes one back to the question of what President Bashar al Assad needs to do to help his country transit to a new, transparent political order. The regime is clearly damaged goods. It must rise above its naïve belief that it can carry on in power without accommodating those who want to see its back.

Now that the UNSC resolution is in place, serious efforts must commence toward effecting a political transition in Damascus, a point not missed in the resolution. Syria must not be destroyed any further.

## A glimpse of the Indian mind



SHAH HUSAIN IMAM

**T**IMES of India Group's senior editor, foreign affairs, Indrani Bagchi, literally took the words from our mouths. In an interactive session between a 12-member Bangladesh media delegation and a distinguished panel of interlocutors in the Indian capital on

ent other areas considerable headway has been made. Bangladesh's exports to India have doubled and 'a relationship of trust' has been built.

Rajeet Mitter, also formerly India High Commissioner to Bangladesh, stressed that Indian media and intelligentsia have been robustly supportive of Bangladesh's concerns over early signing of the Teesta water sharing accord and finalisation of Indo-Bangla land boundary agreement, 1974 along with the protocols relating to 6.4 kms of the undemarcated border.

Pinak Chakrabarty, an erstwhile Indian High Commissioner to Bangladesh and now

government didn't have.'

Indian external affairs minister Salman Khurshid who would meet us at the south block later in the day (which I will dilate on in due course) wondered aloud in passing as to why Indo-Bangla border agreement had hung fire for so long? To my mind, majority governments had been in existence during the incumbencies of Indira Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi, and to an extent Narasimha Rao, as well when the ratification might have been easier. Then, the era of coalition and minority governments with partnering support from inside or outside of the parliament dawned and continues till date, an ambience in which mustering a two-thirds

controlled and a free border there can be a friendly frontier. Examples abound.

Abhijeet Tripathy, a former Deputy High Commissioner to Bangladesh, made an unconventional point, implying as to how many people are going to be affected by a lack of Teesta accord or existence of 6.4 kms of undelimited border? How that is going to influence voting, he wondered. He could have used for briefing from Bangladesh High Commission in New Delhi, one might have thought.

A senior journalist pointed out on the sidelines that Bangladesh High Commissioner Tareq Karim's tit-a-tat with Narendra Modi did not go down well in secular circles. But another way of looking at it would be that if our Foreign Minister Dipu

*Uttam Sinha, a water expert of considerable standing, picked up from Bangladesh's long-standing proposal for regional inter basin cooperation on water management.*



PHOTO: STAR

September 17, said she, "By hindsight, India never had it so good (with Bangladesh) as during the last four and a half years."

Sharing the view being generally held in India, she added, 'from power to connectivity to credit line to trade, we have had very good relations with Bangladesh.'

On what we put as undercoverage of Bangladesh in the Indian media, pat came a lighthearted remark from Indrani—"no news is good news."

One-time Indian High Commissioner to Bangladesh Deb Mukherjee observed, although the Teesta water sharing accord is not yet in place in differ-

Secretary, Economic Relations at the EAM, replied to two points that I had raised at the meet: First, the ten bills that were passed in the Lok Sabha's extended monsoon session, some of which requiring the UPA government to go the extra mile with dissenting parties vis-à-vis the amendment to the land boundary agreement with Bangladesh which couldn't even be tabled in the Lok Sabha. Secondly, I pointed to the unabated border killings by the BSF.

To my first query, Pinak Chakrabarty said, 'those were normal bills but ratification of the land boundary agreement entailed a constitutional amendment by a two-thirds majority which the UPA

majority may be difficult. But is it a mission impossible given that a collective voice is worthy of garnering when it comes to placing good neighbourly relations on an unassailable footing? More to the point, the two prime ministers had committed to finalising the border and Teesta accords.

On the border killing issue, Pinak Chakrabarty said something to this effect, 'A border is either controlled or free. So long as it is controlled there are procedures to be followed. We have tried border fencing but it is sometimes breached and this also happens along Mexico and USA borders where killings take place'. But between a

Moni had met BJP leaders the Bangladesh High Commissioner was perhaps only pursuing the matter.

Uttam Sinha, a water expert of considerable standing, picked up from Bangladesh's longstanding proposal for regional inter basin cooperation on water management. He built up on the theme saying that it is not merely sharing of common river waters which should preoccupy our minds but also taking stock of the hydrological resources of the region and fostering a participative culture among all the stakeholders should be the broader goal, if South Asian countries are to prosper through meaningful handholding.

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## Will they control their language?



SYED FATTAHUL ALIM

"Every man takes the limits of his own field of vision for the limits of the world."  
-- Arthur Schopenhauer

**L**ANGUAGE matters. To comprehend what someone is saying, members of the audience listen both to what and how something is being said. It matters more when someone in position is the speaker.

Mohammad Nasim, presidium member of the ruling Awami League, is one who might have been oblivious of that when

he was addressing a discussion meeting at AL's central office in the city on September 25. "Those who are in public service will have to act as per the government's guidelines until January 24," he warned.

No wonder the public were taken aback. What was Mohammad Nasim, former home minister, actually trying to convey? Why has it crossed his mind that the public servants now need a dose of hectoring so they may conform to the administrative pecking order? Has he got any hint in that line from somewhere in the bureaucracy? We are not aware. And if there was no cause for concern then what he was saying is a contradiction in terms. For under normal circumstances, there is no reason why the civil bureaucracy, which is part and parcel of the administration, should even think of disobeying the government's authority.

Our political leaders are experienced and used only to unalloyed demagogy in their public speeches from start to finish. The emotions and prejudices that such oratory appeal to has no place for courtesy or good manners towards the real or imagined opponent. So the remark made by the AL leader in question could not have been a gaffe either. It was deliberate, which became clear from what he said next. "...Those who will not carry out their responsibilities will face bad consequences and be sent home."

The style of his speech is too familiar and it all fits into a pattern. In another meeting, for example, he said that the upcoming election would be held even if there was Armageddon. But why an election, which is an occasion for festivity of the people, should have to be held in such dangerous times?

Clearly, this particular speaker, or, with few rare exceptions, any other speaker in his place from the party in power, would not be concerned in the least about what actual meaning the words being used in their speech carry. For those bully words were chosen only to strike fear into the minds of the intended audience. At the fag end of its tenure, it is not unlikely if the political party holding the reins of power might get a bit jittery about its sway over the civil servants. So is the bluster like one in a terrible fluster. But while speaking in such a doomsday voice, was not the



*Hypocrisy of politicians is nothing new. But in our case it has perhaps crossed all limits... People are not only losing their trust in them, they are getting afraid of them. So they must control their tongue.*

speaker aware how he was also betraying his own fears before the same audience, who are not just a bunch of suckers?

If truth be told, taking a threatening posture is rather part of our party political culture. We are talking of Nasim here because he is now under the media scanner.

He, like many of his political fellow travellers, believes that they must demonstrate their capacity for harming others as a proof of their strength or power.

Since the government has the armed law-enforcing organs, the civil servants and the national security forces under its command, politicians are so hell-bent on staying in power once they grab it by fair means or foul.

Election, to them, is just a tool to realise that ultimate end -- capturing power. And however much they may cry themselves hoarse over people's cause and power, they hardly mean anything by that.

Small wonder people like Nasim, whose party is still in government, is wielding that naked power to intimidate any challenger to their position. Which is why, he can so casually say that they (of course, the ruling party) would 'go alone' even if others do not join them (in election, to be frank). And so there will be election, rain or shine. Do they need the people as voters for that kind of election?

Hypocrisy of politicians is nothing new. But in our case it has perhaps crossed all limits. What is most worrying at this point, as it has been exposed through the irresponsible remarks made by some of our politicians, is that they have started to break the basic rules of the game that run the process to install an elected and, however flawed, democratic government. The opposition, on the other hand, through its threat to paralyse the government after October 24 has only been adding fuel to the flame.

Uncontrolled language has turned political leaders into loose cannon. People are not only losing their trust in them, they are getting afraid of them.

So they must control their tongue.

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## LETTERS

TO THE EDITOR  
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### Example of 'better service' from DCC

Our city corporation was divided into two to give us better service. By now every body has got an idea what better service they have been providing. They are no good at collecting tax either. 30 th September is the last day of paying city corporation tax with 10% rebate. But till today, most people including me did not receive the bill book yet. I have sent our caretaker to city corporation tax circle 9 office twice. They failed to supply him a bill book for tax year 2013-14. They even refused to accept the tax by seeing the last year's tax payment slip which is a normal practice. This is a shining example of harassment by our public service provider like city corporation.

Dr. Zulfikar Gulshan-2, Dhaka

### US crime level hits a historic high

In the U.S. alone, the statistics for violent crimes are staggering. According to the FBI, on average a person is murdered every 22 minutes; someone is raped every 4 minutes, a robbery is committed every 26 seconds. Citing a commission of crime experts, Reuter reports that U.S. crime levels are even higher:

The Council on Crime in America said in its first report that crime levels "remain at historic highs." They said official FBI statistics on crime were only the tips of the iceberg. The report said the crime rate -- based on surveys of victims and not just crimes reported to the police -- show violent crime -- including murder, rape, assault and burglary -- was 5.6 times higher than those reported.

Murders and suicides (in the U.S.) are now occurring at a rate of more than 145 a day, a rate that is rising. In the past 30 years alone, the total exceeds 1,200,000 people, more than all the men killed in all the wars in the history of the United States. And many of these recent victims are not men and women; they are children.

Ted Rudow III, MA Encina Ave Palo Alto, CA

### Ensuring workers' compensation as a right

Getting due compensation is the most important right of every worker. In fact, almost all rights of the workers are violated intentionally in Bangladesh. In recent times, we experienced two huge accidents in garment sector. The consequent events always remain the same in such accidents. Compensating the victims is the most important thing usually ignored by all. But do we have any law regarding compensation? How do we determine the amount of monetary compensation and other damages that should be given to specific victims?

The prime minister handed over cheques to the victims of Rana Plaza and the government also provided them with medical costs and other supports. Besides, many humanitarian organisations and philanthropists also provided the victims with financial support. The BGMEA said they gave the victims one month's salary. My point is, we gave them grant, not compensation. Giving due compensation needs specific procedure and law. Providing grant is easier than paying compensation. The government should pass legislation on workers' compensation so as not to deprive them of their basic rights.

Md. Taherul Islam Taher M. Phil Researcher ISWR, DU

### Comments on post editorial, "Backward looking owners of a forward looking industry," published on September 27, 2013

Salim Ullah

While the media has been harping on the same string particularly, about the welfare of our garments workers for the sustained development of garments industry; we see the usual slumber of garments owners who are busy with their most fashionable life with luxurious cars and touring foreign countries. It reminds me one infamous event in the history that, while Rome was burning, Nero was playing a flute. When our poor garments workers are on the verge of starving, our garments owners are playing the part of Nero.

### Honestyspeaking

Please don't make mistake calling it a forward-looking industry, sir. How can this industry be forward-looking where incidents like Tazrin inferno and Rana Plaza collapse take place?

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### "Power import begins" (September 28, 2013)

Nasirullah Mridha, USA

Power import from India is commendable. But would India interrupt the power supply to give a 'lesson' to Bangladesh if the government changed? Our past memory is bitter with so many issues with India.

### Sheikh Monirul Islam, Opec

Don't worry, it's coming. Awami League will not be to stay in politics no matter how hard they hold the 'boitha' and whoever takes control of the big boat...it has holes in it and they are leaking slowly. It is difficult to detect those leaks, so it will sink silently, killing all onboard!

### SM

How long is the contract? And what are the termination clauses?

## DAWN

### No durable solution..

EDITORIAL

**A**FTER weeks of inaction and confusion, the State Bank of Pakistan intervened on Thursday to prop up the free-falling rupee. The step was taken when the rupee touched the historic low of 110.5 against the dollar. The intervention has helped stabilise the rupee at 106 to the dollar for now. But will this rescue attempt set a pattern and if the answer is in the affirmative, is this a sustainable, acceptable way of influencing the exchange rate? This intervention can be viewed as a violation of the \$6.6bn loan agreement with the IMF. It is yet not clear if and how the bank's action will affect Islamabad's relationship with its last-resort lender.

As the rupee fell, initially, the depreciation was put down to declining foreign exchange reserves. According to one theory, the IMF loan would help stabilise the currency. It did not. The IMF conditions that bar the State Bank from supporting the rupee and force it to purchase dollars from the market to accumulate reserves created a supply gap. The lender's refusal to frontload a chunk of the loan did not help either. Speculators jumped into the fray to make quick profits. The government's decision to borrow \$625m from commercial banks to boost the central bank's meagre reserves of just above \$5bn failed to reverse the rupee's slide as official and private capital inflows were low.

The rupee's fall demonstrates the fragility of the economy. It also shows the confusion in the present finance management team. Fears that this sharpest depreciation of the rupee in recent years would end up fuelling already soaring prices thus eroding savings and incomes and putting greater pressure on the government's weak fiscal position were something to reckon with, but even these could not compel the bank to take measures to arrest the slide. The Pakistani rupee's future hinges on the government's capacity to restore the market sentiment by discouraging unnecessary imports to reduce the dollar demand. This will send a message to speculators that the government is serious about defending the currency. Over the next six months, it will be required to move swiftly to recover unpaid PTCL privatisation proceeds, auction 3G telecom licences, obtain the promised funds from multilateral lenders and work for the early release of the outstanding Coalition Support Fund dues from the US. The pumping of State Bank dollars will only ensure temporary relief -- the bank had to spend \$3.35bn in the last fiscal to hold up exchange rates artificially. That is a prohibitive exercise. Repeating it will have drastic effects on the economy.

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