

Children at the centre of development strides

Set specific targets

FOR a section that constitutes about 45 percent of our population we cannot afford the issues related to their development to lose focus. Specific goals should be set in order to formulate appropriate strategies to reach those goals.

While the achievement so far under the MDG 2015 in respect of child and maternal welfare is a matter of satisfaction, the performance being better than that of many of our neighbouring countries, our future strategy after 2015 in this respect demands serious deliberation. And this was eminently brought out at a roundtable organised by the leading Bangla daily recently on position of children post MDG.

We feel that the matter can no longer be considered as an appendage of broader national development goals. Children's welfare is an issue of its own right, and without sustained development of children, the other development goals will be rendered meaningless. In this regard the planners should guard against overlooking the marginalised elements among this group, a common shortcoming that plagues most development strategies.

It is a fact that a larger number of children have to toil to supplement family income instead of going to school. Children are still working in hazardous jobs, and child marriage is a way out of pecuniary privations by lessening the 'family burden'. Children happen to be the worst sufferers in any natural or man made calamity. Any goals that are finally determined must take into consideration the social and economic reality germane to the country.

Biman's ground handling

Modernise it on top priority basis

POOR ground handling has been a major irritant for passengers arriving at Shahjalal International Airport. Considerable air traffic passes through Dhaka and ground handling at Shahjalal has been the worst in the region. There are 700 staff against the requirement of around 1,100 and also the existing system for luggage transfer is manual with limited intake and delivery capacities. We therefore, welcome the reported go-ahead to its modernisation plan relating to ground handling, though it should have been introduced a lot earlier.

Shamefully, it takes about 15 minutes for a passenger on arrival to collect his luggage from the conveyor belt in neighbouring Kolkata international airport whereas in Dhaka it takes about ninety minutes. Needless to say, this has affected the growth of tourism and the airport's global reputation and impacted on foreign investment prospects. At present, the ground handling earns Biman about Tk. 300 crore as revenue, but the untapped business potentials are huge for it. Various airlines are keen to connect with Dhaka which could bring a lot of business but slow ground and messed up handling has been a barrier to it.

The need for modernising ground handling is so pressing that the 2 year timeline must be met without any extension whatsoever. We also expect Biman to team up with the most credible international partner to effect the desired improvement in the important field of airport operations.

President Obama's new war

ABDUL MATIN

AFTER withdrawing US troops from Iraq in 2012 and planning to withdraw from Afghanistan by the end of the year, President Barack Obama declared a new war, not against any enemy country, but against carbon emission within his own country. He claimed that fighting climate change was every bit as important to America's national security as stopping terrorism or stopping countries from obtaining nuclear weapons.

He proposed cuts in greenhouse gas emissions (GHG) from power plants by an average 30% from 2005 level by the year 2030. In 2012, the United States produced 5.2 billion tonnes of carbon dioxide against China's 9.9 billion tonnes. According to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), power plants account for roughly one-third of all domestic GHG in the US.

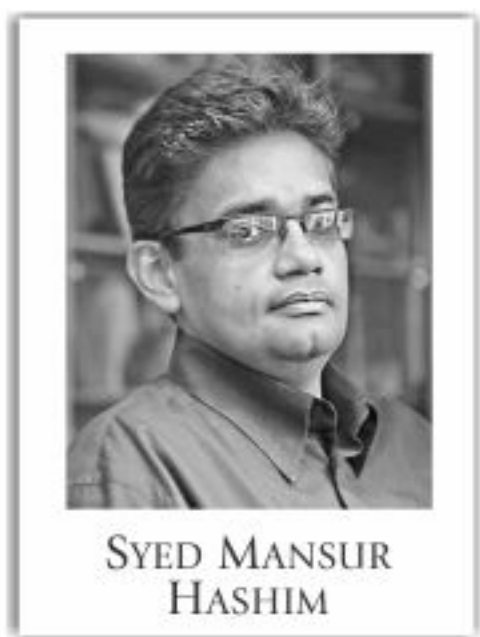
Obama's declaration is supported by Dr. Stephen A. Smith, executive director of the Southern Alliance for Clean Energy. He said: "We are strongly supportive of these ambitious yet attainable standards." Unlike in other US sponsored wars, Obama is likely to get universal support for his current war even though he has foes within his own country. In Georgia, one Public Service Commissioner said: "The Obama administration continues its war on coal with the issuance of carbon dioxide rules for existing coal plants."

Obama's decision is in sharp contrast with the policy of his predecessor. Even though some states, like Connecticut, California and Arizona, took steps to limit carbon emissions, President Bush was least concerned about global warming. In March 2001, he decided not to implement the Kyoto Protocol signed in 1997 requiring nations to reduce GHG emissions on apprehension of economic setbacks in the States, then the largest producer of carbon dioxide in the world.

Climate change is already being felt in every region of the US, resulting in hotter summers, shorter winters, extreme precipitation, and even worsening allergies, according to a government report released recently. The report further forecasts grim scenarios for different regions. The Northeast and Midwest, for instance, would see many more heavy downpours that could lead to flooding and erosion. The Southwest, including California, would be more prone to extreme heat, drought and wildfire, while the Northwest could see a widespread tree die-off because of wildfire, insect outbreaks and disease.

Though the declaration came a little late, it will have a far reaching impact in combating climate change as the US will now be better placed to enforce global carbon reductions. No matter what the antagonists may say at home, Obama's war is not against coal. It is a crusade for the survival of the human race.

The writer is a former chief engineer of Bangladesh Atomic Energy Commission.



SYED MANSUR HASHIM

NBR's estimation, a large portion of these people are currently outside the tax regime and the government is being deprived of its share of tax revenue. According to a report published in the Financial Express on May 10, the NBRO chairman hinted that there may be a disclosure about this in the next budget. That has happened.

The finance minister has proposed in the latest budget that the Income Tax Law be amended to end tax evasion by house owners. According to what has been proposed, if household rent exceeds Tk. 25,000 per month, it will have to be paid through banking channels. And although the NBR is confident that this will go a long way in allowing the authority to track how much money is being charged by house owners, things are seldom that simple. One simply cannot overlook the fact that most house owners will now opt for making a deed worth Tk. 25,000, that will be paid through the bank and the balance amount will be paid in cash. This will most certainly become the norm. The other fact is that a lot of high value property is not registered in the actual owners' names. And transactions for such property will now probably become mostly cash.

We certainly hope the government has a backup plan to serve public interest in reducing the galloping house rent scenario. According to one study, 80% of Dhaka city's 15million residents live in rented houses. As stated in a Daily Star report on August 23, 2013, the law is clear about tenants' rights. There must be an agreement between owner and tenant and owners are allowed to take only a month's advance. Not only that, "owners can be fined for taking more than one month's advance." As per law, owners cannot raise house rent before two years and tenants can sue owners for violating the law. Lastly, owners cannot evict tenants during proceedings. That is what the law says.

The reality says something else altogether. The Consumer Association of Bangladesh carried out a study on the rate of increase in house rent over a 22-year period. The findings are quite astonishing. Over the period, house rent has risen by an average of 15% per annum. It is not the law that is at fault, rather the implementation of the law has been sadly missing. The average tenant has had to pick up the over the years, whilst owners have reaped the benefits. Though the House Rent Control Act, 1991 has provisions to allow aggrieved tenants to seek redress in the court of rent controllers, the bulk of tenants are unaware of their



TAJ HASHMI

beginning of the end of Nazism by liberating France -- was very interesting and significant this year because the world witnessed some dramatics performed by Presidents Obama, Putin, Hollande and president-elect Petro Poroshenko of Ukraine. Although Putin's presence was embarrassing for many, including Putin himself, but he had to be there to represent Russia, which played a very important, if not the decisive, role in the defeat of Hitler.

I am not going to discuss here how embarrassing it could be for President Hollande to host some of his mutually estranged guests at the solemn ceremony of the D-Day celebration. Hollande made Obama and Putin sit at the same table, which eventually made the two estranged leaders informally talk to each other, mostly on Ukraine. The congregation also made Putin and Poroshenko exchange pleasantries with each other, which would possibly make some headway towards a meaningful dialogue between Russia and Ukraine to resolve their differences over Crimea and pro-Russian secessionist movements in southeastern Ukraine. One has, however, no reason to believe that the Obama-Putin chance meeting will lead to any rapprochement between Russia and America. In the backdrop of the growing Russophobia in America, or which could be a reflection of Washington's not-so-hidden desire to resuscitate the Cold War, Russia is not going to be re-admitted into the G-8 in the foreseeable future.

So far so good! However, what is very disturbing, not totally surprising to this writer though, was Obama's hyperbolic speech at the D-Day celebration, which was full of exuberant balderdash and signified only one thing, that this recipient of Nobel Peace Prize was not that different from other US presidents. He had to glorify America's military machine, although he is possibly not another warmonger like most of his predecessors. Yet, his speech was disappointingly unwarranted, and deceptively an endorsement of what Bush-Cheney-Rumsfeld did by their barbaric invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, which virtu-

HOUSE RENT LAW

Proposed mechanism will prove futile

AT the end of 2012, the National Board of Revenue (NBR) had launched a survey to calculate the number of home-owners and landlords in metropolitan cities. This was undertaken to see how many people owned shops, markets and buildings that are rented out commercially or on residential basis. The figure came to about 300,000. By

legal rights. Then again, many tenants stay away from going through the process out of fear that they will be evicted by owners and so, in most cases, a financial compromise is reached which invariably goes against tenants.

With inertia on the part of tenants, it is hardly a wonder that everything under the sun goes. Regardless of what is stated in the agreement, rent is increased as and when it suits the owner. The phenomenon transcends all strata of society, be it the working or middle class. And going by what has been published in this newspaper, "between January and May 2011, only 102 cases were filed in the courts of two rent controllers covering Mirpur, Mohammadpur, Dhanmondi, Hazaribagh, New Market, Tejgaon, Gulshan, Uttara and Cantonment. The number was 131 in 2010." It is interesting to see that rent in the city takes a hike, like clockwork, with the announcement of a new wage board or pay scale. And while many an owner decries his or her helplessness with the argument that the rent s/he receives is the sole means of an income, the law does not allow for arbitrary fixation of rent.



Though the House Rent Control Act, 1991 has provisions to allow aggrieved tenants to seek redress in the court of rent controllers, the bulk of tenants are unaware of their legal rights.

Getting back to the subject in hand, the government has made amendments to the income tax law in an effort to rein in some of the malpractices. It is difficult to be optimistic that such measures will have the desired impact. What would certainly work better is if the department in charge of rent control were to be better staffed and empowered to take on errant owners. It would not only bring much needed reprieve to the bulk of city residents, but provide the government with much-needed tax revenue, which at present it is being deprived of.

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Don't give us this balderdash, Mr. Obama

STRANGER THAN FICTION

THE celebration of the Seventieth Anniversary of the D-Day on June 6 at Normandy was very interesting and significant. Scores of World War II veterans from the US, Britain, Canada and elsewhere graced the solemn ceremony. We expect a fewer number of WWII veterans will show up at Normandy next June before the whole bunch of these brave heroes will leave this world for ever.

The seventieth celebration of the "Longest Day" in modern history -- which signalled the beginning of the end of Nazism by liberating France -- was very interesting and significant this year because the world witnessed some dramatics performed by Presidents Obama, Putin, Hollande and president-elect Petro Poroshenko of Ukraine. Although Putin's presence was embarrassing for many, including Putin himself, but he had to be there to represent Russia, which played a very important, if not the decisive, role in the defeat of Hitler.

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ally destroyed the countries and killed more than a million innocent civilians. Obama surprised us all.

One has no qualms with his hailing WWII veterans who changed the course of history by storming the beaches, cities, towns and hamlets of Nazi-occupied France and liberated the country from Nazi occupation. However, one wonders if Obama had to compare "this generation of Americans -- our men and women of war -- [who] have chosen to do their part as well" with the war heroes of WWII! What was most distressing was the way the president compared the WWII veterans with "the new generation of veterans of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan." He glorified the American Iraq-Afghan veterans as "the 9/11 Generation." His balderdash did not end there. He further added: "And some day, future generations, whether 70 or 100 years hence, will gather at places like this to honour them."

In the backdrop of Obama's track record ever since his opposition to the unprovoked invasion of Iraq in 2003 in the Senate, unlike many Democrat senators including Hillary Clinton, one may assume that he possibly did not mean what he said at Normandy last Friday. He possibly does not believe those who liberated France from the clutches of the barbaric and brutal Nazi invaders could ever be compared with the brutal and barbaric American soldiers, who killed tens of thousands of innocent and unarmed civilians in Iraq and Afghanistan -- women, elderly and children -- destroyed the infrastructures and superstructures of the countries, and dishonoured people across the board. He definitely knows that what he delivered at Normandy this time was all gibberish. We have reasons to believe that Obama knows the world in the coming years is not going to honour America's Iraq-Afghan veterans. He knows that while the world holds the WWII veterans in the highest regard as heroes, it does not consider mindless killers and marauders -- the so-called "9/11 Generation" -- worth-remembering at all.

He possibly knows that we know under what circumstances he has to defend America's mighty war machine, which virtually runs the country. In view of this, we can at most pity the president of the most powerful nation on earth, who is again, not the most powerful president in the world. In view of Obama's volte-face -- as a Senator he opposed the Iraq invasion, and soon after his election he promised peace and justice for all -- it seems America's Military Industrial Complex is still calling the shots; another Cold War is in the offing; and in the coming years, the world is going to be a more dangerous place than today; and durable and just peace will remain as elusive as anything.

The writer teaches security studies at Austin Peay State University at Clarksville, Tennessee. Sage has published his latest book, *Global Jihad and America: The Hundred-Year War beyond Iraq and Afghanistan*.

LETTERS

TO THE EDITOR

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Expectations from Modi as Indian PM

Congratulations to Narendra Modi on becoming the Prime Minister of India after his overwhelming victory in the elections.

Narendra Modi seems to be a wise, capable, and visionary leader who is different from others. We hope with the passage of time he will be able to impress the rest of the world with his positive attitude. He looks like one who wants "to make friends, not enemies."

We envy the people of India as they have been able to choose their leaders. But we were not so fortunate. We could not exercise our voting power; so the government that has been formed lacks people's mandate.

There are so many unresolved issues with India which include water sharing, land boundary disputes, border killings and so on. We hope those issues will be solved under Narendra Modi's dynamic leadership as the Prime Minister of India. Hope he will be understanding and not indifferent to the sufferings of his neighbours.

Nur Jahan
Chittagong

Our madness about World Cup football

With the World Cup Football 2014 approaching, the supporters have started hoisting their favourite team's national flags on top of their houses, shops, sports clubs and even vehicles. Most people of our country are just going with the stream hoisting flags, showing over-enthusiasm for football. Well, there is no harm in supporting any football team, but going overboard with it does not just seem right. We wonder if any other country of the world other than Bangladesh does such things.

Mashudul Haque

Dhaka

Some great friends of Bangladesh

I used to know Mr. Allan Cheyne, who in the mid-Seventies started the work of teaching the under-privileged children of Dhaka (the street children). His noble work started with a few children, but in course of time, it has flowed into a great institution, the UCEP.

I used to know Dr. Ronald Garst fairly well. Soon after the war of independence, he came down to Dhaka from India to help the people suffering from war injuries or disabilities. He brought along his wife to serve Bangladesh. Then again, he brought in a plastic surgeon from India, and he too came with his wife. What was built with his own hands is now known as NITOR, (Pangu Hospital) a great institution.

Then there is the heart-warming story of Dr. Baker, another New Zealander, who for three decades has been serving the poor patients, with love and dedication, in the Madhupur forest area for free. Thousands of people are getting the care of a noble physician, which otherwise would not be available to them.

Dr. Garst and Mr. Allan Cheyne have passed away a long time from now, but their works have blessed Bangladesh. May their souls rest in peace.

Shahabuddin Mahtab
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Dhaka

Comments on news report, "No more money whitening scope," published on June 7, 2014

Spiderman

A budget which is very much unrealistic, by a government that is not true representative of people and a finance minister who is known for his funny remarks.

AL is trying to sell dreams and keep people in false hopes.

Akhtar Shah

About time too! Although, it will probably be a boon for 'hundi' mafias fighting a capital business! Money (black) made has to go somewhere. One can only spend so much on jewellery, fine dining, foreign travels and showing off!

Anonymous

We don't want mere words. We want action against whitening black money.

"Private investment the key" (June 7, 2014)

Fakhrul Islam

I think government will set up a corporation for large industrial projects.

Alam

The government should encourage private sector to invest more to strengthen the economy.