

# Governance at stake

## BITTER TRUTH



MD. ASADULLAH KHAN

However, despite all the odds, the people are optimistic about democratic governance. The agenda for this government is clear -- holding together a country torn by partisan conflicts and clashes; curbing terrorism, corruption, and rampant lawlessness; and healing the wounds of minority repression and looting let loose in different parts of the country after the election. The present government that pledged to curb terrorism must face down the mafia group without fear or favour and regardless of partisan identity.

We have leaders who are capable of shedding tears or indulging in rhetoric of development they want to achieve, but incapable of assuming their duties. People wonder how many incidents of killings, looting, arson and violence will prod the administration into effective action against the criminals. The seven murder incident at Narayanganj and killing of Fulgazi mayor Ekram at Feni show that some people driven by hate, intolerance, revenge and political animosity are there to set the society on fire.

As this AI-led government struggles to address a range of social and economic ills, the last thing we need is further tension. Political intrigue, bickering and

infighting have become the norm. Prices of food and daily necessities are soaring, adding to the miseries of millions, especially in this month of Ramadan. People do not know how long they will have to wait for the kind of leadership the country now desperately needs.

Large scale educational campaigns that will instill the values and ideals that helped nations of the world to survive and prosper in their days of turmoil must be carried out. These ideals -- primacy of human rights, rule of law, and ideological tolerance -- must be enshrined in the society. To be sure, in the state of affairs as it is these days, making these values acceptable in a society torn apart by economic, political and behavioural crisis will not be an easy task. The initiative for the revival of the society will definitely have to come from within the society itself, from its leaders and intelligentsia who are now at loggerheads with each other.

The most prominent casualty of the simmering political crisis and state of turmoil in the country is the badly needed economic expansion programme. As it appears, not to speak of foreign investors, even local investors are wary of venturing into an inflammable area, a conflict-ridden site that has largely been made so by some politicians, with utter disregard towards people's torments and sufferings. They have exploited and manipulated all the weaknesses inherent in a developing society. Social fissures which statesmen would normally attempt to bridge have been deepened by some of us seeking short term advantages.

These criminal acts of a microscopic section of the populace should have alerted the politicians and administrators to reevaluate and guard the goals of a democratic society. It is in this light that our leaders, politicians and custodians of the society must take appropriate measures to curb terrorism.

Most people now say that the country is faced with the crisis of governance, the



STAR

root cause of which is the "flawed design" of our democracy. The resulting situation is that most people in the country are now deeply distressed with the failure of the state to fulfill their expectations of good governance. In such an atmosphere of despair, cynicism and fear one can see the big danger of muscle, money and terrorism creeping into the society.

The rural areas that could once take pride in being peaceful and tranquil now appear to be heading towards chaos. Politics has not gone beyond the narrow limits of petty self-interest and extremist lines even in these areas. It is time the administration recognised the dangers of letting the extremist political groups take control of things and ride roughshod over the principle of sacrifice, and the spirit of the Liberation War. In the quagmire of dirty politics, those who suffer are the country's hapless millions.

People wonder if the rot that has started setting in can be stopped from spreading further. It should be brought home to those self-centred politicians that this is not only undermining the

government but also the state, and is very adversely affecting foreign investment vis-à-vis national development. The popular perception is that the administration has flip-flopped on major policy decisions allowing divisive forces to gain ground. History teaches us that discarding reason and critical thinking in favour of fanaticism leads only to misery.

People wonder how the criminals were so emboldened to behave so recklessly. The answer is obvious, there seems to be no rule of law in the county! It seems the county operates on a very simple principle: show me the person and I'll show you the law. There is no equality before the law. Consequently, there is no deterrence either. Puzzlingly, some politicians still refuse to admit that until our law enforcing agencies start functioning properly, criminals and terrorists will continue to treat the government's fight against terrorism with disdain.

The writer is a columnist of The Daily Star. E-mail: aukhandk@gmail.com

# Taking Bangladesh-India relations forward

PALLAB BHATTACHARYA

As a keen observer of India-Bangladesh relations over the years under different governments on both sides of the border over the last two decades, I could not agree more with the view that the dominant theme of Indian External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj's recent visit to Dhaka (June 25-27) was connectivity.

It was a theme that permeated Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's letter she handed over to his Bangladesh counterpart Sheikh Hasina and also in the speech Swaraj gave at the Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies and in the set of confidence-building measures announced during her visit, like multiple-entry visa to Bangladeshis below the age of 13 and above 65, additional 100MW of power, proposed bus service between Guwahati and Dhaka and increasing the frequency of Maitree Express train. Connectivity in power, train, bus, water ways, the people of India and Bangladesh through visa, power grid has been defined by Swaraj in a sense much larger than just India seeking transit from Bangladesh.

On issues of core concern to Bangladesh such Teesta water-sharing and land boundary agreement implementation, Swaraj repeated the old assurances of trying to build a domestic consensus. It would have been unreasonable to have expected anything more than that because she undertook the visit to Dhaka within a month of a new BJP-led government assuming charge in India. One month is too short a time to make any breakthrough in solving the long-pending issues, especially when there has been a change of government in India. One must recognise that Swaraj's visit was largely exploratory in nature and carried forward Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's neighbourhood first policy which was evident in the invitation to South Asian countries heads of state and government to his swearing-in ceremony on May 26.

It may be tempting to write off the measures announced during Swaraj's visit to boost India-Bangladesh relations as "peripherals" but they do signal the new Indian government's intent to, as Modi said in his letter to Hasina, usher in a "new era of cooperation and connectivity across the South Asian region." But the fact remains that these confidence-enhancing steps are side dishes and both countries must move to the main course of bilateral relations epitomised by Teesta water-sharing deal, stalled three years ago by West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, implementation of LBA and Bangladesh granting transit right to India for easier connectivity with northeastern Indian states. It is here that Modi government's neighbourhood policy faces its first key challenge.

A solution to the core issues like transit, Teestam transit and LBA has the potential to transform India-Bangladesh ties into a model to emulate in South Asia.

Swaraj spoke to Mamata Banerjee on phone hours before her departure for Dhaka. There was no official word from either of the two leaders, who have good rapport with each other, but it does indicate that the BJP-led NDA government, much like the previous UPA dispensation, is keen to keep on board a state's ruling party on a foreign policy issue.

Can the Modi government get Mamata Banerjee on board for the Teesta deal after former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh had failed to do so for three years? The challenge to ratify LBA through a constitution amendment bill is perhaps even more complex because the opposition to it is not just from Trinamool Congress and Asom Gana Parishad but also from BJP's Assam and West Bengal, the two states where the saffron party is eyeing bigger political stakes after the impressive show in the recent Lok Sabha elections. The BJP leadership will have to convince its own nay-sayers by explaining the long-term benefits of Teesta deal and LBA.

Modi and Hasina have invited each other to visit their respective countries and it remains to be seen if the two visits can see the two agreements through.

If Modi has shown boldness in outlining his neighbourhood first approach after having indulged in high political rhetoric against illegal migrants from Bangladesh, Hasina too has shown courage and statesmanship by persisting with deeper engagement with India irrespective of the party in power in New Delhi. She showed no rancour ever even though the UPA government failed to deliver on Teesta and LBA deals, and stuck to her course of scaling up the ties with India.

Hasina addressed India's major securing concerns by turning over top ULFA insurgent group leaders, cracking down on militant groups in Bangladesh and making major arms hauls in the last six years. She also allowed equipment for Palatana power project in Tripura to pass through Bangladesh waterways and decided to permit transshipment of food grains to India's northeast from the mainland.

Hasina reached out to Modi by being among the first foreign leaders to facilitate him on his and his party's election victory and urging him to make Bangladesh as his first overseas visit. If Modi and Hasina can walk the talk further, it will mark a paradigm shift of politics in South Asia.

The writer is New Delhi correspondent of The Daily Star.

# Changing the narrative on Bangladesh and climate change

## POLITICS OF CLIMATE CHANGE



SALEEMUL HUQ

media sees Bangladesh. For example, a recent series of documentaries on climate change impacts around the world hosted by celebrities in the United States of America, called "Year of Living Dangerously" and shown on the cable channel ShowTime, included one on Bangladesh hosted by actor M.C. Hall that also highlighted the vulnerability of Bangladesh to the adverse impacts of climate change.

While this story is undoubtedly true, it is no longer the only story about climate change and Bangladesh. I would argue that it is by now an out of date story and that a new narrative of Bangladesh being at the forefront of tackling the adverse impacts of climate change is indeed the more important narrative for us to propagate from now on.

In scientific and development discourse the vulnerability of countries, communities and systems to the adverse impacts of climate change are often used as the obverse of resilience to those adverse impacts. In other words, countries and communities that have high vulnerability are generally deemed to also have low resilience while building up resilience is seen as reducing vulnerability. So

vulnerability and resilience are seen like a see-saw where high vulnerability equals low resilience and low vulnerability equals high resilience.

I would argue that while this may be true in many cases, Bangladesh is the exception to this rule. In other words, Bangladesh is both highly vulnerable to the physical impacts of climate change but at the same time the people are highly resilient to facing all kinds of adversity, including climatic ones. Indeed, one could argue that Bangladeshis are more resilient than even many developed countries.

### Changing the narrative from victim to leader:

Thus, while Bangladesh remains highly vulnerable to the current and future impacts of climate change it has not been sitting idle waiting for catastrophe to happen. Rather, it has invested in building its own resilience through the Bangladesh Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan (BCCSAP) and the creation of two separate Climate Change Funds with a combined value of nearly half a billion US Dollars, and is now implementing the forty plus actions under the six pillars of the BCCSAP.

At the same time, Bangladesh has hosted the international community of practice on Community Based Adaptation (CBA) by holding the seventh international conference on CBA in Bangladesh last year. The eighth CBA conference (CBA8) was held in Nepal in April this year and CBA9 will be held in Kenya in April 2015, after which CBA10 will be held in Bangladesh again in 2016. When it comes to CBA Bangladesh is already widely acknowledged as the "Adaptation capital of the world."

### South-South and South-North knowledge sharing:

The government, NGOs, researchers and people of Bangladesh are taking



FOCUS BANGLA NEWS

actions to tackle the adverse impacts of climate change around the country and across a range of ecosystems and vulnerability types. In the process, all these stakeholders are going up a learning curve very rapidly and are becoming knowledgeable about how best to tackle the impacts of climate change. They are even developing knowledge about mitigation actions, even though Bangladesh is not a major emitter of greenhouse gases.

In the process, the country is developing knowledge on how to tackle climate change that can be shared with other countries, especially other Least Developed Countries (LDC) who share many of the same problems, and even some developed countries as well. Thus, there is great opportunity for both South-South sharing of knowledge as well as South-North sharing.

### Climate Change Summit in New York:

A good place to put forward this new narrative is the Climate Change Summit to be held in New York on

September 23, where the United Nations Secretary General Mr. Ban ki Moon has invited all heads of state to come and present their actions to tackle climate change. The Prime Minister of Bangladesh Sheikh Hasina could use this summit to put forward the new narrative of Bangladesh as no longer just a victim of climate change but now an emerging leader in tackling the adverse impacts of climate change, and offer to share our knowledge with the rest of the world.

### Conclusions:

It is now high time for the leaders, experts and public in Bangladesh to change the narrative of Bangladesh and climate change from depicting the country as merely a victim to one that depicts the country as learning very fast how to tackle climate change and wishing to share that knowledge with other countries around the world.

The writer is Director, International Centre for Climate Change and Development (www.icccd.org) at the Independent University, Bangladesh.

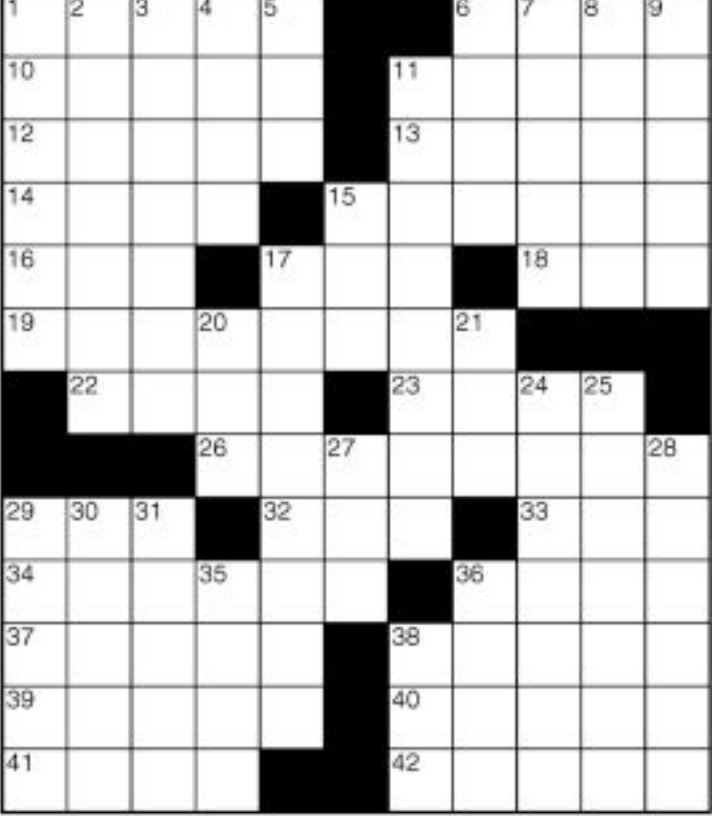
## QUOTABLE Quote

"If one does not know to which port one is sailing, no wind is favorable."

Lucius Annaeus Seneca

## CROSSWORD by Thomas Joseph

- ACROSS**
- TV ad
  - Dune makeup
  - Flatten
  - Court listener
  - Improve, in a way
  - Select group
  - Parachute part
  - Wakes
  - Genesis woman
  - Pinnacle
  - Twisty turn
  - Complete tie
  - Rating unit
  - Borders
  - One who's got no hope
  - Relaxing resort
  - Like some humor
  - Word on a bill
  - Chatty bird
  - Balled hand
  - Parting word
  - Old Testament book
  - Pick up the tab
  - Wise saying
  - Vend
  - Raft pilot
- DOWN**
- Situated
  - Takes out
  - Be a glutton
  - Patch up
  - Antique
  - Enterprise Crewman
  - Spring up
  - Jottings
  - Attire
  - Danger
  - Sturgeon eggs
  - Trashed
  - June honoree
  - Singer McGraw
  - Insurance category
  - Salami for one
  - Museum topic
  - Tie up
  - Petty quarrels
  - San Diego player
  - "The Tempest" sprite
  - Authentic
  - Traditional dog name
  - Atlas page



## Yesterday's answer

LARVA S AVER  
ALIEN ALICE  
COTTONBALLS  
ENE MAE LIP  
DESPAIR APE  
ALL DISC  
SADLY MONET  
IVES GAP  
LOP DRIEDUP  
ICE OIL UNO  
CANNONBALLS  
ODDER ALLIE  
NOSES GISTS

## CRYPTOQUOTE

HUJJVWL FGSV G ZGTP XA  
FCJBAGMPBWUJO PZVUW XHJ KKLUPUDV  
VIKVMGPXJL UJ GQDGMV XA PZV  
VDVJP - TWUJ PWGME

Yesterday's CRYPTOQUOTE:  
IN ORDER TO CARRY A POSITIVE ACTION WE MUST DEVELOP HERE A POSITIVE VISION.  
- DALAI LAMA

## BEETLE BAILEY by Mort Walker

