

## Climate change summit ends

### Firm commitments missing

LEADERS from around the globe gathered at UN's summit on mitigating serious challenges posed by climate change. Yet, as it has turned out, key countries have desisted from inking commitments to cutting down on greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and making serious financial commitments to help developing countries to fight adverse effects of climate change. Despite the hundreds of thousands of people who took part in the Climate march ahead of the summit, the clamour for change apparently has fallen on deaf ears. This summit has drawn massive show of support from corporate bodies, citizens' movements and development organisations, who intend to mobilise funds and take steps to minimise damage caused to the environment. But will that be enough?

Although Chinese Vice-Premier Zhang Gaoli attending the summit stated that the country is on track to reduce carbon intensity by 40 per cent from 2005 levels to 2020, the sad fact is that despite having scientific proof of what the future holds for the planet if GHG emissions continue at present levels, it is the developing nations that will have to face the full brunt of it all. And despite the publicity surrounding the billion-dollar commitments declared by France, Germany and Sweden, the Green Climate Fund is still short by anywhere between US\$10 and \$15 billion to effectively help developing nations and their citizens in a changing global climate. Unless decisive actions are taken to cut emissions, poor countries will be left to pick up the pieces as forces of nature ravage these nations in the foreseeable future.

## Trade surplus

### Not an unmixed blessing!

MARKING an apparent turnaround in the usual trend, Bangladesh recorded a trade surplus in July this year as its imports declined sharply compared to exports.

The exports figure at US\$2.96 billion clearly overshoot the value of imports at US\$2.27 billion. But the fact remains that the imports in this July was 11.36 per cent less than that of July 2013. Notably, the exports, too, registered a decline of more than one per cent relative to July last year.

Evidently, what looks like trade surplus veils sluggishness in the overall performance of business during the month under consideration.

Seeing that both exports and imports have not performed well, the surplus is a little deceptive.

Leaving aside the export figure, falling import is definitely an indicator of sluggishness in growth reflective of lack of investment in the economy, both domestic and foreign.

At this point, a look at the vital imports may be worthwhile. The import of capital machinery, for example, fell in July by 13 per cent, as informed by a central bank official. And as if to match it, raw material import, too, declined by 11 per cent. There is reason to be concerned about these import figures, if only because they point to a slack in industrial activity.

The paradoxical trade figure of July should serve as wakeup call for the policymakers. They must get their act together and stimulate business by removing all roadblocks to investment, both local and FDI.

## The most difficult job in town!

MUAZ JALIL

I am sure many professionals have gone through that period in their life when they contemplate that their job must rank among the very top in the list of most demanding jobs. This is often followed by a self-congratulatory pat on the back in having the skills necessary to succeed in their respective fields. But honestly, which is the most difficult job? Many may think of top executives in MNCs or entrepreneurs because they require diverse skills, leadership quality, strong analytical mind and the ability to withstand mental pressure. Others might think of doctors or engineers. But, surprisingly, as the Cambridge Professor Ha-Joon Chang once said, in a democracy the toughest job is actually being an informed citizen!

An informed citizen must understand economics, because policies have real life consequences. A good citizen must know whether free trade is unambiguously good for the country as some experts would have us believe, or do we need tailored industrial policy? Is the government's decision to enter a free trade agreement ultimately beneficial for the country, or is there a rationale for having tariff protection for local industries? Economics is far too important to be left only to the specialist. A good citizen in a democracy also understands the need for protecting minority rights and thus raises his/her voice when it is violated either in the form of religious persecution or based on tribal identity. An informed citizen cannot be fooled by vitriolic nationalism or toxic political rhetoric, which unfortunately pervades our political environment. A good citizen is a tolerant individual, who can respect others' views even though they may completely disagree with them. Such citizens will not require laws but will have sufficient moral values not to engage in illegal activities for pecuniary gains.

So we see that an informed citizen needs to be almost a philosopher; after all democracy is as good as its constituent elements, i.e. the general public. Now just look at us, both you and me, we are easy to inflame and manipulate, today passionately shouting about Gaza tomorrow mute about the atrocities being committed against minority Hindus and tribal people in our own backyard. Bemoaning about the lack of rules and regulations, while ourselves engaging in jaywalking, overtaking, speeding, breaking every conceivable traffic rule whenever it suits us. Dear reader, how many of us use the simple foot overbridge while crossing the road, or do we not have the inner urge to take the adventurous shortcut of using the road while dodging incoming traffic? Before we expect our government to emulate the developed world, we the ordinary citizens need to understand civic duty and what it means to be a good citizen!

The writer is a recent graduate from Cambridge.

# Deconstructing democracy

## STRATEGICALLY SPEAKING



Brig Gen  
SHAHEDUL ANAM KHAN  
ndc, psc (Retd)

society personages. And no sooner was the idea articulated than it was shot down.

And now we are hearing from some quarters in the country about democracy versus development, and about which one should take priority. Although there is a corpus of literature in the world on the subject, it is only after the January 5 elections that one is hearing the issue being bandied about in Bangladesh. The badly scripted narratives espouse the cause of development, which, according to the protagonists, should be our prime concern, but which is often stifled by political disturbances. And, since in a democratic environment we are prone to violence, the less of democracy we have the better for the country's development. This ludicrous argument is being touted as a justification for the January 5 election.

That perception is shared by outsiders too, which has been amply expressed in the Economist's comment in an article entitled, 'One and Only One' carried in its latest edition which states: 'After a nervous start and amid calls for fresh polls, her government has hit its stride. Some sympathisers argue that Sheikh Hasina's rule is justified, if only because of her success in developing the economy.'

The long and short of the argument is that since there is an apparent calm in the country's political arena and since economic indices are showing upward trend like, for example, availability of eggs per head has doubled, (one is not sure if it is due to the increase in purchasing power of the people or fecundity of hens) the status quo should continue. And they also cite the recognition by most countries of this regime in spite of the faulty elections. To back up their argument they promptly cite examples of several South and East Asian countries, which have for good part

of their history been a non-pluralistic society and which boast of a robust economy with five figure per capita income. One fears that these arguments may again be used for similar modus of election in future too. These utterances are ominous.

These are fallacious arguments. No doubt some countries with 'authoritarian democracy' have done considerably better than we have but there were other concomitant factors that have propelled economic growth there. But can we say that it would not have been better if there were unfettered politics in those countries?

It is true that politically, these countries, during their rapid economic boom, had various kinds of authoritarian regime, but are we then to accept that since martial law regimes saw little political disturbances and considerable development, despotic rule should be preferable to democratic politics? Does international recognition lend moral validity to martial regimes or justify undemocratic arrangements? Are we to accept that autocracy is the best path to development? Are these arguments signs of the beginning of the end of pluralistic politics in this country?

Autocratic disposition generates a psyche among the ruling group of not only invincibility but a couldn't-care-less attitude that makes them dispense with the need for accountability to the people or probity and transparency in actions.

One doesn't have to read the reports of human rights bodies or the mention of the issue in the European

Parliament to fathom the gravity of the situation. Where is the accountability when reportedly in the last eight months only there were 116 encounter killings?

The manner and speed with which the broadcasting policy was formulated, and that too without appropriate laws for its implementation being in place, leave a big question mark on the government's attitude towards the media. And the prospect of the grip on the media getting even tighter is strengthened by the plan to amend the Press Council Act to install some stringent provisions in it, to say nothing of the 16th Constitutional Amendment.

Democracy is the worst form of government except all the others that have been tried. And it must take precedence over any other considerations. It is thus distressing to see a party which had dedicated all its energy during the years under Pakistan to establishing democracy and rights of the people should choose to enact such retrogressive policies and laws which are against the very essence of the causes it had fought for. And that makes their expressed commitment to democracy sound hollow.

The writer is Editor, OP-Ed and Defence & Strategic Affairs, The Daily Star.

# Border more complicated after Xi's visit

## BETWEEN THE LINES



KULDEEP NAYAR

was willing to keep Arunachal Pradesh as a disputed territory provided there was an indication by Beijing that it was willing to settle the border dispute keeping New Delhi's sensibility as well as sensitivity in view. The standoff in Ladakh holds no such hope.

President Xi's response was not helpful and he sustained the incursions in the Indian territories during his entire visit. And after returning to Beijing, the Chinese president has reportedly told his top military officials that they should be ready for regional wars which he contended must be won. It was all directed towards New Delhi which, for reasons best known to it, did not say a word to register its annoyance. It was a stance which the subject nations take against their masters.

What surprised me was why we invited the Chinese president when Beijing has made no amends for the betrayal in 1962 when it attacked the unprepared India. Nor has it vacated the territory which it forcibly captured since then. The Ministry of External Affairs should have tested the waters before Xi's visit.

The various steps China has taken since, from the stapling of visa on passport to amassing PLA soldiers in Gilgit-Baltistan, should make things clear for New Delhi -- a plethora of irritations. However, it would be naïve to play into the hands of China as India did in 1962. A sense of growing strength has given Beijing a measure of superiority. It is crudely exhibiting it, particularly when India looks disorderly and divided.

More concerting for New Delhi is that Beijing is an emerging power in Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Myanmar and Nepal, the countries surrounding India. New Delhi should also reach out to Taiwan, Vietnam and other south Asian countries which are feeling the assertiveness of China. And Beijing should be made to realise that India has accepted China's suzerainty over Tibet but not the demographic change or the ruthless repression in that territory. The Dalai Lama is already feeling restive and edgy.

Jawaharlal Nehru warned India as back as in 1962 thus: "It is a little naïve to think that the trouble with China was essentially due to a dispute over some territory. It had deeper reasons. Two of the largest countries in Asia confronted each other over a vast border. They differed in many ways. And the test was as to whether anyone of them

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would have a more dominating position than the other on the border and in Asia itself."

I mean no disrespect to the Chinese president. But his visit was doomed to be a failure. Investment is at best palliative to the hurt caused on the border. I have not been able to understand, much less appreciate, the purpose of the visit from our point of view.

In fact, China's incursions in Ladakh when the president and prime minister were talking in Delhi, underlined the intractable stance on the border. That China would invest \$20 billion (the initial figure was \$100 billion) in India suits Beijing because it wants to increase trade with New Delhi which offers a vast market and other opportunities. But what about the basic requirement: trust. Nehru introduced Chinese leader Zhou Enlai to the world. He looked up to Nehru but that was till he got known in the international arena. Zhou Enlai betrayed Nehru when China took advantage of our trust -- and unpreparedness.

I do not think that Prime Minister Narendra Modi would ever have as much equation with the Chinese president as Nehru had with Zhou Enlai. Still, the latter carried out the task he had in mind, capturing in Ladakh the area which China claimed to be its own. In fact, the incursions in our territory that took place during the talks between Modi and Jinping underlined that China does not want to accommodate India on the border issue.

I do not find the determination at the highest level. There is a lot of wishful thinking. What purpose does it serve in discussing whether Prime Minister Narendra Modi had the better of China or President Jinping on the border issue when the reality of our society is the caste and class? The dalits are still treated as untouchable as during our forefathers' time.

Today's youth is indifferent to everything else, but not to the feeling of superiority which he seems to feel as his birthright.

Eleven children, all cousins belonging to a dalit family, were ousted from a government primary school in a village in Bikaner, Rajasthan, after two of them drank water from an earthen pot meant for an upper caste teacher. He reportedly humiliated the two students and even beat them up. True, the teacher, Mangal Singh, was arrested after the family lodged a police complaint against him. But the society on the whole remains unresponsive. Prime Minister Modi talks about development. What kind of development does he have in mind where the caste bias is sustained? To some extent, the class and caste seem to coincide.

Coming back to the disputed part of India-China border, the matter has got more complicated after the visit of President Jinping. For example, the Chinese troops who entered the Indian territory not only stayed there but also increased their strength. They have reportedly now withdrawn from the place. But Beijing has made it loud and clear that India should stay from the disputed territory.

The writer is an eminent Indian columnist.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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### Fine, not escort jaywalkers

Anyone who has ever visited Singapore knows the common joke that it is a very 'fine' city, because you get fined for everything including a 500 Singapore dollar fine for jaywalking, and Singapore is a very clean, well-organised, and prosperous city state. Quite often during the week, I travel south from Uttara to the Gulshan area and almost always traffic is backed up for 5-30 minutes from the airport crossing, sometimes all the way back to Jashimuddin Avenue. This is mainly due to police-escorted jaywalkers who refuse to use the nearby bridge. It costs a lot of time, fuel and money affecting productivity. Perhaps the policemen lack the training, empowerment, and authorisation to fine jaywalkers so they simply escort them.



PHOTO: STAR

One thing is certain: unless the law is enforced, it will not be obeyed, no matter how much money is expended on electronic signboards. Why not start by selecting one date out of the year (perhaps November 1?) where every person caught jaywalking is fined 500 taka. Use this revenue to repair numerous pot-holed roads in the poorer parts of the city.

Scott Elliott  
Uttara, Dhaka

### "Cooling water requirement for RNPP"

I congratulate Engr. K.M. Mahbubur Rahman on his article regarding cooling water requirement for RNPP, published in your esteemed daily on September 23, 2014. He pointed out difficulties that the designers of the national plant will face. He mentioned the relevant problems that will be faced by the nearby Bheramara irrigation project. Detailed design will of course determine the amount of the total cooling water requirement. However, his estimate appears to be highly underestimated. He mentioned the cooling water intake structure. But he is silent about the source of water during lean period of the Padma.

Prof. M. A. Quaiyum  
Former chairman  
Bangladesh Atomic Energy Commission

### "No head above king"

Mahfuz Anam has written a very strong commentary. We need people like him to see things above politics and self-interest, people who can contribute to the betterment of society and make a difference. Maybe we will have to wait for a change. And when this much coveted change will come, we will learn to respect people with different views.

Fawzia Chowdhury  
An ordinary citizen

### Comments on news report, "Korean EPZ in trouble," published on September 21, 2014

#### Sayed Rahman

The report tells that YoungOne is not a new company here in Bangladesh. They have been working here since 1980. The company has industries in Dhaka and Chittagong EPZs with 60,000 workers. It will employ 3.5 lakh people if it can go into full operation. I believe the government will take decision after a meticulous scrutiny. Any wrong decision might hamper our employment situation. Besides, it might have a negative impact on other foreign investors.

#### Afreen

Good decision by the government. If the government cannot fulfill KEPZ's demand, then they should get those lands back and give it to trusted investors like Japan, Germany, etc. The government must keep its words.

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### "Low turnout, rigging mark elections" (September 23, 2014)

#### Sayed Rahman

I am not going to comment on the polls of our country, but I would request all to compare our elections with other countries' elections.