

When would enough be enough?

Give yourselves and the nation a break!

THE United Nations has voiced its concern over continuing political violence and fatalities in Bangladesh for more than a month. The former UN Assistant Secretary General, Political Affairs, Oscar Fernandez Taranco has been reportedly assigned to coordinate with Bangladesh government in matters of persuading the contending parties to resolve their differences.

From that perspective, it is important to get to the brass-tacks. As fallout of ruthlessly relentless blockade and hartals reach horrific levels, the BNP-led alliance calls these a political movement and the ruling party persists with a law and order approach to a fundamentally political issue.

For the BNP's part, seeing the burning and killing sprees with bomb blasts, derailment of trains, torching of vehicles and denying livelihoods to people as parts of political movement based on what is claimed as 'spontaneous' support of the people is a measure of how dehumanised a political party can get. If the BNP does not want to alienate itself further from people and court acts of subversion, it should now call a halt to blockade and shutdown allowing a breather in the tense situation.

The onus of generating cross-party confidence lies fundamentally with the government. The way the political mercury has risen between both sides, a patient gradient approach will have to be adopted by the AL and BNP. In the meanwhile intimidating utterances should be avoided and fetters removed from the BNP, allowing it space for carrying out legitimate political programmes.

Empowering special needs people

High time to prioritise the issue

IT is a sad reality in our country that people with special needs, instead of being supported, are shunned from mainstream society, denied their rightful opportunities for leading a normal life. To address this, various stakeholders at a talk have urged all 17 ministries in charge of development of people with disabilities to allocate a specific budget and a comprehensive plan of action geared towards empowering them.

The importance of proper training for the disabled must not be underestimated if we are to form an inclusive workforce. Persons with disabilities, making up around 2 crore of the population, should be seen as assets -- not liabilities -- for our economy. A little more than 9 percent of the total population has varying disabilities which need to be countered with adequate capability-based training. The ministries in charge must consider devising an extensive plan of action for the disabled and incorporating them into existing mainstream developmental programmes. Persons with disabilities, especially those living in rural communities and urban slums, are often deprived of benefits of development initiatives. We need inclusive development programmes to help ensure broader involvement and assimilation of the disabled population in our civil society.

Development of the disabled population must be seen as a human rights issue to be prioritised and tackled head-on by the government. Important initiatives that address issues faced by these disadvantaged groups with special needs are commendable and a positive step for

STRANGER THAN FICTION



TAJ HASHMI

ENOUGH has already been written, discussed and debated on the ongoing political crisis in Bangladesh, especially with regard to the usefulness of a meaningful dialogue between Sheikh Hasina and Khaleda Zia to resolve the crisis, albeit in the short term. However, all the unsolicited advice seems to have gone down the Buriganga, which is also as polluted as Bangladesh politics.

As I have argued through this column, unrestrained political violence could be a prelude to full-blown terrorism, so has the International Crisis Group registered similar apprehensions about Bangladesh:

[T]he political crisis is fast approaching the point of no return and could gravely destabilise Bangladesh unless the sides move urgently to reduce tensions.... Both parties [AL and BNP] would be best served by changing course.... Violent Islamist factions are already reviving.... While jihadi forces see both parties as the main hurdle to the establishment of an Islamic order, the AL and the BNP perceive each other as the main adversary.

AL leaders and senior police and Rab officials in Bangladesh (the differences between politicians and public servants seem to have disappeared totally) have publicly stated that the present crisis would be resolved on the street, not through any dialogue. Senior AL leader Amir Hussain Amu believes that since the government is in a "strong position," there is no need to have any dialogue with the opposition. What other ministers and law enforcers have already said in public in this regard, better not be reproduced here. The DIG police of Dhaka Range has not only asked for shooting saboteurs, but also for "destroying their families"? The irresponsible comments—that entail "OMG (Oh My God!) Moments"—are abhorrently disturbing.

It's time to appraise the turbulent situation in Bangladesh in terms of historical sociology. Like Pakistan, Bangladesh came into being in absolute haste (thanks to the stubbornness of West Pakistani leaders and military), almost without any plan or preparation on the part of the would-be founders. The cumulative effects of the unprecedented brutal killing, rape and torture of tens of thousands of unarmed Bengali civilians by Pakistani troops and their local collaborators, and the destruction of the administrative, business, communication, and industrial infrastructure—

during the Liberation War—were simply overpowering for Bangladesh. While thousands of highly educated and well-trained Bengali civil and military officials were stranded in Pakistan (up to 1974), the acute shortage of trained manpower in the public and private sectors in the country further aggravated the situation.

The newly independent country also lacked a powerful middle class, professionals, teachers and entrepreneurs. Highly ambitious, corrupt and incompetent political activists and "freedom fighters"—mostly the pseudo ones, who proliferated after the Liberation—took full advantage of the situation. Strong patron-client relationship (prevalent in peasant economies), nepotism and favouritism soon infected politics, civil administration, and the nationalised industrial and business sectors. The absence of powerful middle class—and middle class/urban values—and the prolifera-

tics; and on the other, have accepted corruption as a way of life. Under-employed and unemployed men have swelled the ranks of "armed cadres" or political thugs maintained by local patrons, who are again clients to their patrons at the higher level. The network of the patron-client hierarchy in the country deserves separate discussions and study.

The "Mass Society" of Bangladesh is more of a *gemeinschaft* or rural community than a *gesellschaft* or urban society, as German sociologist Ferdinand Tönnies (1855-1936) has elaborated the concept. A *gemeinschaft* promotes "pre-political" culture of violence, anarchy and fatalism, where people don't trust and respect each other; they are primarily factious—only rely on their faction chiefs or patrons—and love to fight members of rival factions (often their neighbours) on phony issues, rumours, and conspiracy theories.

No wonder, flimsy issues and prob-

movements, such as the French and Russian revolutions, and the fascist/Nazi takeovers of Italy and Germany. Post-revolutionary mass societies also support traditional elites, and are subject to "totalitarian elite" manipulation at the cost of democracy and pluralism.

Mass societies represent populist views of the "crowds," who are "only powerful for destruction," and defend collective incompetence of the masses. Mass societies do not evolve out of class struggles; and are fractured, atomised and bureaucratic. Most importantly, in mass societies, masses mobilise elites; it is not the other way around. Sections of intellectuals having soft corner for anti-elitist destructive crowds promote mass societies. Rapid influx of people in newly developed urban areas invites mass movements; and sudden rise in the levels of poverty or prosperity are other contributing factors to mass societies. According to Kornhauser, a society experiencing youth bulge—when more than half of the population is in the 18-40 age group—and rise in "religious extremism rather than political extremism is fully compatible with mass theory."

Followers of populist mass-based and Islamist parties have more resemblances to members of mass societies than parties led by slightly more elitist and aristocratic leaders.

Mostly criminal elements, people with no known source of income, are the new patrons in the arena of politics. And since winning elections at any level—local municipalities or the parliament—pays rich dividends, elections have replaced the share market for investment. The apathetic and marginalised middle classes hardly take part in elections, either as voters or as candidates. Thus, half-educated people with dubious character get elected through manipulation and, literally, buying of votes of urban squatters, lumpen elements, and rural hoi polloi.

This is, however, not unique to Bangladesh. Post-colonial states go through cycles of hope, high optimism and euphoria followed by disappointment and pessimism. Bangladesh's African counterparts went through similar fluctuating cycles in the 1960s. It is noteworthy that while post-colonial African states are gradually changing, emerging out of long-lasting ethno-national conflicts (excepting Mali, Chad, Libya and Nigeria) of the 1960s-2000s—Africa is no longer a place of "forever wars"—unfortunately, Bangladesh is fast going the "Africa way," as it was till the recent past. However, the process is still reversible. Leaders at every level of society must act now.

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tion of mass-based rural, small town culture of the petty/lumpen bourgeoisie and lumpen proletariat classes transformed the Bangladesh society into a "Mass Society," as the late Berkeley sociologist William Kornhauser (1925-2004) used and elaborated the expression.

During the first decade of independence, the country went through several rounds of military takeovers, killing of national leaders and reckless use of political Islam, which simply violated the core principles of state ideology and literally, the "Spirit of Liberation" (in the academic and objective sense of the expression). The widening gap between the rich and the poor, due to the institutionalised corruption through state enterprises, banks, NGO-business, garment factories, bribery, tax evasion, and extortion has posed the biggest security threat to the country. On the one hand, people have become apathetic to poli-

lens seem to be more important than corruption and unaccountability of the ruling elites (irrespective of which party is in power), and the continued violations of the Constitution and the state ideology. The unconstitutional removal of "Secularism" as one of the state-principles without a country-wide referendum; and the introduction of the bizarre and creepy concept of "state religion" (Islam as the "state religion") by the illegitimate government of General Ershad, may be mentioned in this regard.

As mentioned above, Bangladesh society fits in well into Kornhauser's "Mass Society", where "widespread readiness to abandon constitutional modes of political activity in favour of uncontrolled mass action" is the norm. Masses are not necessarily working class people, but not integrated to the state or ruling elites, either. Mass societies emerge in the wake of revolutionary

PROJECT ■ SYNDICATE

Breaking Europe's climate-change stalemate



GRAEME SWEENEY

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT NOW
EUROPE has a strong tradition as a leader in the fight against climate change. Lately, however, the continent has reached an ideological impasse over how to address the problem, with environmental sustainability and growth often portrayed as being mutually exclusive. If Europe is to remain an environmental leader, as well as a center of innovation and competitiveness,

it will have to abandon its ideological rigidity and embrace realistic, pragmatic solutions that can deliver environmental benefits without sacrificing economic development.

The challenges posed by climate change are real, and the consequences of inaction are impossible to ignore. At the same time, there is a growing demand for energy and a desperate need for a long-term exit from the ongoing economic crisis. There is no single, easy solution that addresses both of these imperatives. Reining in global warming while ensuring economic growth will require a balanced portfolio of solutions, including renewable energy and increased energy efficiency. Essential among such solutions is carbon capture and storage.

CCS technology captures carbon dioxide at the source of its emission, compresses it, and stores it permanently underground. In doing so, it provides an important bridge between our modern economy, which relies heavily on carbon-intensive fossil fuels, and a future in which CO2 emissions are greatly reduced. This provides the means for maintaining a competitive industrial sector while simultaneously combating global warming.

To be sure, as with any innovation, there are questions about the technology's viability. Some question the scale of the investment needed to install and maintain the systems necessary for capturing and storing CO2. It is important to note, however, that these costs pale in comparison with the far greater costs of reducing CO2 emissions without CCS. According to the International Energy Agency, for example, a ten-year delay in deploying CCS would increase the cost of decarbonising the power sector by €750 billion (\$880 billion).

The United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change has been unequivocal in its insistence that reducing CO2 emissions and diminishing depend-

ence on fossil fuels is more urgent than ever. It has made it clear that CCS, the only technology that can capture at least 90% of the CO2 emissions from the world's largest producers, must be a part of the solution.

Beyond Europe's borders, governments and businesses are already forging ahead. In Canada, the world's first full-scale CCS project, Boundary Dam, came onstream in October 2014, proving that the technology is viable and ready to be deployed. The United Arab Emirates has initiated the world's first large-scale CCS project in the iron and steel sector. China continues to show great interest in the technology, and is collaborating with the United States to develop its CCS capabilities.

Europe cannot afford to lag behind. Energy-intensive industries directly support four million jobs across the continent. Investing in CCS would help preserve Europe's economic base by securing and creating jobs and protecting vital industries. It would help to realise a vision of Europe that supports both sustainability and growth -- a vision that is clearly in line with European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker's priorities of creating jobs, sustaining growth, and developing a competitive energy union.

The continent's largest petroleum companies, and equipment suppliers, are ready to invest what is needed to reduce CO2 emissions. But, in order for that to be possible, realistic policies and strategies are needed.

CCS has been recognized at the highest political level as a part of the European Union's 2030 Climate and Energy framework and the European Energy Security Strategy. But it is time to translate recognition into concrete action. That, in turn, requires investment incentives, improved carbon pricing, and an upgrade to the emissions trading system. A game-changing solution presupposes substantial political will; it is essential that European leaders show that they know what needs to be done.

Sustainable growth need not be an oxymoron. But to achieve it, Europe must overcome the ideological stalemate that is paralysing the environmental debate. To reconcile our environmental priorities with continued growth, we must act realistically, pragmatically, and -- above all -- immediately.

The writer, former Executive Vice President at Royal Dutch Shell, is Chairman of the Advisory Council of the European Technology Platform of Zero Emission Fossil Fuels Power Plants. Copyright: Project Syndicate, 2015. www.project-syndicate.org (Exclusive to The Daily Star)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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PHOTO: AFP

ICC Cricket World Cup 2015

The ICC Cricket World Cup 2015 has started in New Zealand and Australia. Australia, co-hosts and the current number one team in the ICC ODI Rankings, are the favourites just ahead of South Africa. Co-hosts New Zealand are going into the tournament as most pundits' and bookmakers' 'dark horses'. The Kiwis, despite boasting neither the financial prowess nor the resources that some other countries have at their disposal, have been semi-finalists in six out of the 10 ODI World Cups and have won the ICC Champions trophy. I am tipping the Kiwis to go all the way to the final and winning the World Cup for the first time in their history. The biggest upset will most likely involve West Indies and I feel they will get knocked out in the group stage after losing against Zimbabwe or Ireland (or both!) with one of those two nations advancing to the knockout stage. The usual suspects should advance from the other group even though I think Bangladesh are capable of causing an upset against a very inexperienced England side. Bangladesh had a torrid 2014 with an abysmal T20 World Cup and Asia Cup on their own backyard, where they lost against Hong Kong and Afghanistan, but they have recovered later.

Aranya Syed
London, United Kingdom

Ban hartal

When hartals are more important to BNP and Jamaat than the education of country's younger generation, there is no other choice but to ban hartals. It is clear that their main aim is to dislodge the government and scuttle the trials of the war criminals and that is why they are hell bent on hampering the SSC examination besides crippling the country's economy.

A. H. Dewan
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"It's 1/11 amnesia" (February 11, 2015)

Kamrul Manir

It is not understood what the government wants. Do they want to rule forever?

Javed Akhtar

Yes they do. It's clear as daylight.

S. M. Iftekhar Ahmed

They get amnesia whenever they find it to be convenient for them. No wonder this crisis continues.

Deep Purple Blue

We are caught in a web of dysfunctional political parties and self seeking leaders to whom the country and its people are mere pawns while the leaders are supreme and sovereign!

"Ministers, AL leaders slam call for talks initiative" (February 11, 2015)

Ana

Excess is no good. Hon'ble ministers, you have enough ability to judge people's nerve. You shouldn't reject what people want.

"Free Election" (February 11, 2015)