

Hardening political impasse

Intent and self-initiative key to solution

WITH the AL and BNP replying to UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon's letter urging them to sit for dialogue, all we find is an emphatic reiteration of the hard positions of the respective political parties.

The BNP's 'readiness' to sit for talks will lack conviction so long it continues with its mindless oborodh and hartals. And, the government's 'repression' and its refusal 'to sit with terrorists' add to the hiatus. Thus, there appears to be a deficit of intent, aside from the presence of a hostile environment in which even an initiative for talks is difficult to nurture.

Both the political parties, however, should know it full well that they owe it to the nation to find a way out of the political impasse. The solution must come from within—that is the pressing imperative they need to internalize in the first place.

So far we have concentrated on the government as the dispenser to lead the way for a breakthrough; but now it seems an important part of the onus lies with the BNP to be amenable to rational reasoning. Their blood-letting, severe burn-inflicting, and education and economy hurting blockade and hartals are intolerably nearing the two-month mark. These mindless and purposeless programmes are taking them nowhere; on the contrary, people are confused about their goals. Just as their attempts at passing off oborodh and hartals as political movement sound as cruel mockery so also are these running out of steam exposing the renegade nature of the callers. It is high time the BNP withdrew from such a suicidal approach and restore normality to civic life.

Submission of probe committee reports

Consistent delays raise questions

AFTER every major disaster in the country, probe committees are formed to assuage the public that a fair investigation would be conducted and perpetrators identified and brought to justice in a timely manner. It is unfortunate, however, that most of these probe committee findings do not reach public ears; in an overwhelming number of cases, the investigation, if completed at all, is conducted in a lackluster, insincere manner, with many reports outlining vague findings where the real culprits remain unnamed.

Our report suggests that most of the probe bodies formed to investigate inland waterway disasters in the last six months have failed to submit their findings even though the deadline for doing so has long transpired. Two of the committees formed after the disastrous Sundarbans oil tanker spill are yet to submit their reports, even though they had a deadline of 15 days. Similarly probe reports for accidents of MV Nafiz on November 14 and MV Hazera-1 on September 1 are yet to be submitted.

This delay on the part of authorities highlights their lack of commitment in holding those responsible accountable for their commissions and omissions. This is unacceptable for it paves the way for perpetrators to escape punishment, thereby creating a culture of impunity; furthermore, failure to identify the real causes for such accidents on time means that corrective actions cannot be taken to help prevent future accidents.

We strongly urge the concerned authorities to ensure that investigations are conducted in a fair, efficient and timely manner, so that the public does not lose their faith in the efficacy of these committees.

COMMENTS

"Rab hands over Manna to DB" (February 26, 2015)

Binodbangali

Relieved to hear that at least he still exists! Now we want to know who picked him up and why such weird and flimsy narratives are being spread by law enforcers. At the same time, Manna should explain more about his tele-talks.

"Bullets, not mob beating" (February 24, 2015)

Deep Purple Blue

Nobody believes the shootout story anymore as everybody knows these are extrajudicial killings by the law enforcers.

Aasfisarwar

There is no shred of doubt that these incidents are extra judicial killings perpetuated by Bangladesh security agencies. How long they will continue doing this?

"Editors worried over media freedom" (February 25, 2015)

Deep Purple Blue

We are already in a bad state—curb on media freedom, no political space for the opposition except for the loyal opposition, attack on civil society and total reluctance to hold dialogue and so on...

Faisal

You are concerned about media freedom? Let me tell you something. Today, each and every citizen's freedom has been taken away. Each and every person in Bangladesh is at the mercy of the whims of the two persons. Each and every one of us is prisoner.

Rahul Ahmed

Unless the media unite and put profession before politics, they will always suffer. Today pro-government journalists might think they are safe but for how long?

No one killed Avijit Roy

Hacked freedom of expression

JYOTIRMOY BARUA

FREEDOM of expression, the most inalienable right of the citizens, has been under attack in many ways in this country for a long time. Denying this fact will not change the truth. The killing of blogger Avijit Roy on February 26 by unknown assailants is nothing but an outcome of what this country is becoming day by day.

The rhetoric that Bangali people have been living in communal harmony for last thousand years is not correct. History reveals the bitter truth. The failure to check the psychological changes in the mind of the people has cost us many lives and loss of trust among each other. The government, the intellectuals and the educated section of the society have failed to prevent these changes. This is the real threat the country is facing now.

Now the question is not who killed Avijit, rather everybody is asking how he was killed when there were policemen within approximately 10 yards of the incident. Pictures were published in the newspapers showing common people and police standing near the crime scene, and some of them were taking photographs with their cell phones. This is what we had seen at the time of Biswajit killing, when media took videos of the whole scene rather than rescuing him.

There is speculation that nothing will happen to the killers considering the result of investigations in the case of Professor Humayun Azad, Rajib Haider, Professor Lalon, Sagor-Runi, and so on. In the Avijit killing the photographs published in the newspapers and social media show that there were eye witnesses, including police. The killers can



also be tracked down by tracing their cell phone activities. Police seized two motor cycles and two machetes from the crime scene. If those motor cycles belonged to the killers then the registration details will lead to identification of the killers. All we need is to find the killers.

If the investigation is successful despite all odds, then we can demand holding of the trial in Speedy Trial Tribunal, and also transfer of all the previous cases like that of Humayun Azad and Rajib Haider to the same tribunal. In this crisis, the society needs a judicial precedent to get back hope.

Recent news reports have raised some questions about the role of security agencies as published photographs show that police were standing near the victim while Rafida Ahmed cried for help! Police probably could not prevent the homicide but they could at least have attempted to catch the killers.

Some are trying to link the incident with some comments in the leaked telephone conversation of Mahmudur Rahman Manna. If they want ordinary people to believe what they are saying, then they should also admit that the sole responsibility of protecting us lies upon the government. If the government knew that there would be an attempt to kill someone in the Dhaka University campus to boost the oppositions protest, then it should have taken extra measures to protect the lives of the citizens. The antithesis is there as well which casts suspicion upon the people who are claiming the "Manna theory."

After every incident in Bangladesh we get drowned in a myriad of thesis and antithesis, leaving a very narrow space for the investigators to find out the actual perpetrators through investigation. Our past experience shows that the investigation finally finds

truth in the claim of the people in power! Literally leaving no hope for getting justice. This bias has become a national phenomenon in all sphere of our life. In the present case of Avijit, if this culture goes on then there is no hope at all.

The killing of Avijit gave rise to questions like what and how far the bloggers can write in their blogs, a very legitimate question. Be it blogs or any other media, as per international law, no one can be allowed to incite child pornography, genocide, racial hatred and terrorism. Except these four, there should not be any other restrictions against one's right to freedom of expression. Our constitution has a number of other vague restrictions which are not defined and are capable of being interpreted according to the wish of the people in power.

There are a few self-imposed restrictions like refraining from defaming someone intentionally, deliberately committing any other criminal offence, etc. Even if someone does commit an offence which is punishable by law then he may be liable to be dealt with in accordance with law. Killing him/her cannot be justified for whatever reason. Moreover, to win an argument one needs a better argument. Whether you like it or not, civilisation will move forward by way of questioning authority. This is what education usually does -- arm people with the tool to question authority. There will always be people who will follow the established principles rather than questioning them. This is how the society should grow up -- side by side.

The writer is Advocate, Supreme Court, and Member, South Asians for Human Rights (SAHR).

Financing climate change activities in Bangladesh

POLITICS OF CLIMATE CHANGE



SALEEMUL HUQ

BANGLADESH has been a pioneer in financing climate change by setting up two separate climate change funds over the last decade. One, called the Climate Change Trust Fund (CCTF), was funded entirely from government of Bangladesh funds allocated in the budget by the finance minister each year, and has over \$500 million allocated over the years. This fund has been governed by an inter-ministerial committee and each year they allocated two-thirds of the amount towards projects submitted by different agencies and ministries, while keeping one-third in a reserve account to be used in case of emergencies.

The second fund is called the Climate Change Resilience Fund (CCRF) and is based on contributions from international development partners including the United Kingdom, Denmark, USA, European Commission and others. This fund is governed by a board with both government as well as donor participants and has been managed by the World Bank.

While there is some differences between the two funds (for example the size of projects that each fund supports), there are several features in common.

The first common feature is that both funds support projects which have to be part of the Bangladesh Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan (BCCSAP). This avoids the parallel activities by different donors funding different projects, which is sometimes duplicative and can be wasteful. So far, both funds have supported several hundred projects being implemented by different agencies and ministries of the government.

The second common feature is the allocation of 10% of each Fund towards civil society for supporting community based adaptation activities. Both funds have selected the Palli Karma Shahayak Samity (PKSF) as the agency to deliver these funds to NGOs around the country. Many NGOs are now delivering these projects with support from PKSF.

In addition to the two dedicated climate change funds there has also been financing to Bangladesh from international climate funds under the United Nations Framework on Climate Change (UNFCCC) such as the Least Developed Countries Fund (LDCF), as well as multilateral banks such as the Pilot Programme on Climate Resilience (PPCR) from the World Bank

through the Asian Development Bank (ADB) as well as bilateral agencies such as DFID from the United Kingdom, USAID of USA, GIZ of Germany and JICA of Japan, amongst others.

Thus, Bangladesh has probably deployed nearly three-quarters of a billion dollars in several hundred activities amongst government as well as NGOs over the last decade.

As we go forward to the next phase of tackling climate change through different activities and financing them as well, it is a good time now to reflect on the relative successes of different channels and plan the future of financing climate change activities. I will provide below some ideas for taking this assessment forward.

Need to learn lessons

Bangladesh has accumulated a considerable amount of experience in both tackling as well as financing climate change activities, both in government as well non-government sectors. It is therefore a good idea to conduct a major review of those lessons so that the next phase of activities can be done better than the last round. This means that we must identify, accept and learn from mistakes and not assume that everything we did so far was perfect or even effective. Such a critical self-evaluation is essential to avoid repeating mistakes in future.

Need for transparency

One way to learn from both success as well as failure is by ensuring transparency of activities, and specially of funding. Unfortunately, the previous phase of climate change activities and funding of those activities have not been very transparent. In order to avoid charges of corruption or wrongdoing and to make the investments more effective it is essential that information about activities and financing of those activities should be provided on a routine basis to anyone interested. With today's information technology tools and with the objective of going towards a Digital Bangladesh, the next round of activities and financing of climate change related activities should be put on the web for anyone to see easily if they wish.

Ensuring transparency is half the battle against corruption while at the same time it empowers citizens to know what is happening.

Future funding from global level

At the global level we are expecting \$100 billion each year to be made through the Green Climate Fund (GCF) for tackling climate change in developing countries. The GCF Board (on which Bangladesh represents the LDC Group) has recently made a very important

decision to allocate half of those funds to adaptation and half for mitigation. They also decided to focus the adaptation funding toward the LDCs and other most vulnerable developing countries.

The government of Bangladesh has recently designated the External Resources Division (ERD) of the Ministry of Finance as its National Designated Authority (NDA) to deal with the GCF and approve national entities who could apply directly to the GCF for funding. The ERD has already initiated actions to identify implementing entities that could be approved for submitting funding proposals to GCF.

While it is important to enable such national implementing entities to apply for some early funding from GCF, I would argue that we must also invest at the same time in building our national capacities to utilise funds well.

In future, the amount of climate change funding that Bangladesh receives (for which it will have to compete with other vulnerable developing countries) will not depend on our vulnerability, but rather on our ability to demonstrate that we can use money well. This requires us to demonstrate that we have good and transparent mechanisms of disbursement and robust methods of monitoring and evaluating the outputs and outcomes of the investments that have been made.

Future funding at national level

Finally, we must realise that the climate change problem is here to stay and that ultimately we must try to mainstream or integrate climate change finance into national development finance. The Planning Commission as well as Ministry of Finance have been working on climate change budgeting with a view to ultimately mainstreaming climate change finance into national budgets and plans. While this may take some time, we need to invest in putting in place these systems for the longer run.

Conclusions

While climate change is a major problem for Bangladesh, the government and other stakeholders have actually been carrying out many useful projects to tackle different parts of the problem by implementing climate change activities around the country. If Bangladesh can critically assess the lessons learnt from the last few years and is able to incorporate those lessons into elements for the 7th Five Year Plan, the country can remain at the forefront of finding new ways to tackle climate change which other countries can learn from.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Political impasse taking its toll

The ongoing political impasse has hit every aspect of people's lives very hard. Businesses have come to a near-halt, education is in tatters, people are getting killed by arson attacks everyday. Holding innocent people hostages and wreaking havoc mindlessly throughout the country cannot be an acceptable means of demonstration. Political leaders must act sensibly with a view to keeping the country's economy unharmed and ensuring the security of public life. It is high time for our political leaders to shun the path of further mayhem and help people to get rid of this terrible situation.

Hasnat Lycan
Dhaka

Stop burning us

I'm a Bangladeshi girl and being dejected vent my feelings as I have lost my father and mother. They were burn victims of some senseless criminals. This is not supposed to be my childhood. I had lots of hope, but all are shattered, and all for our greedy politicians.

Do they ever see that children are being used to participate in political unrest? Can they visualise the scene of their parents, friends, relatives or children being burnt and their skins peeling off their body? This is what we are going through. We can't go to our schools,

we even can't hope. Here gaining possession of the country becomes the crying need of the political groups and we, the people, are the victims. Hey people, tell our politicians to stop burning hopes as they are not the owner of our death. I'll never get back my parents, I'll never see them with contentment, I'll never get the love I am suppose to get, but hey greedy politicians, allow other children to be loved. Feel the pain of the burnt ones. Think about yours, what if the same thing is happened to you? Stop burning us.

A little burning heart
On e-mail