

Well done Bangladesh!

Rejoicing in the victory, we are strengthened

CRICKET in Bangladesh has indeed come of age. Gone are the days when Bangladesh buckled at the crunch time, miserably failing to live up to the expectations of its millions of fans who stay glued to the television to get a chance of seeing their team play well. Bangladesh can now boast of beating most of the major cricketing nations in the world, which include world champions like Australia, India, Pakistan and the West Indies.

Nevertheless, Bangladesh's win against England, a formidable test playing nation, is significant on many counts, not least its entry into the ivy league of the last eight of the ICC Cricket World Cup. The Tigers have beaten the much-fancied English side by 15 runs, out-smarting them in all the three areas of the game—batting, bowling and fielding. The way they have beaten England has washed off the stain of their inconsistency streak. The victory also gives Bangladesh its maiden opportunity to play at the quarter final stage of the Cricket World Cup.

The irony however may not have escaped us. It has not been long that the England and Welsh Cricket Board, one of the so-called Big Threes of international cricket, proposed that teams like Bangladesh should play at the qualifying stage to take part in the Cricket World Cup.

We will not be exaggerating if we say that at a time of crisis, especially the one Bangladesh finds itself in, the Tigers have brought us together; it is a part of regenerative Bangladesh that wants to stride forward towards a progressive, happy future. Well done, Tigers! You did us proud.

Early alert on swine flu

Preparations laudable, more needs to be done

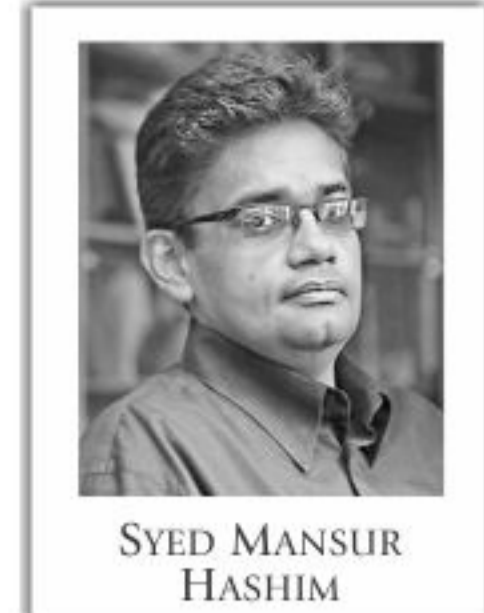
WITH the deadly H1N1 virus claiming 1,300 lives in India over the last two months alone, we are reassured by the government's proactive steps to minimise the possibility of a similar outbreak of swine flu in Bangladesh. According to our reports, medical teams are monitoring travellers at all 27 international air, land and sea ports in Bangladesh; more than 6,000 nurses and doctors have been trained to take care of H1N1 patients, with district hospital equipped with an "isolation ward" for potential patients.

This is undoubtedly a laudable effort on the part of our government to ensure that our people are protected, given that there is a high risk that the virus will seep through the long porous borders shared by Bangladesh and India. This screening must be done in an efficient and energetic manner by dedicated and trained teams.

However, thousands of people still remain outside the purview of such screenings, including those entering Bangladesh through Benapole land port every day and smugglers crossing the border illegally. Medical teams must be deployed without delay at the port for systematic screenings, and security heightened to monitor illegal cross-border movement of people.

In addition to the screening, the government must also carry out awareness campaigns to inform the public about the symptoms and dangers of the virus and encourage people to get the vaccine which is available on the market. Furthermore, there is an urgent need to increase the government emergency stock of drugs which currently can only treat 600 patients in case an outbreak takes place

Preventing an Afghan meltdown



SYED MANSUR HASHIM

THAT the United States (US) has put limitations on what actions the allied forces will perform in Afghanistan under the Bilateral Security Agreement (BSA) leaves much to be desired, at least as long as the new Afghan government is concerned. 12,500 troops on the ground from January 1, 2015 with nearly 10,000 coming from the US alone, are supposed to hold in check the Taliban and its allies. However, given the guidelines of the BSA, this force will help transfer the bulk of the fighting to the estimated 350,000 Afghan National Forces (ANF).

Voices are deeply divided as to precisely how effective this new policy will be. The plan as it stands envisages the ANF to head national security by 2017. The political climate is altogether not too glum. The third democratically elected government is in power. The billions of dollars invested in the country over the more than one decade of western engagement in the country has helped improve Afghanistan's "capacity for self-governance, improved national health care, expanded schooling opportunities for Afghan youth, especially girls, and a better connected Afghanistan to the outside world than ever before. Afghanistan also began 2015 with a 350,000-member security force consisting of an army, a limited air force, national police and border and customs forces." (Source: Foreign Policy Research Institute)

The flipside to this rosy picture is that a large percentage of the Afghan popu-

lace still suffers from extreme poverty. Being a landlocked country does not help the country in terms of trade and the overt dependence on foreign aid remains the Achilles heel. There is also a massive shortage of housing for nearly half the population. There is simply no denying the fact that many of the "gains" Afghanistan has achieved since 2002 were funded by multilateral agencies and these include both the building of infrastructure and institutions. Salaries of both the bureaucracy and the military are dependent on foreign aid. What is

Afghanistan. The increased intelligence sharing between India and Afghanistan and the growing cosy relationship between these two countries on military matters make the Taliban dilemma a festering wound in Afghan politics. With India now giving more direct military aid to ANF in terms of training and equipping, the stage is set for the Taliban to remain very much present in Afghanistan. Precisely how the US hopes to counter the growing fear that Afghanistan will become the country of choice for militant organisations where

fighting between the US-led allies and the Taliban in years gone by. Going by numbers, ANF has sustained 4,600 deaths in October, 2014 alone. It has serious deficiencies in intelligence support, in medical evacuation and / or supporting fire in terms of artillery and air bombardment. The bottom line is that 2014 has not been a good year to boost foreign investment confidence in the country. Without foreign investment to replace donor-handouts, there is serious doubt Afghanistan will be able to hold its own in the mid to long term. The drastic pullout from Afghanistan without putting into place the challenges of logistics, an intelligence backbone, without training and equipping air support and counter-insurgency forces will all collude to a dramatic turn of events in Afghanistan in the coming year, one that will hardly help in making "the world a safer place from terrorism."

So what can be done? It is imperative that the US commit itself to build up a workable intelligence gathering and sharing framework in Afghanistan and beyond. The ANF is still in its infancy when it comes to combating militant outfits and requires direct military support in its operations. There is also the need to comprehend that there is no alternative to training and maintaining an "operational military presence in Afghanistan." These key elements need to be worked into a revised BSA. The alternative is to let things lie as they are and watch as Afghanistan descends into another Iraq-type situation. The only problem with that is that the problems associated with militancy will spiral beyond the borders of Afghanistan onto neighbouring countries and beyond.

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sad to see is that despite sitting on some of significant deposits of precious minerals like copper, lithium, uranium, iron ore, cobalt, natural gas and oil, foreign investment has not been forthcoming primarily due to the fluid political situation on the ground.

It is not without reason that the Taliban refuse to go away. There is no doubt that the Taliban's principal supporters in the Pakistan military and intelligence community continue to patronise the group in an effort to influence the political discourse in

they train and use it as a base to counter Western interests in the region remain to be seen; especially with a much reduced force of less than 10,000 personnel on the ground.

Despite the impressive numbers, the Afghan army has been less than effective in countering the Taliban in the south, the east and in the capital city itself. This is so because the US-led allied forces are no longer there. Indeed the Afghan forces have actually ceded ground to the Taliban in areas in the south and east...gains that had come after much

Global celebrations of Beijing+20

CHRISTINE HUNTER

TWENTY years ago, thousands of delegates left the historic Fourth World Conference on Women on a high. The overwhelming feeling was that we had won a great victory for gender equality. Leaders from 189 countries, including Bangladesh, had committed to an extraordinary Platform for Action, with ambitious but realistic promises in key areas and a roadmap for getting there.

Bangladesh has been internationally recognised for its achievements since then. With genuine commitment governments and civil society have worked to lift women out of poverty and illiteracy, achieve gender parity in school enrolment and improve health especially for women as mothers. The country benefited as women came out of their houses into the factories and other jobs. There are more women in decision-making in national and local government and other successes to be celebrated

Yet there is a paradox; despite these achievements, the vast majority of women live with injustices that are completely inconsistent with human rights and the values on which Bangladesh was founded.

Girls start school but many do not finish. Boys who drop out of school may work in unskilled labour; girls will most often be married and work long hours for little or no pay. Levels of adolescent pregnancy are the highest in South Asia, and violence is so high as to be a normal part of women's lives.

We should celebrate successes but we must not be blind to continuing inequalities and the ways in which people's daily lives are shaped by gender roles and discrimination. Consider the context of climate change. Unpaid work for women increases significantly as households adapt to changes in the environment. Many men become day labourers or migrate to urban centres for work. Women take over the men's agricultural work or fishing while continuing the household work. Increasing scarcity of water and fuel often adds to the demands, increasing women's exposure to harassment. Micro-enterprises supported by development agencies provide some additional income, and managing the family's main livelihood can improve women's status in the household, but the total work burden is enormous, negatively affecting women's health and leaving little time to participate in community affairs.

During floods or tidal surges expectations that women will forgo their own welfare for their family's survival are common. In many households women are excluded from decision making and are not permitted to travel to services or markets without their husband's permission. In case of disaster they may be afraid to take the decision to move to a shelter. Women who go to the shelter may find secure space for pregnant and lactating mothers and female toilets, but not always.

Policies and programmes which are based on clear analysis of these realities are more likely to reach and benefit women. However, policies and programmes are implemented by people who live in the same environment where discrimination is practiced. Inevitably, some of those service providers will interpret policies through their own beliefs. Some justice officials will blame

human rights.

A national study by the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics found that 67% of ever-married women had experienced physical violence by their spouse. The findings suggest that in any 12 month period, at least 13 million women are physically assaulted. This can only be possible if the majority of people accept this violence and that acceptance can only be possible because women and girls are less valued than men. How can governments, media, private sectors, NGOs and citizens work together to challenge this devaluing of women?

Again, changing mindsets is not the only answer. One critical step is to reform laws that make women 'less equal' than men. By law the age of majority is 18. Girls under 18 cannot legally give consent, and yet one half of girls 15 to 19 are married. These girls

protections set out for other workers.

Thirdly, take actions to overcome social barriers that prevent fulfillment of women's human rights. School stipends are an example of a policy that provides support and incentives for families to educate their girls as well as their boys. Government and tertiary educational institutions can implement systems to increase women's enrolment in universities, technical colleges and skills training; stepping up action to prevent sexual harassment, setting quotas for girls, hiring more women to teach subjects traditionally dominated by men. Some employers already set targets to recruit women, invest in female employees and audit their human resource policies to help dismantle the glass ceiling. Any sector can implement strategies that will remove barriers to women's equal participation, the only limits are commitment



women who are raped for being out of their houses after dark and some health care providers will blame the mother who has no control over household resources for not feeding her children better food. We need to change these mindsets, but fair treatment by public services cannot wait for attitudes to change. Managers and decision-makers must be held responsible to provide adequate resources and training for service providers and those front-line providers must be accountable for treating women and men with equity.

Designing programmes in awareness of women's realities, taking steps to remove barriers women face and implementing accountability systems will help reduce inequalities. Global experience shows us, however, that this will not be enough to end violence against women or other serious abuses of women's

have no right of consent over a decision that will shape their lives. Marital rape is not recognised in the law of Bangladesh, suggesting that women have no right to bodily integrity. Personal laws impose limits on women's ability to protect their rights and their children in the context of marriage; inheritance law is a barrier to women's access to resources.

Secondly, recognise women's contribution to the national economy. Much of women's production of food and goods for the market is invisible because they work as unpaid family labourers. Women's unpaid care work is the foundation on which reductions in poverty and improvements in health and education have been achieved. Agriculture is the biggest sector of work for women, but they are not recognised as farmers. Domestic work is not included in the Labour Act, excluding those women, children and few men from the

and ingenuity.

Finally, yes, we do need to change social beliefs and attitudes. However, on International Women's Day let's commit to move beyond a sole focus on personal change and work together for social change.

Twenty years ago, leaders around the world promised to achieve gender equality. If leaders across Bangladesh join with gender equality advocates today; if business leaders, government members, educators, media and others genuinely step up their action for equality and build on the foundation laid in the last 20 years; if they can make the necessary investments, build partnerships and hold each other accountable for results, we could finally see those promises fulfilled.

The writer is Country Representative, UN Women.

COMMENTS

"Khaleda blames violence on the AL"

(March 5, 2015)

Barkat

The leaders of both BNP and AL are responsible for the violence. It will be wrong to expect anything good from any one of them.

Anonymous

We can't disagree with her because we have come to know from newspaper reports that cops caught pro-ruling party activists red-handed with petrol bombs.

"Modi 'eagerly waiting' to visit Dhaka"

(March 3, 2015)

Deep Purple Blue

Our foreign secretary sees "a major change" in Indian foreign policy that New Delhi is focused on resolving bilateral problems and pending issues "expeditiously" with its next door neighbours.

Is our foreign secretary saying that the previous Indian government was not focused on resolving bilateral problems?

Snr Citizen

This gesture and positive moves to solve problems will be possible only from the standpoint of strength. So, we expect India will

"Punishment must"

(February 8, 2015)

Prof. M. Hoque

Parliament should ban calling of hartals because it is a breach of citizens' right to move freely or safely.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Truth or Fiction?

In response to my earlier letter, Iqbal Hossain writes in a letter published on February 25: 'a certain person filed a case in the High Court against the caretaker government system' and that 'it is not true that Awami League abolished the CTC.'

But sometimes truth is stranger than fiction; from where that person surfaced, why he filed a case etc. all seem mysterious. It looks like a part of a great design, a bead of a single string.

Nur Jahan
Chiitagong

"Fertiliser from human waste"

In appreciation of Engr. S. A. Mansoor's letter titled as above (TDS 3/3/15) I would like to say that fertiliser known as 'night soil' or 'night manure' made from bio-solids, or human waste has yet to get a safety certificate for application in food crop production or in agriculture. Because such fertiliser even after strict treatment may contain heavy metals, pathogens or chemicals which might contaminate crops and enter into

the human food chain. In some advanced countries, fertiliser made from human wastes or bio-solids are used but after killing dangerous bacteria either with heat or anaerobic digestion in treatment plants. But such type of fertiliser is not allowed in organic agriculture. In fact more epidemiological research is needed to determine the health effects of using this fertiliser in growing food crops.

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