

BNP's 'demise' and possible consequences

DR. BADIUL ALAM MAJUMDAR

In Bangladesh, Awami League and BNP are the two major political parties, which have alternated in power since 1991. However, owing to its boycott of the last national election, BNP has no representation in the present parliament. Furthermore, due to its own organisational weaknesses and the various repressive measures of the government, it is currently unable to play any role in protecting the rights of the people.

Through its failed attempt to pull down the government in a violent movement during the first three months of the year, the organisational structure of BNP has collapsed, as evidenced by the recent inaction of many of its leaders. However, it was already weak organisationally because of its dynastic leadership structure. In fact, there is a serious crisis of ownership within the BNP's ranks. Another reason for its organisational weakness is its dual decision centres. In addition, because of the 15th Constitutional Amendment, which provides for parliament election under the ruling party, there is little chance for BNP to come to power in the foreseeable future. Thus, it is not surprising that many of its mid-to-senior level leaders were reluctant to take risks and join the recent anti-government movement.

Other reasons for the breakdown of BNP's organisational structure are the government's repressive measures and the excesses of the



PHOTO: AFP

law enforcement agencies. The government has filed innumerable cases, many of which are politically motivated, against BNP leaders, including Begum Zia. A number of senior leaders are already in jail. For example, the acting Secretary General of BNP, Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir, has at least 76 criminal cases against him and has been in jail for many months. In addition, thousands of cases are pending against thousands of BNP activists, many of whom are on the run. During

the violent movements at the beginning of the current year, nearly 10,000 of its leaders/workers were arrested.

It is believed that the government's aggressiveness is intended to neuter BNP. Many argue that with the continued government repression, BNP's demise is a matter of time. However, others disagree; they believe that despite a leadership crisis, BNP still enjoys widespread public support. Like a seesaw, BNP has been, to no credit of its own, benefitting from the ruling party's loss of support

for its errors in governance.

However, many citizens have no love lost for BNP because of its many sordid actions of the past. Nevertheless, many still feel that its extinction is not in our best interest. Rather to prevent the government from becoming more overbearing, BNP must now emerge as a democratic, secular and strong party. Furthermore, with the demise of BNP, many of its activists may join communal parties, and some may even become extremists.

Incidentally, even though BNP is currently in a bad shape, the ruling Awami League's long-term prospect is also not very bright. Having been in power for over six years, Awami League as a party has gotten lost in the government. The patronage-based politics of the past years has attracted many opportunists to the party, making many committed Awami League activists inactive. Hence, many observers are concerned that when out of power the ruling party may also be in disarray.

To conclude, Begum Zia will now have to take on the responsibility of transforming BNP into a truly democratic, secular and dynamic political party. She will have to renounce dynastic politics and empower honest and committed leaders. She also needs to find an executive president to run the party on a day-to-day basis. If Begum Zia is unable to rise to the occasion and make some unpleasant decisions, she herself, BNP as a party, and the entire nation will have to pay dearly for it.

The writer is Secretary, Shujan.

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The "sorrow of Chittagong City"

S M GUBAIR BIN ARAFAT

THE problem of waterlogging in Chittagong has reached such an extent that the first monsoon rain is enough to shut down the city. The most vulnerable places are Bakalia, Chawkbazar, Agrabad, Halishahar, Kapasgola, Chandaon, Shulakabahar, Bahaddarhat and the Probartak intersection, which went under water due to heavy rains, causing immense sufferings to the people living in these areas.

Chittagong is located in the tropical zone, where high temperature and heavy rainfall with high humidity is a general characteristic of the summer season. Annual rainfall in the city fluctuates between 2100mm and 3800mm, of which 2400mm occurs only during the monsoon. However, such climate has been there for centuries, while water logging is a comparatively recent phenomenon. In the last decade or so, this problem has been increasing due to population growth, economic agglomeration with unplanned urbanisation, illegal refilling of natural water channels, and encroachment of drains.

Most of the drainages are obstructed by building structures, that have overtaken the natural gravitational drainage systems of the city, which were organised enough to cope with the natural rainfall.

The causes behind waterlogging are well known and the media have been vocal on these issues. Despite that, why is there little policy intervention to improve the situation? First of all, the governance of drainage systems does not belong to any particular authority. Besides, the distribution of management of the drainage system follows the drainage hierarchy, namely the primary, secondary and tertiary drainage. The Chittagong City Corporation (CCC), for example, mainly deals with the drainages besides houses, roads and small scale, unstructured rainwater runoffs. While the Chittagong Development Authority (CDA) deals with primary and larger canals, Chittagong WASA (CWASA) is responsible for sanitation and storm water management. Hence, drainage system management is either over-mandated or under-mandated to these institutions.

Some critics allege that coordination meetings among stakeholders are held only during the monsoon when the water logging issue surfaces. Recently, the CCC and CDA were given the responsibility to reclaim the Chakta khal (canals) at a coordination meeting. However, past experiences show that the decisions made in such meetings are barely implemented. After developing the CMMP 1995 guideline, the drainage system was supposed to be implemented within one and a half years but the plan has not been put into effect in the last 13 years. Lack of coordination also hindered the construction work of the canal (Mirza- Chakta), which could have protected a huge area under Panchlaish and Chandaon Police Station from waterlogging (The Daily Star, 2008).

Several authoritative bodies are responsible for manag-

ing the drainage system of the city. The core responsibility for storm water drainage and sewerage belongs to CWASA. However, CWASA has neither developed any sewerage system nor storm water drainage infrastructure till date. CCC is mainly working on the local and tertiary drainage development and construction and is also responsible to keep the drains clean. CDA's role is to incorporate drains in land-use and structural plans and allot space in city designs. The Bangladesh Water Development Board (BWDB), another statutory body, is responsible to plan the flood management of CCC and they are both involved in linking the embankment with the drainage system.

Budget constraints add to the problem of proper drainage. The Chittagong Storm Water Drainage and Flood Control Master Plan 1995 proposed for developing the drainage system in five phases within the plan period of 1995-2015. Regrettably, eight years have passed since the gazette publication of the Drainage Master Plan in 1999 with no visible progress in its implementation. No progress is noticed in the reclamation of the Chakta canal, the backbone of drainage system of the port city, either.

Moreover, one of the biggest challenges for CCC in managing the drainage system is to deal with the illegal occupation of the canals. Many of the primary canals have disappeared and several secondary canals are either completely or partially occupied. The occupiers are very powerful and no government authority wants to recover any of them. It was only during the period of the caretaker government in 2007-08 that the CCC managed to recover the Chakta khal. The CDA and CCC are now planning to excavate new canals instead of reclaiming the old ones.

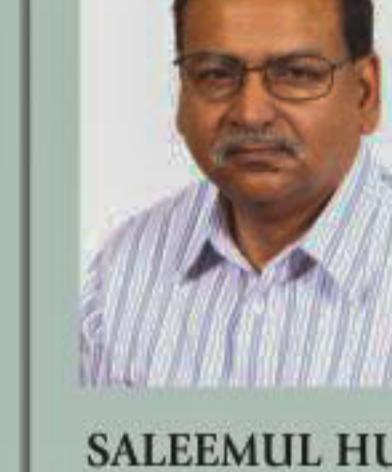
The blueprint of the city is the main source of the problems, as the management of waterlogging issue was not planned accordingly in the city's design. In 1961 the first master plan was devised, with the main focus being on zoning maps for housing and industries and very little or no reference to drainage planning (CMMP-4 1995). Since then, major drainage planning has been devised without any integration with the planning process of land use. As a result, engineers built drains, rehabilitated canals on an ad hoc basis. The future use of flood plains was not considered in the provisions for flood storage works. Building of flood plains is allowed without providing for the appropriate drainage that is 20 feet or 60 feet long. However, the drain width mysteriously remained constant at 2 to 3 feet.

There is also a lack of coordination in the entire drainage management. There has to be one central authority under which CDA, WASA and other bodies can work together, towards the same goal. Such mechanisms can only be implemented with collective, coordinated efforts under a city government arrangement.

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BANGLADESH'S CLIMATE DIPLOMACY

POLITICS OF CLIMATE CHANGE



SALEEMUL HUQ

As countries are preparing for the next set of negotiations under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in France in December this year, there are many other meetings between countries taking place to identify areas of collaboration, either bilaterally or in smaller groups or in coalitions-of-the-willing.

The Government of Bangladesh has already taken the lead in initiating South-South and Triangular collaboration on development finance by hosting a meeting of developing countries in Dhaka recently, which included a session dedicated to climate finance.

The Bangladesh Bank has also been a global leader in initiating Green Banking and its Governor was awarded the Green Banker of the year award recently.

Other examples of Bangladesh sharing its knowledge and expertise on tackling climate change include a recent visit by a delegation from Nepal organised by the NGO Practical Action to exchange experience and knowledge on tackling climate change with Bangladeshi counterparts.

Another example is a one day seminar on Bangladesh-German collaboration to tackle climate change held at the United Nations University in Bonn, Germany in June, with the Bangladesh Counsellor in attendance, to showcase the climate change related activities between researchers, government agencies, banks and NGOs in Germany and Bangladesh, respectively.

The examples cited above are just a few of the many activities that are already

taking place on both South-South as well as South-North knowledge exchange and cooperation to tackle climate change. However, these activities remain somewhat disconnected.

I would argue that it is perhaps now time for Bangladesh to integrate these different initiatives - each of which is good in its own right - into a more cohesive and comprehensive Programme on International Collaboration to Tackle Climate Change, under the leadership of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA), involving all the Bangladesh missions in other countries, both in developing as well as developed countries. Of course other ministries, such as the Ministry of Environment and Forests (MOEF) as well as the Ministry of Finance (MOF) and the Bangladesh Bank as well as parliamentarians, NGOs, universities, private sector and the media can all play a role but the leadership should be with MOFA. It should be treated as a new dimension of Bangladesh's diplomatic strategy of offering collaboration with all countries, both South and North, to tackle the global problem of climate change.

Finally, it is important to point out that such a programme would not replace the need to continue engagement at the UNFCCC talks to try to get a global agreement in Paris in December, but rather recognises that regardless of the outcome of the Paris talks, the actual reality of climate change will remain with us for decades to come. Collaboration with other countries on sharing knowledge and experience in practical ways to tackle the problem will also remain an important part of Bangladesh's foreign policy for many years to come.

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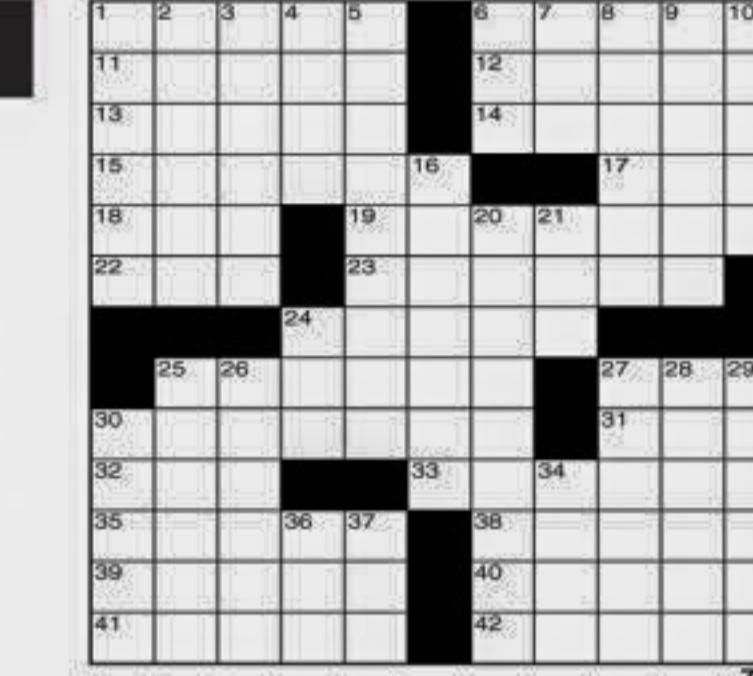
CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

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- 15 For the time being
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- 19 Sits by the window, say
- 22 Hosp. sections
- 23 Freeway entrance
- 24 Comic Richard
- 25 Sap
- 27 Imitating
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- 40 Massage
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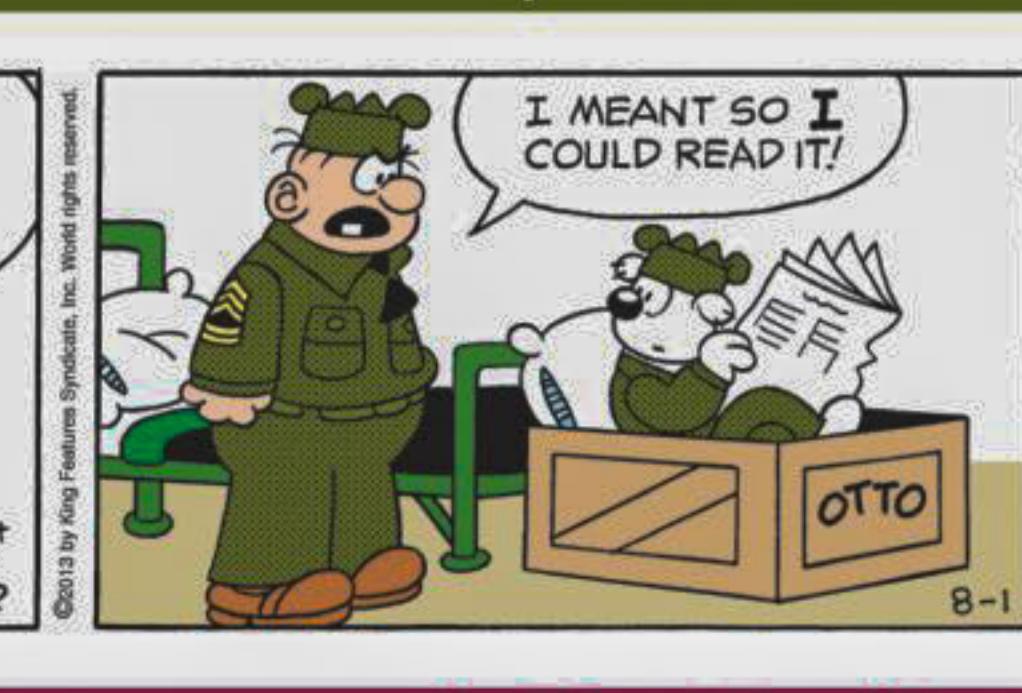
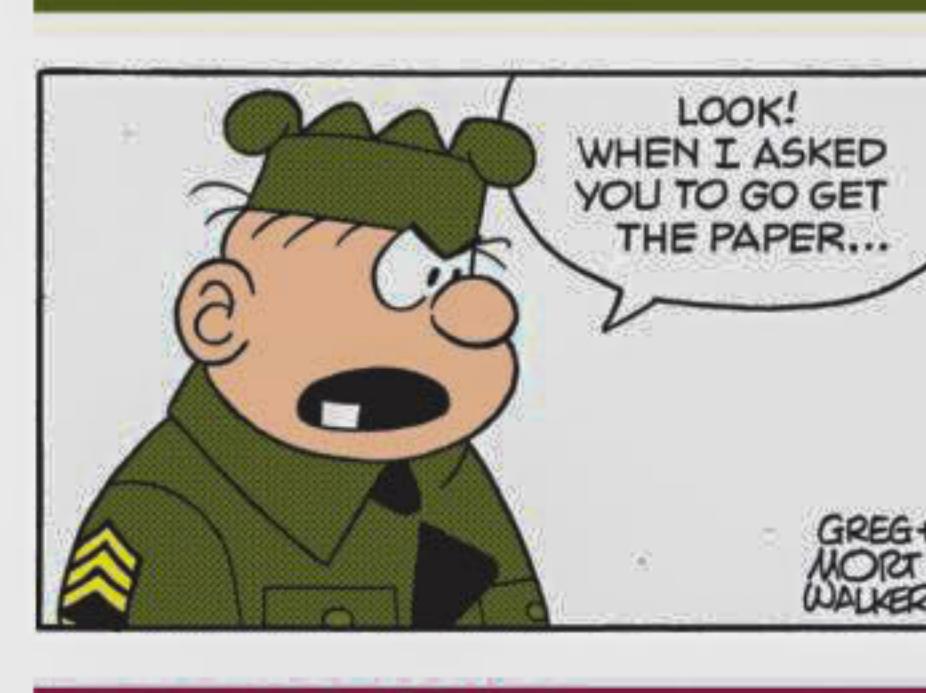
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- 6 Green and Gore
- 7 Stake
- 8 Selfishness
- 9 Kevin Costner film
- 10 Exorbitant
- 16 Unit of work
- 20 Smelting site
- 21 Ship sealer
- 24 Steno need
- 25 Pop's Andy
- 26 Complete
- 27 Showy bush
- 28 Straight
- 29 In disagreement
- 30 Supports
- 34 Moneymaker
- 36 Antietam general
- 37 Pool unit



Yesterday's answer



BEETLE BAILEY



by Mort Walker

BABY BLUES



by Don Trachte



Quotable Quote



RUTH BADER GINSBURG

"TRY TO TEACH THROUGH MY OPINIONS, THROUGH MY SPEECHES, HOW WRONG IT IS TO JUDGE PEOPLE ON THE BASIS OF WHAT THEY LOOK LIKE, COLOR OF THEIR SKIN WHETHER THEY'RE MEN OR WOMEN."

— RUTH BADER GINSBURG