

Landslide death in Chittagong

An avoidable tragedy

THE death of a woman and five children last Sunday in a landslide in Chittagong has been deeply disturbing. The incident took place after the government-appointed Hill Management Committee (HMC) had earmarked 30 hills as vulnerable to landslide and recommended the relocation of 666 families. A year on, the administration has not taken any step to rid the hills of risky structures out of the danger zone. To make it even more grievous, some nefarious businessmen in connivance with political bigwigs cut hills and illegally build makeshift houses on the slope and at the foot of the hills. They are provided with utility connection and are rented out to poor people. As a result, with the advent of monsoon, the threat of landslide death looms large in the hills of Chittagong. In 2007, 127 people were buried alive in a single incident in the city's Lalkhan Bazaar area, with no lesson whatsoever learnt from that disaster.

The administration needs to relocate the families living in hills susceptible to landslip. Retaining walls have to be constructed to stop mudslide and the recommendation of the HMC followed so as to take up afforestation programmes and erect barbed-wire fences around the hills that are prone to landslide. The authorities have to be more vigilant in order to prevent hill cutting, and those behind this debased business must be brought to book. Also, as experts suggest, soil protection measures have to be put in place to prevent landslides.

Why the foot-dragging in recompensing workers?

Pay workers what's rightfully theirs

EVERY year, there is a brouhaha surrounding wages and Eid bonuses of RMG workers; it is unfortunate that, this year, too, was no exception. According to the BGMEA, a total of 160 factories failed to pay festival allowances on time while 32 factories failed to pay wages prior to Eid-ul-Fitr, although labour leaders claim that the number of non-complying factories was actually much higher. Why, we ask, do we see repeated instances of owners defaulting on workers' wages and benefits? Why must workers take to the streets every Eid to demand what is rightfully theirs?

The workers of Swan Garments and Swan Jeans have been protesting since July 12, demanding payment of outstanding wages of three months from April-June. The operations of these factories were suspended on April 10, without any prior notice.

Their protests have thus far fallen on deaf ears of the BGMEA and government. Three months have passed since Swan's owner absconded, but no progress has been made in terms of selling Swan's assets to pay the workers or hold him to account. A committee has been formed by the labour ministry to address the situation, but there is a fear that this may be an eye-wash to assuage them, and that they will not see concrete results anytime soon. The fear is understandable, given that, despite assurances from the government and the BGMEA, the workers of Tuba garments who waged protests during last Eid did not get paid in full.

We demand that the government and BGMEA take immediate action against the absconded owner and pay the workers in full without any delay.

COMMENTS

“Policeman 'helped' main culprit flee”
(July 15, 2015)

▼
Enam Mahin
Police is no less dangerous than the killers.

▼
Nazrul Badal
The men who killed the boy and the people who let the killers flee are equally guilty. Both should be served equal punishment.

▼
Sharif Uddin Ahmed
We are so unfortunate that we can't even differentiate between the criminals and the police.

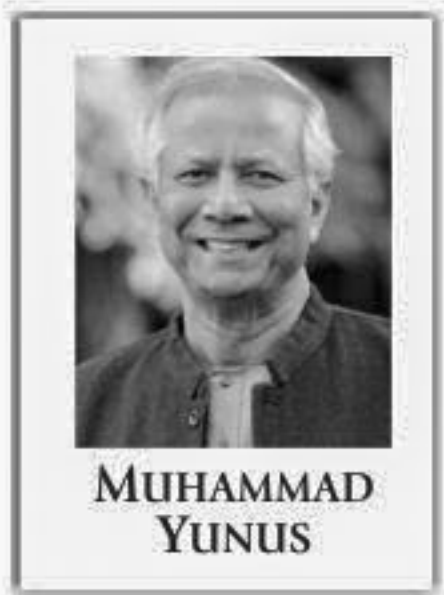
“Analysis: An ominous sign in politics?”
(July 13, 2015)

▼
Mahfuz Alam Pappu
Those who don't want healthy politics don't want these two people.

▼
Mohammed Abdul Khaleque
This indicates that there is no democracy in Bangladesh.

▼
Hassan Faysal
Ashraf is an honest man but he was not doing his duties properly.

Towards building a new civilisation



WHAT we have in front of us is an unprecedented opportunity, and historical chance to make the paradigm shift that humanity desperately needs. We need it because science tells us we do, because our conscience tell us we can't do without it. 2015 has already demonstrated a continuous

building up of momentum towards something big: a historical UN conference on climate change that has the potential to redefine humanity's destiny.

Earlier this year, following on from Davos, many global businesses came together to call on governments to agree to a net zero carbon goal by 2050. Investors are being more proactive in disclosing the carbon footprint of their portfolios, choosing to decarbonise their investments, and some are going as far as publicly announcing that they are divesting from fossil fuels. During their last meeting, the G7 sent an unmistakable message of commitment to decarbonise the economy by the end of the century. But this is not all. People of all faiths have loudly and clearly welcomed the strong message coming from the Papal Encyclical on ecology in June, calling on world leadership to urgently take action on climate change. We can't ask for any clearer sign that the time is ready, that the time is now.

The paradigm shift that we need is a radical change that requires us to move away from the excessive and selfish lifestyle we have been led to believe was the most satisfying, (but in reality it is based on egoistic and unjust exploitation of resources and of human capital) to a lifestyle based on selflessness, of fair and just opportunities, that can lead us to what I have been calling a global destination.

We know that continuing with business as usual is not an option anymore: it is as unfair as it is unjust, and if left unchecked will take us to an irreversible process of self-destruction. But it is not too late. We have the opportunity to act; many businesses are already demonstrating their willingness to do so. Additionally, each one of us can make a difference in our daily lives, knowing that small action makes a big difference. And collectively, we can ask our representatives to take a bold stand later this year when they will meet to decide on a crucial agreement that can take us on track to transition to a low carbon economy.

In particular, this agreement must be both long-

term in its aspiration of setting a decarbonisation – or net zero – goal, as well as to have regular short-term review cycles to ensure that progress is on track. The agreement must also underpin the just transition to a low carbon economy and green jobs creation by being grounded in sound equity principles. Achieving this net zero goal is the only just, rational, and humane way forward.

It is sensible because it will revert the trend of economic development and investment being coupled with carbon emissions. It will present an opportunity to allow for local entrepreneurship to flourish, by stimulating creative transformative initiatives that will provide the ground for a sustainable and just development. The present exclusively profit-focused, job-oriented, planet threatening, income-wealth gap-widening civilisation has to come to an end, and the seeds of a new civilisation must be sown now. We'll have to put the guideposts to take us to that civilisation.

In order to do that, I am proposing a comprehensive global destination in terms of three zeros. These three zeros are to be achieved by 2050: zero poverty, zero unemployment, and zero net carbon emission. All global activities should be framed around achieving these three goals. Each global player may publish reports on each country, each year on the progress made on getting closer to achieving each zero. This will set the transition process in motion from the present civilisation to the new civilisation.

These zeros can be reached with four basic strategies.

First, by unleashing the creative power and commitment of the youth. Today's youth has the power to bring dramatic changes in the world, if we encourage them and facilitate their initiatives to play their role. The present generation of young people is the forerunner of the generation of the most powerful generation in human history because of the enormous technology in their hands. We have to get them engaged in creating the world they wish to live in, and pass on to the next generation.

The second strategy would be to focus on technological innovations to solve human problems. Combining the force of youth with the force of technology can become unbeatable. But unfortunately, technology has always remained under the command of money-makers and war-makers. We need to bring in a new class of players on the playing field of technology who will create new technology exclusively for solving social problems and adapt the existing technology for the same purpose, without any thought of making personal money out of this. The sooner the socially committed

players take charge of technology, the faster the world will reach the three zeros.

This brings us to the third strategy, building up social businesses by mobilising creative power to solve long-standing complicated social, economic, and environmental problems in sustainable ways. Social business is a new variety of business which delinks itself from any desire to make personal profit out of these businesses. They are mission-driven businesses. They are non-dividend companies exclusively devoted to solving human problems. I have been creating and promoting this type of business around the world with great results.

Even as we tackle the climate challenge, we must also help bring empowering energy services to the 1.2 billion people who lack access to electricity and the almost 3 billion who cook on polluting, unhealthy stoves. A comprehensive and compassionate response to climate change requires us to help the world's poorest gain access to sustainable energy solutions so that they can improve their lives while avoiding the dirty energy path that developed countries followed.

I created Grameen Shakti (energy) almost 20 years ago, to bring clean solar power to light and communication technology to the villages across Bangladesh. Our efforts exceeded everyone's expectations, with the millionth solar home system installed in 2013. Grameen Shakti's work continues to expand – in the next two years we anticipate reaching 2 million families with these life-transforming systems. But there is much more work to be done to reach the UN's global goal of universal access to energy – hopefully they mean clean energy – by 2030. Building a green economy by breaking free from fossil fuel addiction is the smartest and most efficient way to create new engines of sustainable growth and job creation for the next generations.

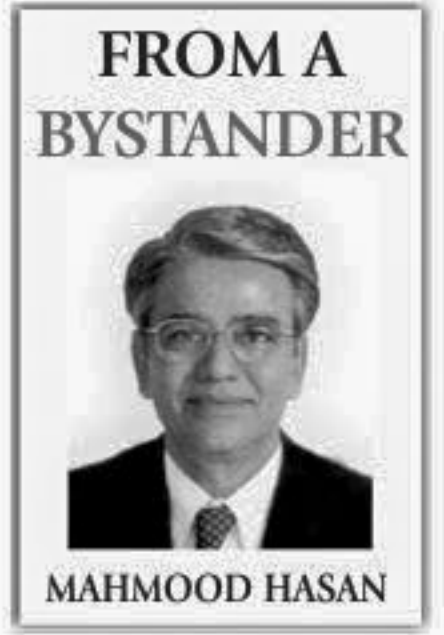
The fourth strategy is to ensure good governance in government, global governance, business world, civil society, and to uphold human rights all along the way, without fail.

It is about creating a healthier society, built on the recognition of a moral obligation to let selflessness to come into full play, and restrain selfishness and business as usual, to initiate a process of transformational change. We are the generation that is responsible for putting in motion this trans-generational change.

It is our moral responsibility to act. We must act because we care.

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The writer is a Nobel Peace Prize winning economist and banker.

Iran's re-entry to the comity of nations



THE 35-year standoff between America and Iran seems to be over. After nearly 12 years of difficult negotiations, P5+1 (five permanent members of the UN Security Council +

Germany) and Iran have achieved the much hyped breakthrough in Vienna on July 14, 2015 after signing the historic Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action. The plan has effectively curbed Iran's nuclear programme from developing nuclear device, in exchange for lifting debilitating economic sanctions imposed by the UN, the US and Europe.

The 159-page document goes into minutest details on what Iran and the world powers are expected to do. Basically, for the next 15 years, Iran's enrichment of uranium has been curtailed and its uranium stockpile slashed, while the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) will have unlimited access to all nuclear facilities, including mines and mills. The Damocles sword hanging over Iran is a sanction snap-back provision, if Iran is found busting the deal.

For its part P5+1 will move a UNSC resolution endorsing the deal and terminate all sanctions. A joint commission will be created, comprising P5+1, EU and Iran to monitor the implementation of the deal.

The deal has raised hopes, doubts and alarm among stakeholders. Now that the negotiation phase is over, a new phase of politicking has begun in earnest in America and the Middle East. Israel, Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states have expressed strong resentment to the deal. There is a flurry of meetings between the foreign ministers of world powers and their Israeli and Middle Eastern counterparts.

Prime Minister Obama will have a difficult time selling the deal to the Republican-dominated Congress. Republican leaders denounced it, even before reading the document. They accuse

Obama for “managing” Iran's nuclear programme rather than totally “dismantling” it.

The US Congress has 60 days to review the agreement. During that time, President Obama cannot lift the sanctions. If Congress rejects the deal and keeps the sanctions, Obama can veto the decision. In that event, the US Congress will need a two-third majority to overturn the president's veto, which is unlikely to happen.

Already some of the Republican presidential candidates have threatened to reject the deal if elected to the White House. Clearly, this deal will be a leading

“No deal means a greater chance of more war in the Middle East. The deal is not built on trust, it is built on verification....This deal will have my name on it,” said Obama. Indeed, it will be the legacy of Nobel Peace laureate Obama's foreign policy.

The strongest reaction came from Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, when he castigated the deal as a “stunning historic mistake.” His discourse on Iran contained the same old invectives against the country. In his scathing attack, Netanyahu remarked that with the sanction-released-funds Iran will fuel its “terror machine”. Netanyahu

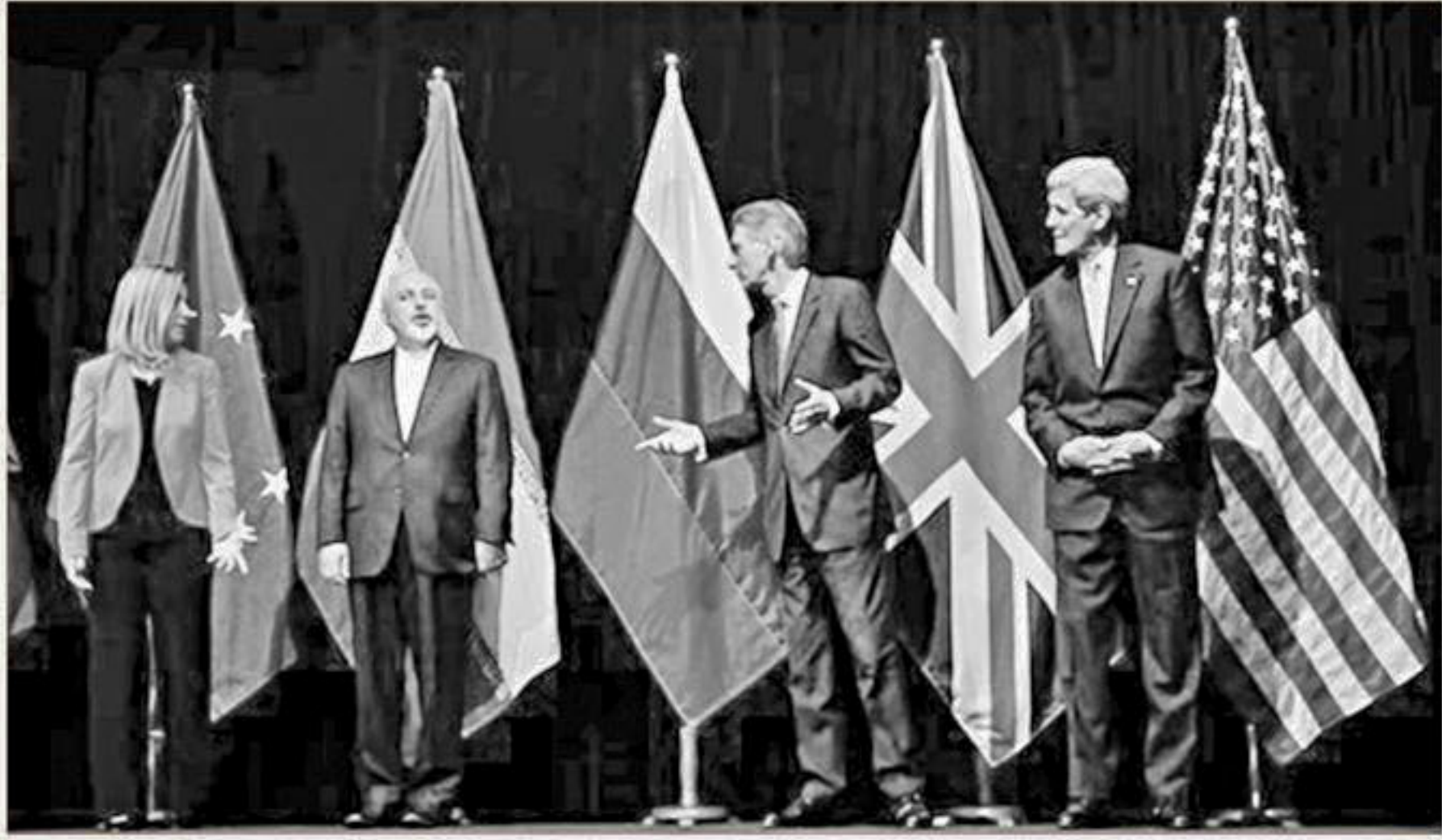


PHOTO: AFP

issue for the candidates in the run-up to the elections in November 2016.

Surprisingly, Republican leaders, while deriding the deal, did not come up with any alternative solution on how Iran's nuclear programme could be curtailed. The alternative is bombing Iran's nuclear facilities. That is war against Iran that a majority of Americans are averse to. However, the Republicans feel that they have a responsibility to protect Israel from Iranian threats.

For President Obama, it is a victory of one of the main tenets of his foreign policy which produced tangible results. Instead of opting for war, dialogue must be given a chance, even with America's enemies. Normalising relations with Cuba is another case in point.

declared, “Israel is not bound by this deal ... We will always defend ourselves.” Even though he often threatens to bomb Iran's nuclear sites, it is impossible without US help.

Having failed to deter Obama from making this deal, Netanyahu will now certainly lean on the Republicans in Congress and try to convince them to reject the agreement. However, Israel will find it extremely difficult to have the deal overturned as other major powers are involved. The Obama administration made it clear to Tel Aviv that American Middle East (ME) policy will not be determined by Israel.

What is significant is the shift in American ME policy is a rapprochement with Iran. Saudi Arabia, a key American

ally in the region, is alarmed at the development. Sunni Saudi Arabia has been at odds with Shia Iran since the Islamic Revolution in 1979. Clearly, Washington needs Iran to stabilise the Shia regime in Baghdad, and also to defeat Sunni ISIL. Surely, the deal will make the Shia-Sunni proxy-wars more intense. One wonders whether Washington will try a similar deal with Syria.

The political dynamics in Iran will be worth watching. Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei has congratulated the Iranian delegation for their “tireless efforts”. For now, the headline Ayatollahs are on the backfoot.

President Hassan Rouhani told Iranians that “all our objectives” have been met by the deal. Rouhani went on to reiterate that “Iran will never seek a nuclear weapon, with or without the implementation” of the Vienna deal.

People in Iran, tired of economic sanctions, were euphoric when news of the deal broke. The Iranian delegation returning from Vienna was given a rousing welcome at Tehran airport. Once Iranian oil starts flowing freely, world oil prices will come down, which is good news for all. Oil revenues will create thriving business opportunities. Western companies and financial institutions have already started jostling to enter the potentially lucrative Iranian economy.

Having failed at regime change, the West imposed sanctions to compel Tehran to come to the table and negotiate. Iran patiently and steadfastly negotiated with the world powers and agreed to scale down its nuclear programme for 15 years.

Now that the world powers have recognised Iran's right to have a nuclear programme, it is unlikely that Iran will risk violating the deal, thus inviting the re-imposition of sanctions. However, the devil lies in the details of the deal.

Iran was outside the mainstream of world affairs for the past four decades. The deal has enabled it to shake off its pariah status.

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The ambassador is former ambassador and secretary.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Bangladesh's historic ODI series win

This is in response to the report "Absolutely awesome" (July 16). Pakistan, India, South Africa -- overhyped teams consisting of 'superstars' are collapsing one by one while facing Bangalis' might! Bangladesh's superb consistent show is a matter of immense pride and joy for all Bangalis of the world. This series of victories over these mighty teams is not only a slap on the face of the 'pundits' who question the credibility of our team, but is also a sort of renaissance in



PHOTO: ANURUP KANTI DAS

Bangladesh cricketing arena. These victories have forced the racist lobby -- which dares to project Bangalis as those who "can't play cricket" -- to eat its own words! And no amount of congratulations is enough for youngsters like Soumya Sarkar and Mustafizur Rahman for toying with the darlings of the media. The talented juniors should carry on the brilliant show by exploiting their immense potential to its full extent and keep aloft the cricketing flag of Bangladesh in the international arena.

Kajal Chatterjee
Kolkata-114, India