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FOUNDER EDITOR LATE S. M. ALI

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SDGs reflect universal aspirations

Fulfill the pledge for common action

THE world has adopted a bold new agenda to end poverty and preserve the planet. The ambitious 15 year plan, adopted unanimously by 193 member states of the UN, comes with great challenges, the biggest of which is funding the efforts to realise the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that are accompanied by 169 specific targets. Implementing the goals is expected to cost a whopping \$3.5 trillion to \$5 trillion every year until 2030. Member states will therefore have to now work out the details of how this huge amount will be raised. This will no doubt, involve significant financial commitments from international financial institutions as well as sincerity of all nations to spend available funds as efficiently and as transparently as possible.

For Bangladesh specifically, it is laudable that the country has made significant inroads into several areas of social development. This includes decreasing child mortality, increasing enrollment of girls in school, successful disaster management, achieving food selfsufficiency and reducing extreme poverty. It is however, important to acknowledge that it is not enough to just meet goals that are measured in numbers - the ultimate target has to be to bring qualitative strides in each area of development.

One of the biggest stumbling blocks in the way of realising SDGs is widespread corruption in every sphere of development. This is true of most developing nations that all too often are held back by poor governance. Most of these countries, Bangladesh included, are working hard to fight poverty through innumerable projects and programmes. But unless there is a sincere effort to eradicate the systemic bottlenecks, such efforts will be nullified and the prospect of meeting the SDG targets will be all the more difficult.

Patients suffer on Eid again

Why are hospitals understaffed?

report published in this daily yesterday revealed firsthand accounts of the untold sufferings firsthand accounts of the untold sufferings patients at government hospitals had to endure during the Eid holidays. With most doctors and nurses having gone on leave for Eid, patients in some five major hospitals reported upon had to wait in long queues and resort to emergency services as outdoor services remained closed on Thursday and Friday. At Dhaka Medical College Hospital, basic facilities such as X-ray at the emergency were unavailable which forced critically injured patients to look for other alternatives. Unfortunately, this dismal picture has become something of a routine every Eid holiday.

It is incomprehensible as to why the hospital administrations kept these hospitals understaffed, even if it was for a short period of time. That patients who travelled to the capital with the sole purpose of seeing a doctor should be turned away by officials and told to come back when hospital activities returned to "normal" is unacceptable. The lack of access to the most rudimentary facilities such as X-ray, and that too in the emergency section, is baffling. Furthermore, the statement of a relevant official that he was unaware of any anomaly in the hospital services during the Eid holidays sheds doubt on the sincerity of the higher-ups about delivering proper services.

Healthcare services, being a basic need like electricity and water, should be prioritised accordingly by health officials. On major holidays, special arrangements should be made so that adequate staff is ensured at all times. It is of paramount importance that the issue of staffing, along with proper maintenance and availability of equipment, is given due attention.

COMMENTS

"Doctor with a difference" **September 28, 2015**

Alamgir Mahmud

We respect his dedication. He honoured his noble profession and fulfilled his duty, unlike most other doctors.

> Md Sajjadur Rahman Good job!

"Saudi Arabia under fire" **September 28, 2015**

Ritzy Bird

Iran is right in asking for an apology from Saudi Arabia, since so many precious lives of Iranian citizens have been lost in the Hajj incident. However, Saudi Arabia, instead of saying sorry, has begun to blame Iran for this mishap. They should apologise not only to Iran, but to all Muslim countries and the families of the martyrs, and the injured, due to poor management. It should also compensate the victims and their families because it all happened because of the authorities' mismanagement.

Asif Mehdi Tonoy

Iran is now mixing politics with it.

Sheikh Zaman Saudia

Saudi should apologise to the families of victims for having failed to protect their lives of their loved ones, as was its duty as the host nation.

Nurul Alam Anik

Mecca and Medina should be an independent state just like the Vatican.

Pope with a difference



SYED MANSUR HASHIM

OPE Francis brings the message of reconciliation to some of the most contentious conflicts and trouble spots in the world. It is a difficult path he has chosen. On the surface, he has advocated for justice, peace and mercy from those who hold power. His style of engagement is a major departure from his

predecessor. Given the tight political rope one must walk in global politics, Francis is doing rather well. And he has already made his mark on some of the issues that have been grabbing international media headlines of late. As is evident from his speech at the United Nations, Pope Francis has outlined three priority areas for action: compassion for marginalised people, with particular emphasis on refugees; peace and security; and surprisingly enough, an environmental programme. All three areas fall squarely into what the Church espouses as core values.

The Pontiff has used symbolism and presence on the ground to speak out for the exodus of refugees from Africa to Europe. He has taken up the cause of Muslim refugees fleeing in their hundreds of thousands from Africa and the Middle East (to avoid war and famine) to Europe. Indeed, his first foreign trip was to the island of Lampedusa in 2013, an island in the Mediterranean off Italy to commemorate those who had drowned while trying to swim to shore. The visit by the Pope, his impassioned speech "to reawaken our consciences" ultimately impressed the Italian government into mounting a mission that aided in the rescue of some 150,000 refugees and a clamping down of smuggling rackets.

Pope Francis, it appears, is a man on a mission. Under his stewardship, the Church is in the process of taking a more proactive role for the benefit of refugees. From what has been reported in international media, it is understood that he has asked all Catholic communities in Europe to accommodate at least one refugee family. This is a major departure from the past. This is political action on the ground and it fits squarely with the new line of thinking that the Church should be engaged in spreading Christ's message to a worldwide audience. Given the flurry of visits and speeches the pontiff has been making over the last two years, it is a policy that seems to be working.

There is also full-scale behind-the-scenes diplomatic flurry. In late 2013, the Pope wrote to President Putin on the eve of the G-20 summit in Geneva where a nonmilitary solution was sought in Syria. A decade earlier, Pope John Paul II had made a similar appeal to the United States on the eve of the Iraq invasion; an appeal that had gone unheeded in 2003, was not repeated as the United States backed off from bombing Syria. A

more unlikely scenario is Iran, a nation with which the Vatican has maintained unofficial lines of communications since the days of the Shahs. As reported by Foreign Affairs in an article recently, "Three U.S. bishops met with four leading ayatollahs in Iran. They were hosted by the Supreme Council of the Seminary Teachers of Qom, Iran's spiritual center. With backing from the Holy See and a blessing from the U.S. State Department, the participants used the four-day session to establish a dialogue on nuclear weapons and the role of religious leaders in diplomatic engagement." Such activity comes in very useful as a backup measure when usual diplomatic relations sour.

This of course is not the first time the Vatican has

document made available prior to COP21, it is society's orientation towards short-term financial gain and consumerism that has led to the steady destruction of the environment. It is interesting to note that the Pope has deliberately skirted sensitive issues, pointing out that neither capitalism nor market economics are to blame for the situation; rather emphasised the need to have "transparent dialogue" on environmental policy at all levels of decision making. This is political dynamite. Needless to say, political cartoonists have taken swipes at the pontiff's statements, as global leaders and the parties they represent are suspicious of the motives behind such utterances.



come in handy in diffusing tensions in global politics. One cannot forget John Paul II's engagement with President Ronald Reagan, at the height of the Cold War, on the Poland question. However, the present Pope in his short tenure has gone where no Pope has gone before. The pontiff has played his part in the ongoing normalisation of relations between Cuba and the United States. And in doing so, has helped build relations with the White House.

It remains to be seen, however, to what extent the new man in the Vatican will have success in addressing climatic change issues. In what has been outlined in Laudato si' (On Care for Our Common House), a

At the end of the day, little can be done to dissuade the Pope from making inroads into global issues. His track record at diffusing tense situations, using the office he occupies, in the last two years is impressive. That he has taken to heart environmental degradation as a matter that affects all of humanity is encouraging. However, given that an issue like climate change is a matter that cannot be tackled without consensus amongst developed and emerging economies on so many different levels - from politics to policymaking - judgement is best reserved for now, but we wish him success nonetheless.

The writer is Assistant Editor, The Daily Star.

The land of the rising sun rises again?

SHAMSHER M. CHOWDHURY, BB

N a move that saw Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's nationalist government facing the stiffest resistance from pacifists and opposition parliamentarians alike, the Japanese Diet (Parliament) last week voted into law a bill that will allow Japan to deploy its military in combat roles beyond its territorial boundaries for the first time in seven decades.

The latest move is indeed a milestone in Prime Minister's Abe's push to loosen the limits of the pacifist constitution on the military. It is seen as a major departure for Japan and all that it had stood for on defence and security issues until now. The new law will grant Japanese governments the power to send its military into overseas conflict theatres to defend allies, even if Japan itself is not under a direct attack.

The passage of the bill was anything but smooth for the Prime Minister. The process had to endure long and tortuous debates among opposing politicians that at times descended into unsavory physical scuffles inside the Diet itself. Outside, the protests were more vociferous. Unable to muster enough support to amend the pacifist Constitution, Prime Minister Abe opted to "re-interpret' the meaning and the definition of "self defence."

The whole exercise has not been without its share of controversy. Opposition lawmakers have vowed to do everything in their power to fight the changes. Legal scholars have argued that the legislation violates Japan's pacifist constitution and several groups said they were preparing legal challenges.

Prime Minister Abe, on the other hand, has defended the law as being

"necessary in order to protect people's lives and peaceful way of life." He also described it as "designed to prevent wars."

As expected, Japan's neighbour China, with whom relations have been uneasy for a while now, reacted sharply. Beijing called the move a threat to peace and stability. China's Defence Ministry has said the reforms had "aroused grave concern among its own citizens, Asian neighbouring countries and the international society." China's official Xinhua news agency said the new security bills "not only broke Japan's promise to the world after World War II, but also betrayed its own people."

Japan's ally South Korea's reaction has also been carefully crafted. It called on Japan to remember the need for transparency in implementing its new defence policy "while maintaining the spirit of the pacifist constitution." It, therefore, stopped short of an unqualified endorsement of the new

Abe's argument that the laws are necessary to protect against threats from what he views as an increasingly "belligerent China and an unstable North Korea" was persuasive enough for Washington to express instant support. Australia too has endorsed the move. Asia's other big power, India, will not be unhappy with it but may not say so publicly. The ASEAN countries are not likely to feel any danger to them from the development. Many of them may tend to see this as a step to strike a military power balance in this part of Asia. Moscow, though, is unlikely to look at it kindly. The sharply divergent positions taken by Washington and Beijing may be cause for concern and Tokyo will need to play its cards with

tact in the changed circumstances. Countries like Bangladesh will hope that Japan's felt need to invest more in its military to fit its new role will not see any change in the country's long standing status as a dependable and a major development partner.

It is the reaction inside Japan that is of greater significance than how the rest of the world looks at this tectonic shift in Japan's post-war defence posture. The expected reaction of a populace when their government opts for a stronger military role is usually one of acquiescence. Even a defeated and a painfully partitioned German nation following the Second World War, became frontline players in mutually hostile military alliances in Europe during the Cold War period. However, the resistance to the legislation inside Japan is a departure from this norm, maybe a welcome one. It perhaps reflects the apprehensions of the post-war generation, who are not willing to see a repetition of the horrors of militaristic Japan of the past. They are also sending a clear message that Japan should not get drawn into wars and military conflicts, many of them controversial, in distant lands.

There is also the bigger picture. The "peace dividends" promised following the end of the Cold War has failed to materialise. The maddening arms race has grown in intensity and volume with many more nations joining in. Nuclear proliferation has spread deep into Asia. The Palestinian people, who are the longest running victims of injustice and apartheid, now look to groups like Hamas and Hezbollah for redress. The oil rich Middle East is in turmoil as extremist ideologies like Al Qaeda and the IS threaten more and more societies.

Non-conventional security threat perceptions like those from global terrorism have added new dimensions to the conventional ones. Ukraine is turning out to be a miniature version of the Cold War. Regime change efforts through outside military forays have caused instability and insecurity in countries like Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya and Syria, leading to large scale refugee flows that threaten to turn a seemingly cohesive post Cold War Europe on its head. Competing goals of creating strategic and geo-political spheres of influence in various parts of the globe can potentially aggravate underlying tensions and threaten stability.

It is in this larger backdrop that the more pacifist Japanese would like to see limits remain on how far his country gets drawn into seeking military solutions where alternatives have not been exhausted. They also fear that the pacifist role model stature that Japan has enjoyed for seven decades, one that has brought it rich economic dividends and global political status, could be jeopardised by enhanced militarisation. For Prime Minister Shinzo Abe this is the bigger challenge. He will need to muster all his political skill and experience to convince sceptics at home and in the outside world that the new law will not alter Japan's standing as a responsible and a nonaggressive global player. He will also need to demonstrate that the spirit of pacifism that has come to define Japan's security and defence policies so far will not fundamentally be compromised.

The author is a former Foreign Secretary of Bangladesh and Bangladesh High Commissioner and Ambassador to Sri Lanka, Germany, Vietnam and

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Reduction of Unemployment

Unemployment in Bangladesh has been a serious problem particularly for the educated youth. More and more students are pursuing IT and business related subjects. Despite this, these graduates are frustrated with the lack of job opportunities. Also, the prevalent unemployment crisis is due to the imbalance between expected skills by employers and the actual skills of employees.

Generally the growth in labour force is considered to be derived from two main sources: the demographic transition resulting in surge of youthful entrants into the labour market and the sharp increase in participation of certificate-carrying labour force. The rate of growth of the unemployed population is higher than that of the employed population which is creating extra pressure for the labour market.

More effective enforcement of existing labour market policies is needed. Employment generation should include sustained productivity and output growth across all economic sectors; deeper and more focused government attention to enhancing workers' skills is necessary, which can be done by boosting higher education. In addition, the rural and local governments must facilitate urban to rural migration and put continuous emphasis on gender empower-

the United States.

Anindita Dey

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