

IS DEVELOPMENT INCOMPATIBLE WITH DEMOCRACY?

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WE are living in the digital age of growth with deprivation; we see affluence with poverty, globalisation with increasing restrictions on human mobility, growth with high inequality and vulnerability. We are witnessing unprecedented wastage of human and material resources on war and surveillance, expansion of repressive machines, high growth of private (in) security business. Most alarmingly, invisible government has taken over areas of vital importance. The big brother's fascist sermon, 'either with us or against us', with the declaration of war on terror, has been shaping the global (dis)order. This model of democracy trickles down to different corners of the globe, promoted by the regimes that are fearful of people's power and democracy. Intolerance and hatred appear as guiding principles of today's 'rule of law' on a global scale.

Democracy cannot be reduced to periodic election; development cannot be reduced to GDP growth. It is very common to hear from ruling elites that, 'democracy needs to be sacrificed in order to achieve development goals'. In Bangladesh, the pattern of development mainly follows primitive forms of accumulation that include widespread corruption, rent seeking, illicit business of arms, drug and human trafficking, grabbing of common property, commission-based bad deals with foreign and local big companies, bank loan defaults and resource outflow. There is no doubt that all forms of primitive accumula-

tion can contribute to GDP growth but put long term development potential of the country in danger. This nature of "development" asks for squeezing democratic rights, replacing institutions by vested interest groups. The law and the state become crude instruments for capital accumulation. "democracy", instead of democracy, rises. Therefore, mal-development and "democracy" grow together.

A few years ago, UNESCO, the only organisation in the United Nations system whose constitution refers to democratic principles, set up an International Panel on Democracy and Development (IPDD), in order to examine and study the debates on relationships between democracy and development, taking representatives from all regions of the world. The committee inquired about international democracy as well as domestic democracy, since these two are inter-linked.

The report defined democracy as a system where:

- The whole of society can participate, at every level, in the decision-making process and keep control of it.
- Full observance of human rights, as defined by both the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Vienna Pacts and Declaration of 1993.
- Ensure rights and the respect of differences and of freedom of speech and thought.'
- Existence of an independent judicial system and free media.
- Power to legislate exercised by

representatives of the people. The holding of free and fair elections by universal suffrage is a necessary, though not in itself sufficient, a precondition for the existence of a democratic regime.

The report therefore stated democracy "as a political system that is capable of correcting its own dysfunctions" . . . that also "needs to be embodied in a culture, a state of mind that fosters tolerance and respect for other people, as well as pluralism, equilibrium and dia-

1995) and habitat (Istanbul, 1996). Development cannot be sustained by pushing up GDP alone.

In another study, Pranab Bardhan of the University of California in Berkeley examined the complex relationships between democracy and development. He discussed in detail the experiences of "authoritarian states" and their achievements in development goals. The East Asian success story in development over the 1960s, 70s and 80s has been referred as case

also referred other instances of "authoritarian regimes like the Duvaliers in Haiti, Trujillo in the Dominican Republic, Somoza in Nicaragua, Mobutu in Zaire," and so on, "who systematically plundered and wrecked their economies for excruciatingly long periods". In contrast, he stressed that in South Korea and Taiwan, initial conditions were much more favourable to the ruled (with land reforms and expansion of mass education).

The present Bangladesh regime, despite plunder-friendly policies and high corruption and grabbing, uses the rhetoric of "the spirit of the Liberation War" as its shield. The spirit of the Liberation War means people's power, equality, democratic institutions, and the sovereign authority of people over the country's resources and decision making process, democratic practices within party and society. We have seen different regimes in the last decades, who have similar records in plundering, grabbing common property and land of religious and ethnic minorities, as well as in corruption, violence, extra judicial killings and so on. This relay race has reached its worst phase now, both in the areas of "democracy" and "development". At this point, people are even deprived of their voting rights.

Therefore, we have many reasons to be worried for our present and future. Our major concern, for our country as well as globally, include the following:

-Grabber-friendly state. The state is visibly becoming an instrument of power and accumulation for an oligarchy.

-Increasing militarisation, expansion of surveillance, invisible machine to rule.

-A large section of media and intelligentsia embedded to commercialism and power.

-Erosion of institutional capability to protect public interest.

-Corporatisation of NGO and civil society.

-A form of privatisation of law enforcing agencies and administration.

-Commercialisation of security system.

-Irreparable damages or destruction of environment, grabbing rivers, wetlands and open spaces in the name of development. Violence follows.

-Manufacturing of consent for repression, torture, harassment and even killing.

-State sponsored killing in the name of crossfire, disappearances, illegal arrest and harassment become everyday news. Law and legal process has become a hostage to mafia groups.

In this situation, we need to activate our energy to stand against fear of terror, plunder, monopolisation of power and grabbing of people's resources to bring people's political and economic rights in the centre of politics. We need to reclaim our rights as citizens of the country. We need to raise our voices for both democracy and real development. Nothing less can save us.

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logue between the forces that make up a society."

On the analysis of development, panel members were unanimous in asserting that development should be understood to mean the whole range of economic, social and cultural progress which was marked by a series of major international conferences on environment (Rio de Janeiro, 1992), human rights (Vienna, 1993), population (Cairo, 1994), social development (Copenhagen, 1995), women (Beijing,

studies by many for putting development against democracy. It is claimed that authoritarianism made it less difficult for the regimes in East Asia to implement necessary policies.

Bardhan, however, pointed out that "authoritarianism is neither necessary (even in East Asia, post-war Japan has successfully insulated parts of the bureaucracy without giving up on democracy), nor sufficient (even in East Asia, the dictatorship of Marcos in the Philippines is an uncertain prospect of a share in a larger pie)". He

Bangladesh should be worried about China's Brahmaputra dam



NAHELA NOWSHIN

CHINA'S \$1.5 billion Brahmaputra dam, known as Zangmu Hydropower Station, has raised some serious concerns in India and Bangladesh. Known as the Jamuna river in Bangladesh, any diversion of the waters by China could have some drastic effects for Bangladesh, as it is one of the two lower riparian countries (along with India). Indian ministers and officials are worried that the dam, the largest in Tibet, may reduce water flow downstream, in effect drying up the Brahmaputra.

Located in the Gyaca County, Shannan Prefecture, the dam harnesses the resources of the Brahmaputra which flows through Tibet into India and later into Bangladesh. The China Gezhouba Group, a major hydropower contractor based in Wuhan, said that all six of the station's units were incorporated into the power grid. The dam is said to be the world's highest-altitude hydropower station at 116m high and is set to produce 2.5 billion kilowatt-hours of electricity per year.

China is reportedly building a few other dams but China alleges that they are run-of-the-river projects (hydroelectric power plants that incorporate little or no storage of dammed water) which aren't intended to hold water.

According to former Indian water resources secretary Ramaswamy R. Iyer, such run-of-the-river projects are increasingly becoming a source of intervention. Iyer also believes that China's control of the water supply downstream could affect aquatic life and displace populations living in the region.

According to United Nations estimates, more than half of the world's population will live in water-scarce conditions by the year 2025. A large majority of these people will be



in India and China. With the increasing industrial production, expanding consumption and climate change adversities, water supplies will come under more pressure than ever before.

China and India are two of the most populous and fastest growing economies in the world. Of the rivers shared by the two countries, Brahmaputra is the most important and has huge potential for hydropower generation. China has more hydroelectric dams (over 22,000) than any other country in the world and is seen as the world's most aggressive dam builder. With 80 percent of its cities facing a tightened water supply, China is looking to divert the waters to irrigate northern China (part of the Grand Western Water diversion plan to divert water to the dry north). Any diversion of the Brahmaputra waters will likely have the most severe consequences for Bangladesh, a much poorer nation than India.

Bangladesh is a riverine country. The livelihood of millions depends on the availability of water. In total, there are about 250 rivers that crisscross the country. But 92 percent of

annual flow is contributed by 57 rivers that originate outside the borders. The unilateral withdrawal of water by upper riparian countries such as India and China can, therefore, cause irreversible damage to the economy and sustenance of the country.

A national water crisis has already begun to threaten the country's biodiversity as more than 50 rivers are on the verge of drying. For instance, the Farakka barrage built by India in the upper part of Padma has had destructive effects for rivers that were fed by the Ganges. With a deal yet to be signed on the Teesta water sharing issue -- a bone of contention between Bangladesh and India -- the livelihood of many in the northern region of Bangladesh gets more and more uncertain by the day. The Bangladesh Joint Rivers Commission (JRC) water flow chart shows that Bangladesh received just 232 cusecs (cubic feet per second) of Teesta water on March 22, the lowest recorded in history. With a worsening nationwide water crisis and unsolved trans-boundary

water disputes, the diversion of waters of Brahmaputra could make matters much worse for the poverty-stricken nation, badly affecting the agricultural and fishing industries. Rapid urbanisation, industrial boom, agrochemical use and various other factors are also responsible for exacerbating the water supply crisis.

The construction of the Zangmu may be treated as a case study that helps to highlight the broader regional and international challenges posed by friction over water resources. There is no question that in this case China is in the driver's seat because of the simple fact that China is upstream and has de facto control over the water flow of the Brahmaputra. China is extremely fortunate in this regard because it has a combination of de facto and de jure control in this case -- both of which are necessary under international law. In effect, China controls the Brahmaputra as well as other Himalayan-origin river systems. China's dam-building projects on the Brahmaputra play a vital role in strengthening China's de jure standing. (Christo-

pher, Mark. 2013. *Water wars: The Brahmaputra River and Sino-Indian relations*. Case study. Newport, RI: US Naval War College, Center on Irregular Warfare and Armed Groups.)

If we are to go with China's dam-building pattern, it can be said that China's downstream neighbours have a legitimate cause for concern. As both China and India go ahead with their dam building projects, it is crucial for the Bangladesh government to immediately address the possibility of China reducing water supply, for which a tripartite agreement between the three nations is imperative. What Bangladesh needs to do is engage in meaningful discussion with both India and China for equitable sharing of the Brahmaputra waters. It is, therefore, time the government started thinking about initiating talks before history repeats itself and other rivers are met with the same tragic fate as the Teesta or the Padma.

The writer is a member of the editorial team, *The Daily Star*.

A WORD A DAY

SEMIOTICS

[□si□m□□□t□ks]

the study of signs and symbols and their use or interpretation

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

- 1 Tater
- 2 British diaper
- 10 Part of a sheikh's household
- 12 Start of the Spanish year
- 13 Hearty entree
- 15 Memorable time
- 16 Boater or bowler
- 17 Old soap ingredient
- 18 Knuckle heads
- 20 Grope
- 21 Arctic explorer
- 22 Track figures
- 23 Prone to brooding
- 25 Item used onstage
- 28 Put in office
- 31 Cincinnati team
- 32 Dawn goddess
- 34 Adam's mate
- 35 Hallucinatory drug
- 36 Neon or helium
- 37 Wide-angle accessory
- 40 Slalom curves
- 41 Tango or twist
- 42 Paper packs

DOWN

- 1 Tear into tatters
- 2 Form couples
- 3 Suave
- 4 Ruby of films
- 5 Bird abode
- 6 Termite's cousin
- 7 Prepared potatoes
- 8 Said grace
- 9 Hicks
- 11 Rescued damsel's sigh
- 14 Simple
- 19 Summer spots or some
- 20 Entrance hall
- 24 Steered clear of
- 25 Like better
- 26 Modify
- 27 Black Sea port
- 29 Convincing
- 30 Stupor
- 33 Useful skill
- 35 Smaller amount
- 38 Skirt edge
- 39 -Vegas

YESTERDAY'S ANSWER

C	L	A	D	A	C	T	E	D	
H	I	L	O	C	A	R	L	O	S
A	V	O	N	C	L	I	E	N	T
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P	R	E	F	E	R	S	N	A	G
		R	E	D		D	O	S	E
A	D	D	E	D	C	O	R	K	S
T	O	U	T		S	O	N		
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S	C	O	R	E	R	A	T	O	N
E	R	N	E	S	T	L	A	D	E
Y	E	A	T	S		K	N	E	W

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3

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