

## Karnaphuli River being choked

DoE strangely silent

**B**IG cities thrive on the banks of great rivers. For Chittagong it is the Karnaphuli River. Yet over the nearly two and half decades, we have stood as silent spectators to its gradual degradation as greed paved the way for unbridled encroachment. The Department of Environment (DoE), the regulatory authority has also stood on the sidelines in the face of powerful vested interests and not taken effective steps to protect it. It is shocking to find that the river's width has shrunk from 870meters in 1990 to a mere 600meters in the span of two decades as manmade illegal structures propped up on its banks and land grabbers opted for filling up the river over this period.

The ecological balance of the river has suffered immense damage as untreated industrial effluent, about 1,400 tons of solid and liquid waste of some 6million residents have been dumped indiscriminately into the waters of Karnaphuli on a daily basis through various canals. Yet authorities work at a sedate pace to set up a central effluent plant for the city's industrial belt. We are informed by a report published in this paper that a master plan on sewage treatment will be finalised by 2017. Hence, it is not clear precisely when the actual plant will go into operation.

In the meantime, Karnaphuli continues to be polluted and encroached upon. The DoE operates under severe constraints of resources including lack of manpower and enforcement authority. The Karnaphuli is Chittagong city's bloodline and it is high time for the government to wake up to realities on the ground and take a hard line against polluters and land grabbers

## Lessons of Ashura

Embody its spirit

**T**HOUGH the day of Ashura, the 10th of Muharram and the first month of the Islamic calendar, is related to many events of historical significance, the Muslims today observe it as the day of Karbala, where on this day, Imam Hussain, the grandson of the Holy Prophet chose death to ignominy of surrender to the unjust demands of Yazid. With him perished a small but dedicated band of Muslims, including nearly all of the direct descendents of the Holy Prophet.

And since that fateful event more than 1300 years ago, the day is being observed by some in open expression of grief, and by some in quiet mourning and remembrance of the episode and prayers for the martyrs of Karbala.

But while we mourn the martyrs we feel that the day should be a day for more than just mourning. The lessons of the day, that justice shall prevail over injustice, should be internalised by all Muslims; and that injustice must be protested and Yazids, who appear in all ages and all countries, must be resisted at all costs.

This is also a day for all Muslims to vow to sink their own differences. We are pained to see the sectarian clashes, particularly in the Middle East that threatens to not only pull the countries down but also destroy the cohesiveness of Islam. We must also join hands and declare to not only abjure violence but to unite to resist those who are distorting the teachings of Islam and wreaking suffering on innocent people which does nothing to glorify the religion of peace but harm it immensely.

# THE REAL BOGEYMAN



STRANGER THAN FICTION  
TAJ HASHMI

**W**HILE addressing a public rally at Ashtagram in Kishoreganj, President Abdul Hamid said: "It is unfortunate that businessmen are controlling the country's politics today. This is the most disgraceful development. We must get rid of this trend". Recently, Transparency International, Bangladesh (TIB) observed that 57 per cent of Parliament Members were businessmen. In view of the TIB's and the President's concern at the growing number of businessmen in politics – which the latter considered "the most disgraceful development" – the innuendo is obvious: businessmen in politics are at the root of most evil in Bangladesh.

Since businessmen generate employment, growth and development; and aren't the only agents of corruption, let's not vent out all our anger and frustration to one direction, towards businessmen, and "businessmen-politicians". We know from our experience, traditional politicians and military rulers having known or unknown sources of income; high government officials; engineers / technocrats and professionals play the decisive roles in plundering national wealth through mega share scams, massive land grabbing, bank defaults, and hundreds of million-dollar bribe or "commission" extracted from donor-driven development projects, and purchase of (mostly unnecessary) military hardware from China, Russia and elsewhere, and by other means.

Unaccountable and unethical politicians, with no known skills or general / professional qualifications or business background, and corrupt high government officials (some retired ones) have been the backbone of the monster of corruption in Bangladesh. And organized state-sponsored corrupt system ensures total impunity from punishment to the wrongdoers, and total unaccountability for the ruling classes while they are in power. Corrupt businessmen and "businessmen-politicians" just play the second fiddler.

Many "businessmen-politicians" first entered politics as relatives, cronies and musclemen of powerful politicians, and then they themselves became

"businessmen" during the unsettled days of 1970s and 1980s, under corrupt civilian and military rule. The process didn't stop with the fall of the corrupt Ershad regime in 1990. It's an ongoing process of upward mobility of corrupt relatives and clients as "businessmen", and "businessmen-politicians". The new breeds of "businessmen" are very different from the old and established trading and industrialist families in Bangladesh. While the nouveau businessmen are mostly corrupt and opportunistic – they mostly support the ruling party – traditional businessmen in general are less corrupt and non-political by nature. So, imputing corruption and dysfunctional governance to an amorphous "businessmen-politician" category is anything but fair.

What is plaguing the polity of Bangladesh is the state of almost total impunity for people in power, their

executive. And the state of impunity implies "well-connected" people's impunity from arrests, trials and punishments for committing serious crimes, while others don't enjoy any such privilege; as if there are at least two sets of law for two different categories of people, one for the ruling elites and their cronies, and another for the rest of the population.

Unfortunately, growing number of "well-connected" people are getting away with imaginable and unimaginable crimes on a regular basis. The list is too long to catalogue here. One single article in Bengali daily Prothom Alo (October 16, 2015) "Ora Beporwa Keno?" ["Why are they so reckless?"] catalogues more than 36 serious crimes committed by ruling party ministers, MPs, their relatives, and supporters during the last one year alone. The crimes include indiscriminate and selective killing of people; seriously injuring people by reckless driving under

nothing to do with some businessmen's entering the arena of politics – as MPs or ministers – but in the state of impunity and unaccountability the dysfunctional state ensures to the ruling party cronies and close associates / relatives of the ruling elite. Many of the so-called "businessmen-politicians" today are actually yesteryears' "wretched of the earth" pejoratively, not in the sense Frantz Fanon has used the expression. They mostly come from lower middle class (petty bourgeois) families of middle peasants; clerks; schoolteachers; and small traders linked with corrupt politicians, businessmen and bureaucrats, as relatives, clients or cronies.

Since the Constitution doesn't specify which categories of people, and how many from particular categories – lawyers, doctors, teachers, accountants, engineers, businessmen, peasants, fishermen, carpenters, and homemakers ("house-wives"), among others – are eligible to become MPs and ministers, it's unwarranted that we raise objections at "over-representation" of businessmen in politics. I personally won't mind if 100 per cent of politicians in Bangladesh are businessmen, accountants, engineers or lawyers. We may cite Deng Xiaoping in this regard: "It doesn't matter if a cat is black or white, so long as it catches mice".

Good governance depends on good leaders, who are personally incorruptible, and are capable of leading and inspiring people to work together as equal citizens. So long as there is formal or informal recognition of the leaders as VIPs, and extraordinary privileges, such as free medical treatment abroad at the taxpayers' expenses, or even the "right" to drive by the wrong side of the road (quite common in Dhaka), good governance in Bangladesh will remain elusive. Special privileges, impunity and unaccountability of leaders, bureaucrats and law-enforcers are at the core of the problems of bad governance and dysfunctional state.

Special power, privileges and exemptions for the rich and powerful imply an Orwellian "Animal Farm" – where some people are "more equal than the others" – or his Dystopia under the Big Brother. Bangladesh should worry about the growing influence of the Big Brother, not about the growing number of businessmen in politics.

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*Locating an easy scapegoat, the "businessman-politician" is no option at all. The problem of bad governance has nothing to do with some businessmen's entering the arena of politics – as MPs or ministers – but in the state of impunity and unaccountability the dysfunctional state ensures to the ruling party cronies and close associates / relatives of the ruling elite.*

patrons, associates, cronies and clients. The unaccountability of elected or unelected ruling elites, and government officials – including law-enforcers – is another impediment to good governance. We, however, can't single out any particular government or political party for the unofficial endorsement of impunity for criminals who are their "own people". Again, the state of unaccountability for ruling elites and partisan law-enforcers – who are cherry-picked by ruling elites from their "own people" – is not a new phenomenon. It started not long after the Liberation.

Now, how does one define the states of unaccountability and impunity? One may classify a government as unaccountable when it violates any well-defined constitutional provision, pays no heed to expert opinion, ruling by the Supreme Court, or even turn the entire judicial process subservient to the will of the

influence of alcohol; drug trafficking by a sitting MP at Cox's Bazar; shooting of a child by a ruling party MP at Gaibandha; plundering of public and private assets by ruling party supporters; and killing of seven people at Narayanganj by a RAB official, who is also a son-in-law of a minister.

One may list scores of other major crimes committed by ministers, MPs and their cronies in the recent past, including the infamous Padma-Bridge scandal, and a minister's personal secretary's involvement in literally carrying sacks full of cash in the middle of the night in the most suspicious manner in his private car. This episode is not that different from Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves, who also carried sacks full of money in the middle of the night.

So, locating an easy scapegoat, the "businessman-politician" is no option at all. The problem of bad governance has

## UNITED NATIONS DAY 2015

# The United Nations at 70

ROBERT D. WATKINS

**A**T the close of the Second World War in 1945, the world had never seen destruction on such a scale, with the estimated death toll in six years of fighting ranging from 40 million to as high as 85million people, most of them civilians, and two continents left in post-war ruins. By some estimates, a further 60 million people were made refugees, almost 3% of the global population at the time.

After years of negotiations, as one of the most brutal wars in human history raged and finally came to an end, on 24 October 1945 the United Nations was founded, creating a Charter that is still resonant today and which Member States are beholden to observe. The first task of the UN in the wake of the war was to rebuild, reconstruct, and lay the foundations for international cooperation and peace so that a war of such magnitude could be avoided in the future.

The UN has sometimes been described as a "tiger without teeth". While the nature of the UN as an inter-governmental organisation means that no single country can determine the agenda, it also means that there are often competing agendas that are negotiated in this forum. Consensus, above all, is more productive to collective peace and security than unilateral action. Indeed today, unilateral action is often perceived to be an affront to global peace and security, such is the norm that multilateral organisations like the UN have created.

Political realities can sometimes mean that international agreements are not always observed. However, their existence creates a normative environment in which international cooperation can take place. The various UN bodies, conferences, councils, and the General Assembly itself, allow countries to have a voice on the principle of "one state, one vote", while treaties, agreements, and resolutions over time create the environment which influences the conduct of States and are often adopted as customary law.

Change often happens by design, and can move in imperceptible increments. The UN's role is to assist governments to implement their commitments and to ensure that required changes are carried forward and sustained. And although progress has been made, the world has radically changed from what it was when the UN was founded in 1945. Global politics and development cooperation is now increasingly multi-polar. It is no longer necessarily based on an East-West or North-South dynamic, exemplified by the rise of the BRIC nations (Brazil, Russia, India and China), and how those countries have not only taken ownership over their own development but are now helping other nations along the way.

In order to tackle global challenges such as poverty, climate change, and the proliferation of arms, along with mediating conflicts that, while no longer played out on the same global scale as the Second World War but are often just as devastating, other forms and modes of working can be effective moving into the future. The scope for regional cooperation and regional organisations to have more of a role in the articulation of the goals of the UN is being demonstrated not just by entities such as the European

Union, but coalitions such as the Group of 77.

Measures have been taken by the UN as an institution to be more flexible to the environment it works in, to adapt to the shifting context, and to strengthen accountability. Some of these include the "Rights Up Front" initiative, which enables the UN to take early and effective action in times of crisis and to implement the necessary measures before the situation worsens. This allows the UN to enforce the breadth of its mandate, and was used recently at the end of 2013 when thousands of those fleeing conflict fled to UN compounds in South Sudan. Responding to calls for the UN to work better together and to avoid duplication, UN Reform is a continuous process that enables more effective and efficient delivery systems in development assistance by having UN Agencies,

Fund, and Programmes work together in a more coherent and cost-effective manner, maintaining the

UN, reflects how different actors can work together to fulfill common development objectives, whether it be a universal immunisation programme enabling Bangladesh to eradicate polio before its neighbours, or increased resilience and fewer deaths in times of natural disaster. It also demonstrates how a global agenda such as the MDGs is translated into a country context given the right partnerships. This partnership augurs well as we begin to look at implementation of the SDGs over the next 15 years.

On this UN Day, I have highlighted the origins of the UN, its role, and how its relevance and efficacy can depend as much on the organisation and its institutional arrangements as it does on the Member States that comprise it. Perhaps it was the first UN Secretary General, Trygve Lie, who described it best at the end of his tenure in 1953 when he said that:

"Our organisation reflects the imperfections of



expertise and mandates of each one, but strategically unified in approach.

Bangladesh continues to play an important role in the UN as a leading Troop Contributing Country to UN Peacekeeping Missions. The country's importance to the UN has also been demonstrated by its national development progress. Bangladesh was selected to receive UN support to undertake national consultations as part of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) process due to the country's impressive development gains and attainment of many of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). This leadership was further recognised by Bangladesh's recent election as Chair of the Least Developed Countries (LDC) Group at the last meeting of the UN General Assembly.

The partnership between the government of Bangladesh, development partners, international and national NGOs, Civil Society Organisations, and the

our time, but it is also an expression of the most constructive forces of our world and a symbol of hope for the future... I see in the UN a practical approach to peace and progress, not by any quick and easy formulas, but by wise, loyal and persistent use of its institutions by Member States over many years."

The values and principles of the UN remain the same 70 years after the organisation's founding, but how they are implemented, observed and upheld require adaptation, vigilance, and inclusiveness. This is also a time to recognise that the UN continues to use the UN Charter to guide itself, and its 193 constituent Member States, to reinforce our shared duty of ensuring peace and security for all, observing human rights regardless of race, religion, nationality, gender, or sexual orientation, and to collectively alleviate human suffering.

The writer is the United Nations Resident Coordinator in Bangladesh.

## COMMENTS

**"Explain why action won't be taken"**

(October 21, 2015)

Enamul Haque Milan

This is Bangladesh, that's why.

Kamrul

I appreciate High Court's order.

**"Tarana asks telcos to compensate for call drops"**

(October 20, 2015)

Kamrul Islam

If they cannot improve the service within the said period, their license should be cancelled or fines should be imposed on them.

**"1.29cr new jobs by 2020"**

(October 20, 2015)

Skeptic Saleh

Is it really going to happen? Earlier they had promised that they would provide at least one job for every family. But that never happened.

**"Poor quality wheat brought again"**

(October 20, 2015)

Rana Ghosh

Because the government does not take stern actions against the culprits.