

Huseni Dalan bombing

A black day for us

WE are shocked at the dastardly bombing targeting the mourners at Huseni Dalan Imambara on the night before the Ashura. The act deserves our strongest contempt. This is unprecedented in Bangladesh. In fact Muslims in this country have been participating in mourning the martyrs of Karbala and observing the Ashura peacefully cutting across sectarian divide, over a long time.

It would not be remiss to suggest that there is a pattern in the three violent incidents of the last one month. First it was the killing of the two foreigners. And now we have the bombing at a Shia place of congregation.

It is evident that the purpose of these attacks is to destabilise the country by exploiting as many issues as possible to create a divide within the country including denting the sectarian harmony that Bangladesh has enjoyed for so long. But we are not sure what dividend it will accrue to the perpetrators of these crimes.

We would strongly recommend that the government and not the police, as has been done, should form the probe body to investigate the matter, because there is a need to bring out the loopholes in police arrangements, if any, covering the Ashura observance.

But be that as it may, we would hope that the probe body would not be swayed in their investigation by the knee jerk comments of some politicians of the ruling party on the matter. Nothing damages more the course of an investigation than unsubstantiated comments on an issue under probe. The real culprits must be identified and nabbed and brought to justice soonest.

Encroachment of the Shitalakkhya

Grabbers more powerful than the law!

A recent photo in this newspaper showing the illegal setting up of shipyards on the banks of the Shitalakkhya after filling it up and changing its course at Kanchpur area in Narayanganj underscores the lack of commitment of the authorities to save our rivers from illegal encroachments, and the Shitalakkhya, one of the main sources of water for Dhaka city.

It is extremely disturbing to see the unscrupulous activities go on unabated under the very nose of the BIWTA, the body responsible for protecting the rivers although the High Court, in 2009, directed the government to take necessary steps to stop encroachment, earth-filling and unlawful construction of structures on the banks of four rivers including the Shitalakkhya. What has followed is even more frustrating. As soon as an eviction drive ends, the encroachers, reportedly, return to continue with their land-grabbing. At least Tk18 lakh has so far been wasted from public exchequer to carry out six eviction drives at a single site along this river.

This is, however, not an isolated case. Rivers and even canals are being filled up in different parts of the country for commercial gains causing severe environmental hazards. According to another recent report, the Karnaphuli, a lifeline of Chittagong city, is in peril due to widespread encroachment and unregulated waste disposal.

We renew our call to the government to act immediately to hold the agencies accountable whose job it is to not only prevent illegal grabbing of public land but also prosecute those responsible for it. Also, a nationwide campaign to safeguard and develop our rivers may yield positive results in this regard.

Mitigating the implications of TPP



THE recently adopted mega trade deal, the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) led by the USA, has received mixed reactions worldwide. For the 12 signatory countries, it will integrate trade among themselves. To them, this addresses the "21st century trade issues, such as intellectual property protections, digital trade rights and protections for investors". Mooted in 2008, the deal was finally signed on October 5, 2015. Its members, the USA, Canada, Japan, Chile, Peru, New Zealand, Australia, Brunei, Malaysia, Vietnam and Singapore, cover 40 percent of global trade and one third of the global economy. After the Uruguay Round of the World Trade Organisation (WTO), TPP is the largest ever trade agreement among countries.

Through major steps towards trade liberalisation, the TPP countries "expect this historic agreement to promote economic growth, support higher-paying jobs; enhance innovation, productivity and competitiveness; raise living standards, reduce poverty in our countries; and to promote transparency, good governance, and strong labour and environmental protections." Some estimates indicate huge benefits for these countries. For example, it can expand the economies of TPP members by \$285 billion by 2025. Vietnam, Malaysia and New Zealand will benefit the highest in terms of their GDP growth. Production and export of electrical equipment, textiles, construction and machinery in Vietnam and Malaysia and transport equipment in Japan will be increased due to this deal. The political economy of the TPP is

deeper than mere trade liberalisation. The underlying objective also includes isolating China and creating more competition between the USA and China. As China created the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), the urge of some bigger powers to unite against China became stronger. Because, through AIIB, China has exhibited its ability to influence the rules of investment finance in Asia.

For those outside the TPP, apprehensions have surfaced in a number of areas. Existing estimates are only preliminary in the absence of the details of the agreement. Still, it is huge. The Chinese economy will suffer a loss to the tune of \$47 billion to \$89 billion. India

While TPP membership is open to interested countries, Bangladesh has to know the details of the agreement and their potential implications before joining the pact.

will lose out \$2.7 billion in exports annually. Indian exports will face a diversion of about 1 percent.

Bangladesh worries about the possibility of trade diversion due to the TPP. Through extensive tariff elimination

amongst themselves, the TPP countries will have advantage over non-TPP countries. Almost 80 percent of Bangladesh's exports are readymade garments (RMG). The RMG sector is feared to be the direct victim of TPP. At present, Bangladesh - as a least developed country - gets duty free, quota free access to most developed country markets. But in the US market, Bangladesh pays about 16 percent duty on its RMG exports, while Vietnam pays only 8 percent as tariffs. With TPP in place, Vietnam will have even more preference in the US market compared to Bangladesh. Of course, the extent of the trade diversion is to be seen once the final concessions are provided. But worries remain. This is also true for other export items of Bangladesh, such as frozen food and agricultural products. Another area of loss is foreign investment. For investors, it will be profitable to invest in TPP member countries. They can have preferential access to export products to the TPP countries. For example, if investors wanted to invest in pharmaceuticals in Bangladesh to export to the global market, they will not find it attractive to invest in Bangladesh anymore.

Experts and exporters of Bangladesh expressed concerns on the potential negative impact of TPP. Some tried to put up a brave face by saying that there is nothing to worry as Bangladesh will not lose much. True, in the short run the impact will not be negative. Materialisation of benefits from TPP takes a long time, as countries have to prepare themselves to comply with various requirements of the trade agreement. Also, the trade deal is yet to be approved in the US Congress. And by the time countries actually start benefitting from TPP, the global trade landscape would

already have changed. The tariff regime may come to an end. Well, this will mean that the Doha Round of trade negotiations of the World Trade Organisation has to be successfully completed by then. But after 14 years, the Doha Round sees no sign of conclusion. This has led countries to fall back on bilateral free trade agreements (FTAs) and regional trade agreements (RTA). Bangladesh's loss due to TPP can be mitigated through active participation in regional and free trade agreements. Bangladesh, as a member of more than 50 FTAs, can effectively utilise these platforms to benefit from trade.

The apprehension of losing the export market to competing countries through TPP has led some in Bangladesh to consider joining the group. While TPP membership is open to interested countries, Bangladesh has to know the details of the agreement and their potential implications before joining the pact. The TPP sets high standards for trade and investment. Among them labour and environmental regulations and intellectual property rights protection are critical components of the agreement. Bangladesh will have to undertake major regulatory and economic reforms to meet those stringent requirements. The efficiency level has to be improved to compete in a tougher trade regime. Because more than tariffs, non-tariff measures will affect exports from Bangladesh. The magnitude of impact from trade diversion on Bangladesh due to TPP is uncertain. But the impact is certain. Mitigation of some of the shocks of TPP will depend on how the country prepares domestically and globally.

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UN at 70

The power of a single ideal

SHAMSHAD AKHTAR

ON October 24, 70 years ago, the Charter of the United Nations came into force - hope, rising from the ashes of World War II. For seven decades, the UN has driven multilateralism for peace, security, development and human dignity - in the Asia-Pacific region and around the world. Although far from perfect, no other organisation has done more to "save succeeding generations from the scourge of war and to promote social progress and better standards of life" for all.

Conflicts have been averted. Human rights have been enshrined in international law. Hundreds of millions have been lifted out of poverty. Primary education has become near-universal. Smallpox and polio have been largely eradicated, and fewer women, men and children die now from preventable causes than at any point in human history.

Many of the greatest impacts of 70 years of UN work remain often unseen, but are at least as important in our daily lives. UN-driven regulations and frameworks facilitate trade and commerce, as well as air and maritime safety. UN-sponsored treaties help ensure the worldwide flow of mail, telecommunications and data. Progress is measured against UN-derived benchmarks. Global energy, food security, and even the acceptable use of our oceans and outer space are all governed by agreements reached under the auspices of the United Nations.

The most important contribution of the UN however has been to prove the power of a single ideal: that no nation can succeed alone. Through its institutional architecture, especially the five UN regional commissions, the organisation has fostered regional development and shared prosperity as a way to reinforce multilateralism, demonstrating time and again that cross-border challenges, which continue to grow, require collaboration, integration, coordination and an unwavering commitment to the wider common good.

No region provides better proof of these efforts than Asia and the Pacific. When the UN was created, just four of the 51 founding member states were from this region - China, India, Iran and the Philippines. Much of the continent was under colonial rule. Standards of living were falling, and post-war infrastructure in many countries was nearly non-existent.

To address these challenges, the United Nations created the Economic Commission for Asia and the Far East (ECAFE) - the forerunner of the present Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP). Over the next seven decades, these institutions, supported by the whole of the UN system, have assisted member states in creating the most economically dynamic and diverse region on Earth.

This growth has come, however, at great cost to our

people and planet - with growing resource constraints and social inequalities, which threaten both our social fabric and environmental health. We are - once again - in a time of great turbulence, transition and opportunity, which is why the United Nations remains more relevant today than it has ever been.

The newly adopted 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development - anchored in 17 universal Sustainable Development Goals - embodies this renewed multilateral clarity of purpose. Ending poverty and hunger; ensuring education, equality and inclusive growth; acting on climate change and delivering lasting peace and justice - these are the cornerstones of the regional and global future we want.

Key to success in these new Goals will be mobilising the resources necessary for implementation

from man-made and natural disasters and shocks.

Through the ESCAP intergovernmental platform, we not only engage our member governments but are also working to better harness the power of partnerships, increasing engagement with the private sector, civil society organisations, and growing citizen movements. Bringing this all together will be a system of follow-up and review that strengthens accountability for the well-being of the people of Asia and the Pacific.

Seventy years ago, Asian leaders had a vision to shape the future of this region. Their focus was on building nations with the support of the United Nations. That same spirit still resonates today. In the words of Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon:

"Alongside despair in many corners, there remains great hope in the power of working together. That is



- innovative finance mechanisms and new approaches to development driven by science, technology and innovation.

ESCAP is also promoting policies that foster regional economic cooperation and integration through closer trade and financial activities; connections that open transportation corridors, link countries digitally and enable access to affordable and sustainable energy; and the ability to build back better

the founding spirit of the United Nations - and in this 70th anniversary year, in the face of grave and global challenges, it is the spirit we must summon today."

The author is an Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations and Executive Secretary of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP). She is also the UN's Sherpa for the G20 and previously served as Governor of the Central Bank of Pakistan and Vice President of the MENA Region of the World Bank.

COMMENTS

"Will our parties' culture change in pouira polls?"

(October 22, 2015)

Abdul Hadi

There should be an option of a 'NO' vote.

"Unfit vehicles are mobile bombs"

(October 22, 2015)

Mubarak Hussain

A bus once collided with my car in Chittagong. I sought help from the traffic sergeant. He asked me if I was an army personnel. I was not. He then said that he could not do anything because neither the bus nor its driver had proper documents, except a token issued by the police. What I want to point out is, the police and BRTA are the main culprits behind unfit vehicles on the streets. Bribes are their source of income.

Pulak Ahmed

We talk about unfit vehicles, but what about unfit roads all around the city?

"Bangladesh should be worried about China's Brahmaputra dam"

(October 21, 2015)

Robiul Alam

The government as well as the citizens of Bangladesh should raise their voice against this.

"Nearly 2,000 died in Hajj stampede"

(October 21, 2015)

Nirjon Pranto

The Saudi media is completely silent on this tragic issue and on the death toll. Shame on their management system for this huge disaster!

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Trump's anti-immigration rhetoric

Donald Trump's anti-immigration rhetoric, especially demonising Mexican immigrants, has boosted his poll numbers in the primary, mostly in the Republican dominated red states. Trump mentioned that if he is elected, he would build a giant wall similar to the Chinese Great Wall to prevent illegal immigrants from entering the United States, particularly from Mexico. He is using xenophobic and fear mongering strategies to persuade the

primary voters of the Republican Party. But this strategy may turn out to be extremely risky and costly for him in the general election in 2016 if he is able to make it to the primary. Trump has forgotten that his forefather was also an immigrant, and that Texas was once an integral part of Mexico. He is a symbol of division not integration.
Nawfal Talukdar
USA

Justice is hiding its face in shame

We are shocked to learn that police still haven't taken any action against the teenage drunk driver who injured four people on October 12, 2015. Deputy Commissioner (media) of Dhaka Metropolitan Police told *The Daily Star* on October 21 that police is yet to receive the High Court directive to take legal actions against the offender. This is unheard of! Is it not the duty of the police to apprehend criminals on the spot? Do they have to wait for the High

Court directive to do so? Their explanation was utterly absurd. Had the boy not been the nephew of a former Awami League MP, things would have been different. This disparity is shameful; law enforcing agents must do away with such practices and perform their duty honestly.
Nur Jahan
Chittagong