

An Uncomfortable Centre Stage

TIB's report card on parliament

Its time should not be frittered away

PREDICTABLY, the reaction from the government regarding the just released Transparency International, Bangladesh (TIB) report on the performance of the current parliament, has been total rejection and absurdly terming it as 'part of an international conspiracy' as expressed by three whips of the treasury bench. The allegation that the study, which is based on months of research, was made public after the murders of two foreign nationals and the Ashura bomb attack is rather farfetched and illogical.

The report has found that a measly six percent of 388 working hours were spent on formulation and passing of laws and only 29 of the 350 lawmakers took part in the process of enactment of 30 laws in 14 months. The rest of the time, treasury and opposition benches were busy praising their parties and the government and criticising the BNP-combine. The study also pointed out a quorum crisis, though less than in previous parliaments, that ate up more than 48 hours amounting to a waste of TK 32.42 crore.

A huge amount of taxpayers' money goes into funding the parliamentary sessions. Wasting it by talking about irrelevant matters or remaining completely indifferent, is a huge letdown for the people and a discredit to the exalted position MPs hold.

The recommendation TIB has given includes: a bill on lawmakers conduct, encouraging MPs to take part in the lawmaking process and making sure the opposition plays its 'actual role'. Thus instead of lambasting the report we suggest that the government takes cognizance of the constructive criticism the study has offered and make all out efforts to ensure that the parliament is effective and representative of the needs and aspirations of the people.



KNOT SO TRUE
 RUBANA HUQ

"SO, what are you telling your buyers?" - A colleague of mine called me at an ungodly hour past midnight and asked. I couldn't blame him for the late night call, as he was calling from the U.S where he was facing a microscopic questioning on the status of the security in Bangladesh. His buyers have not travelled and hence the meeting

was taking place there. The next morning, another colleague called me and said, "We have to have the same message when we speak to our buyers. Don't you agree? I mean...we can't create panic, can we?" To both my colleagues I had a straight answer. I told them both that Bangladesh has never needed any defence and added that we would all tell the brands that it is, has been and will continue to be a safe haven for foreigners and one isolated killing does not demean Bangladesh's security. We cannot and will not shy away just because some boro bhai (elder brother) somewhere thought killing an innocent Italian national would set Bangladesh off its course. We cannot and will not stay away from telling all our buyers that killers like Bidyut (=Power) Rasel, Kala (=Black) Rasel, and Shooter Rubel do not define Bangladesh. These elements can at the most skip the surveillance of the 32 closed circuit television cameras, explode bombs, kill one, injure scores, but they will never have the satisfaction of being the force behind "destabilising" the country. These incidents are, however, grave testimonials of an unhealthy psyche of deprivation and restlessness that is fast gripping our land.

Right after the day of Eid, in Kazinagar of Sonaimuri, Noakhali, three brothers were hacked to death just because of a controversy around the number of goals scored in a match. On April 13 this year, in Khilkhet, a 16-year-old Nazim was tortured to death by seven to eight people because of being suspected for having stolen a pigeon. Last year, in Mirzapore, Tangail, a deadly report on a man having burnt four members

of the same family just because the girl in the family refused to marry him, sends shivers down all our spines. On October 10, 2014, in Jatrabari, a six-month old baby was brutally murdered because of his mother's infidelity.

There are also reports on the public beating people to death all over the country. On July 5, this year, two men, Miron and Forhad, both rod and cement suppliers, were beaten to death by people in Boalmari on suspicion of being dacoits. In Aliabad, Faridpur, on February 22, Masum Mridha, an ambulance driver was killed on the same grounds. On June 24, again in

on the middle. And the whole world is watching. Some from the audience are stoning the crew, some casting aspersions, and some are even springing to its defence. But unfortunately, there is not a single, cohesive narrative that describes the Bangladesh that has spun itself around and has evolved as an economic and a human miracle. While there may be apparent observations on the lack of democratic space in Bangladesh, while there may be apparent suspicion around governance, there is a definite and an acute lack of telling a complete story of the millions of secular souls who stand up for the spirit of 1971.

People who commit these crimes may not be reading English dailies. Many columns in English may just be for the eyes of the policymakers and the civil society. But the trends and the stories must continue being narrated. We can't just close our eyes and pretend that there is no violence, no extremism, no militancy, but the truth is that instead of outright ruling these all out, it would perhaps be better if we narrate our own stories with transparency so that the next time around, whatever we say or uphold will be deemed as credible.

Last week in London, way before I knew about another embassy updating its alert, a buyer had pointed the same to me and said: "It's unfortunate. I have myself lived through most of the 22 years of Civil War in Sri Lanka and I was never scared." But what he meant was in spite of a full-on war, the element of panic was missing there, while in our case, it's just the opposite. The fear button is instantly triggered in our case. What Bangladesh has done to deserve this, is another political consideration. Buyers may cancel trips this season, the orders may get placed elsewhere this time around, but at the end of it all, Bangladesh will win its share back the very next season. After all, Bangladesh has been and always been a case of an eternal phoenix and nothing is ever lost in this land.

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Faridpur, in Kojjuri upazila, three innocent men, assumed to be robbers, were beaten to death, once again. Countrywide, the percentage of violence is on the rise. According to police sources, incidents of murder and violence are on the rise. In 2011, number of murders was reported to be 3966; in 2012, it was 4,114; in 2013, it was 4,393; and 4,514 in 2014.

There is no denying the fact that the recent incidents of a blast and two murders have, indeed, taken Bangladesh to an uncomfortable centre stage. It's almost like a dark setting with a single spotlight

The writer is Managing Director, Mohammadi Group.

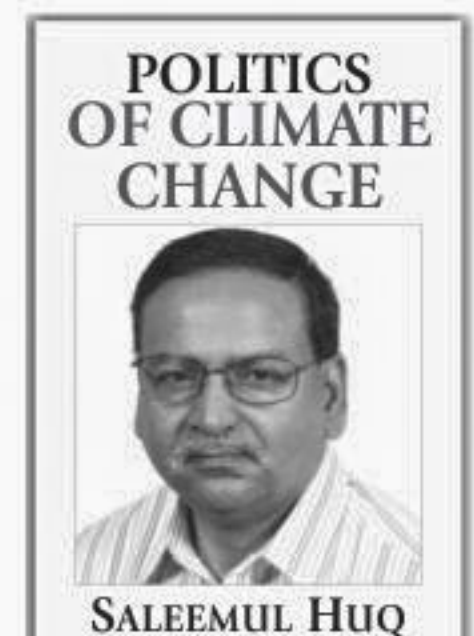
Organic farming methods help

Increase awareness and monitoring

A young farmer from Lalmonirhat decided to do things differently. Where the bulk of vegetables sold in the capital city are chemical-laden which is not at all conducive to health, Atul Chandra Roy introduced organic fertilisers and pesticides on his farm, which has been emulated by other farmers in his village. Given that his produce has met with marketing success, some 100 odd farmers in the area have decided to forgo the use of harmful chemical agents altogether. The commonly held notion amongst most farmers is that unless chemicals are used in abundance, vegetables will not grow to optimal size and shape. What has been lacking is the sharing of knowledge that public health suffers when such agro-products hit the human digestive system.

It is interesting to observe that most vegetables now grown in Dakkhinpara village where Atul hails from have stopped using chemical agents on their fields for the last five years. But that has not stopped these farmers from making a profit. A growing awareness, especially among urban residents about health hazards has provided the boon needed for such farmers to produce agro-products that sell at a premium price.

In the absence of adequate monitoring and supervision by agriculture officials, the chemical companies woo farmers into applying toxic chemicals that include banned pesticides to vegetables. Indeed a recent study by Bangladesh Agriculture Research Council (BARC) has found that farmers apply pesticides up to 8-10 times the recommended level. The only way out of this situation is to improve preservation technologies, packaging materials and proper transportation for perishable commodities.



POLITICS OF CLIMATE CHANGE
 SALEEMUL HUQ

EARLIER this month in Bonn, Germany, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) held its last round of talks to prepare the text for the Climate Change Summit to be held in December in Paris, France to finalise a new Paris Agreement at the 21st Conference of Parties (COP21).

The draft of the text going forward to COP21 in December is now ready, and the final round of negotiations will now take place in December in Paris.

Some of the key outstanding issues that need to be resolved in Paris if there is to be a successful outcome:

LEGAL STATUS OF THE PARIS AGREEMENT

There are going to be two sets of texts negotiated (and hopefully agreed on) in Paris. The first is a shorter document to be called the Paris Agreement which sets in motion the next phase of actions to tackle climate change from 2020 onwards. This document is likely to be a legally binding agreement that may require ratification by national legislatures for it to come into force by 2020.

A second set of decisions will also be agreed for more near term actions before 2020 and these will be in the form of simple COP decisions, which will not require ratification by national parliaments.

MITIGATION AMBITION LEVEL

Many countries, including Bangladesh, have prepared and submitted their national climate change plans (called Intended Nationally Determined Contributions or INDCs in UNFCCC's jargon). These plans set out the level of mitigation actions that each country is prepared to undertake. In the case of developing countries, they have proposed two sets of actions; one that the country can do on its own and a second more ambitious set of actions which they can undertake if they receive financial and technological assistance.

Over 150 countries have already submitted their plans, which is a very encouraging sign. The less encouraging

sign is that the level of global ambition (when all the plans are added up) leads to 3 degrees Celsius temperature rise, which is still too high.

LONG TERM GOAL

The level of ambition is linked to the long term goal for the Paris Agreement which is a contentious topic where vulnerable developing countries, including Bangladesh, are arguing for a long term temperature goal of 1.5 degrees Celsius and others, including China and India want to keep the current goal of 2 degrees

text has one option proposed by all the developing countries for recognising and dealing with loss and damage from climate change, and another option - put forward by Switzerland - on behalf of some developed countries to delete all reference to it. This will be one of the more contentious issues to be dealt with in Paris.

FINANCE

The last and most important issue is always finance. The good news is that developed countries have already agreed

vulnerable developing countries for adaptation projects. As far as the Least Developed Countries (LDC) group are concerned, loans are not acceptable and it is also preferred that grants be channelled for now through the existing and fully functioning LDC fund rather than the GCF.

BANGLADESH'S ROLE

The Bangladesh delegation at both technical as well as political levels has acquired considerable knowledge and capacity to negotiate over the years and is

THE PARIS AGREEMENT ON CLIMATE CHANGE WHAT CAN WE EXPECT?



However, what is still to be agreed upon is how the \$50 billion for adaptation is to be delivered with the GCF being unable to deliver any money yet, and in an even more troubling move, are offering loans instead of grants to vulnerable developing countries for adaptation projects.

Celsius. This will be a critical issue in Paris.

ADAPTATION

Developing countries, led by the Africa Group have been arguing for an adaptation goal similar to the mitigation goal. This would elevate adaptation, which is of greater concern to the vulnerable developing countries, to the same level as mitigation. This has also not been agreed upon yet and will have to be resolved in Paris.

LOSS AND DAMAGE

This is a highly political issue that is a strong demand from the developing countries and which the rich countries are resisting strongly as well. The Bonn draft

that they would provide US\$ 100 billion a year from 2020 onwards to developing countries to help them tackle climate change. There has also been an agreement on the Green Climate Fund (GCF) to be the channel for most of these funds. The GCF Board has also made a laudable decision to allocate half their funds for adaptation and half for mitigation and also to prioritise the most vulnerable countries for adaptation support.

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fully prepared to play its part both within the LDC Group as well as bilaterally.

At the moment, there is a good deal of cautious optimism that the Paris Agreement will be a reality as everyone remembers the failure of Copenhagen six years ago, and no one wants a repetition of that. President Hollande of France, who will host the summit, is going out of his way to consult with all countries (he sent his Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius to Bangladesh a few weeks ago), in order to ensure that everyone's voice is heard and incorporated in the Paris Agreement in December.

The writer is Director, International Centre for Climate Change and Development at the Independent University, Bangladesh.

COMMENTS

"Nothing clear"
 (October 26, 2015)

Amina

Why "nothing clear?" It is their duty to make it clear. It seems like it is very easy for people to hurl grenades/bombs and get away with it.

Anonymous

Find the culprits and punish them as soon as possible. We don't want anymore incidents like these.

"AMAN'S ORDEAL"
 (October 24, 2015)

Faisal Ahmed

When someone from a well-off family like that of Moudud Ahmed is treated in such a manner, one realises how vulnerable we, the general people, are to the whimsical behaviours of medical staff in many of our hospitals.

Alim Haq

There is no answering for patients' deaths. Doctors must be held accountable. The health ministry is to blame.

Syed Khalid Hussain

Very sad. Hospital authorities could have told the family to take the boy to Singapore if it was not possible for them to treat him.

Shahriar Islam

Totally unacceptable. Sad end of a young life.

"Man killed as muggers beat, run him over"
 (October 26, 2015)

Razia Begum

So brutal! They were about to get what they wanted but they still beat up the man mercilessly and killed him by running over him.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Tackling climate change

Climate change is affecting Bangladesh severely. Bangladesh is suffering from untimely flood, drought, rise in temperature, etc. As a result, people's sufferings, especially the poor, know no bounds. It is imperative for the government to take immediate measures so that people can prepare themselves to cope with the effects of changing climate. Sustainable and effective long term action plans can help in this



regard.
 Jahan Ara Begum
 Dhaka

"Aman's Ordeal" and some facts

I am writing this letter in response to "Aman's Ordeal" published on October 24. While I express my heartfelt sympathy to the grieving mother, I can't help but say a few things. How could a local hospital treat the son of a high profile political figure so badly? This forces us to imagine how hospitals in Bangladesh, public and private, treat an ordinary citizen.

When a person belonging to the upper-class falls sick, s/he flies to Bangkok or Singapore (and those with European/North American passports to their adopted countries). This country's dysfunctional medical system poses great risk and people are left vulnerable in the face of illnesses.
 Tayeb Husain
 Lund, Sweden